

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Financial burdens deepen over virus

Associated Press

TOKYO — A deepening health crisis became an economic one too Friday as the coronavirus outbreak sapped financial markets, emptied shops and businesses and put major sites and events off limits.

The list of countries hit by the illness edged toward 60 as Mexico, Belarus, Lithuania, New Zealand, Nigeria, Azerbaijan, Iceland and the Netherlands reported their first cases. The threats to livelihoods were increasingly as worrisome as the threats to lives.

“It’s not cholera or the black plague,” said Simone Venturini, the city councilor for economic development in Venice, Italy, where tourism already hurt by historic flooding last year has sunk with news of virus cases. “The damage that worries us even more is the damage to the economy.”

The head of the World Health Organization said Friday that the risk of the virus spreading worldwide was “very high,” citing the “continued increase in the number of cases and the number of affected countries.”

Economists have forecast global growth will slip to 2.4% this year, the slowest since the Great Recession in 2009, and down from earlier expectations closer to 3%. For the U.S., estimates are falling to as low as 1.7% growth this year, down from 2.3% in 2019.

But if the disease known as COVID-19 becomes a global pandemic, economists expect the impact could be much worse, with the U.S. and other

global economies falling into recession.

“If we start to see more cases in the United States, if we start to see people not traveling domestically, if we start to see people stay home from work and from stores, then I think the hit is going to get substantially worse,” said Gus Faucher, an economist at PNC Financial.

Part of the problem is that the health measures needed to combat the outbreak — locking down cities and ordering workers and students to stay home — damage the economy.

“This is a case where in economic terms the cure is almost worse than the disease,” said Jacob Kirkegaard, senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics. “When you quarantine cities ... you lose economic activity that you’re not going to get back.”

Kirkegaard said that hard-hit Japan, South Korea and Italy could slip into recession. And if the U.S. stock market continues to plunge, American consumers could lose confidence and cut their spending, threatening to turn the record-breaking 11-year U.S. economic expansion into a recession.

“You don’t need many more days like this,” he said, as stocks tumbled again on Wall Street.

Investors watched as stocks fell across Asia. On Wall Street, the Dow Jones index suffered another brutal drop, falling 715 points in mid-day trading. The index has dropped more than 13% since last week.

House questions cuts to Navy shipbuilding budget

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — House lawmakers voiced frustration to naval leadership Thursday about shipbuilding cuts in the fiscal year 2021 budget proposal. Uncertainty is growing about how the sea service can reach its 355-ship goal in 10 years while funding is being reduced and diverted to build the U.S.-Mexico border wall.

Acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly told representatives on the House Armed Services Committee that the Navy still plans to make its goal.

“While this budget does slow our trajectory to a force of 355 ships or more, it does not arrest it. ... We are still deeply committed to building that larger, more capable, more distributed naval force within what I consider a strategically relevant time frame of no more than 10 years.”

The Navy is requesting \$207.1 billion, a \$2.9 billion decrease from its 2020 funding. The request includes the budget for the Marine Corps.

The Navy aims each year to move toward its total battle-force requirement of 355 ships by 2030. However, the 2021 request has a 17% reduction in shipbuilding procurement, from \$24 billion to \$20 billion. The Navy seeks contracts for eight battle-force ships in 2021. However, funding for one Virginia-class submarine the Navy had already planned to buy in 2021 did not make it into the proposal. The money was instead put into the Navy’s operations and maintenance funding.

The budget proposal allows for 306 deployable ships by the end of 2021, up from 297 ships in 2020.

The Navy is putting more money in operations and maintenance for 2021 because the service needs to improve readiness after falling behind for many years, Modly said.

“Because that immediately impacts the safety and security of the sailors and Marines that we put out on these platforms,” he said. “We could not in good conscience trade that money for more ships that could not operate properly with the right equipment and with the right readiness. And so that’s the trade we made.”

Congress is still waiting on the Navy to submit its 30-year shipbuilding plan, which is required by law. It’s being held up because Defense Secretary Mark Esper wants time to compare it to the new Integrated Force Structure Assessment that the Navy has sent him, Modly said. That details the service’s plans for the specific makeup of its fleet, such as how many aircraft carriers, submarines and destroyers it needs to compete against Russia and China.

The reduction of shipbuilding funds became even more of a concern for congressional members Feb. 13, when Esper approved \$3.8 billion in FY 2020 operations and maintenance funds to be diverted to support building the border wall. Those funds were to be used for ships and aircraft, including a landing helicopter assault ship; two F-35B Lightning II fighters; and a P-8A Poseidon reconnaissance aircraft used in counter-submarine operations.

“To be frank, it’s not helpful because it takes a ship out of a plan that we’re driving toward,” Modly said of the unfunded submarine.

Final steps underway for US-Taliban deal

BY J.P. LAWRENCE

Stars and Stripes

DOHA, Qatar — The stage was set Friday for hundreds of guests to witness an accord expected to lay the groundwork for a U.S. troop withdrawal from Afghanistan after more than 18 years of war.

Workers at the posh Sheraton Grand Doha hotel Friday lined up dozens of chairs and tested a projection screen that serves as the backdrop where U.S. and Taliban officials will gather for a deal that would begin a conditions-based drawdown of American, NATO and foreign partner troops.

Most of the roughly 12,000 U.S. troops and 8,500 other foreign troops in the country support a NATO training and advising mission. The U.S. is expected to reduce its contingent to 8,600 to continue fighting terrorism.

In return, the militant group is expected to break ties with terrorist organizations like al-Qaida, which it had harbored in the early 2000s and refused to give up after the 9/11 attacks, prompting the U.S.-led invasion.

The agreement would also usher in talks involving the insurgent group, the U.S.-backed Kabul government and other Afghans to address how Taliban fighters would integrate into the government and military.

“It is probably the most important event in the history of Afghanistan over the last 18 years, in terms of giving the greatest potential in ending the war,” said Sultan Barakat, director of the Doha-based Center for Conflict and Humanitarian Studies, who is expected to attend the signing.

However, peace with the Taliban comes with mixed reactions from many in Afghanistan, who want an end to war but fear that gains for women and basic freedoms, particularly in the cities, might be lost as a group that once banned music and shaving gains legitimacy.

The Taliban have long refused to negotiate with the government in Kabul and a

Tensions remain despite reduced violence

The Washington Post

KABUL, Afghanistan — The Taliban and United States had just launched a seven-day agreement to reduce violence and possibly end America’s longest war, but U.S. and Afghan officials wondered whether the Taliban would keep their end of the deal.

Then a rocket crashed into a fire station at Bagram air base within the first hour of the so-called “reduction in violence” period that began at midnight last Saturday. That was followed by dozens of other attacks across the country, including Taliban ambushes that killed at least six people in the northern province of Balkh.

Afghan officials said violence was down about 80% nationwide. But the attacks prompted Army Gen. Scott Miller, the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, to direct his staff to speak to Taliban leaders about restraining their fighters.

“The message that I passed is that if they can’t get that under control, we’re going to start shooting,” Miller said in a staff meeting, referring to the situation in Balkh. “That’s a very tough decision if we have the opportunity to end violence.”

The rocket at Bagram was “pretty close to hitting coalition” members, he added, something that “would be one of the red lines that is hard to come back from despite all the work.”

The behind-the-scenes moments, observed by *The Washington Post*, illustrate how U.S. military leaders are grappling with how to extricate the U.S. from the longest war in Amer-

ican history ahead of the expected signing of peace deal with the Taliban on Saturday. For U.S. defense officials, the deal allows the U.S. to keep a foothold in Afghanistan depending upon the conditions on the ground, monitor whether the Taliban seek peace, and carry out strikes against Islamic State, which is at war with the Taliban, too. It also could leave U.S. forces vulnerable to some casualties.

By early this week, U.S. military officials had grown confident that bloodshed with the Taliban could remain low through a signing deal.

In Balkh, where attacks caught U.S. attention, it is believed that a Taliban commander was operating without the approval of his leaders, said one senior U.S. military official, speaking on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue. The commander needed to “pick up his game” and meet the terms of the seven-day deal, a message that was relayed to Taliban leaders overseeing him, the senior U.S. official said.

Miller traveled by helicopter to Camp Dahlke in the eastern province of Logar on Tuesday and met with Green Beret soldiers and conventional U.S. soldiers who advise Afghan forces.

In a room of bushy-bearded Green Berets, Miller asked: How many times have you deployed here? One after another, the soldiers answered: Three, four, even seven times.

“In a perfect world, if all is working, we may have fired our last shots, at least against the Taliban,” Miller said. “Maybe — unless they attack us first. It’s the Taliban’s choice.”

spokesman for the militant group Friday denied they would meet with their representatives in Doha. Nevertheless, a government delegation will try to speak with them, Javed Faisal, a spokesman for the Afghan National Security Council, said by phone from Kabul.

Others expected to attend the signing of the accord include former Taliban captive Timothy Weeks, an Australian university professor who arrived in Doha on Thursday. Weeks, who was held for three years, said on Twitter that he will be an “official guest” at the signing ceremony.

The Taliban posted a picture of Weeks with Anas Haqqani,

one of three high-ranking militants released from Afghan custody last year as part of a prisoner swap that freed Weeks and another professor, U.S. citizen Kevin King.

The expected signing comes at the end of a seven-day partial cease-fire between the insurgents and government forces, which stopped most offensive operations in Afghanistan.

During the weeklong period, meant to test the Taliban’s ability to halt its fighters, U.S. counterterrorism operations against Islamic State continued.

While scattered attacks broke the week’s calm, Gen. Scott Miller, the top U.S. commander in the country, said Tuesday

there was a “downward trend in violence.”

The following day, alongside acting Afghan Defense Minister Asadullah Khalid and followed by select media outlets, Miller walked some Kabul streets outside the capital city’s heavily fortified green zone to publicize the reduction in violence. The city, long one of the safest in the country, has seen increased suicide bombings and other attacks following the withdrawal of most foreign combat forces at the end of 2014.

Zubair Babakarkhail contributed to this report.

Airman demoted for peeing in coffee pot

BY ROSE L. THAYER

Stars and Stripes

An airman in Alaska was demoted and received a letter of reprimand for peeing in his squadron's office coffee maker, among other violations of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, according to documents from Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson.

Formally charged as a violation of article 92, dereliction of duty, the unnamed airman

"knew or should have known" to "refrain from urinating in the squadron coffee maker," according to the redacted charge sheet provided by the base public affairs office. The incident occurred sometime between Jan. 1 and Oct. 31, 2019, but the document does not stipulate how the crime was discovered.

The airman also faced a charge of being absent without leave from Nov. 27 until he was apprehended on Dec. 2. Both charges were addressed

through article 15, which allows the commander to determine guilt and punishment for minor offenses instead of through a judicial hearing.

The airman received the letter of reprimand as well as a demotion in rank to airman basic, the Air Force's lowest enlisted rank.

The charges were first made public earlier this month on a Facebook page popular with enlisted Air Force personnel when someone anonymously

shared a newsletter from the Alaska base that mentioned the charges. The newsletter posting, which garnered more than 400 shares and nearly 650 comments, also mentioned the airman had five previous letters of reprimand unrelated to these charges. Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson's public affairs office confirmed that information.

CENTCOM: Leave, travel canceled amid virus fears

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — U.S. Central Command on Thursday issued travel restrictions for troops stationed within its area of responsibility across the Middle East and southwest Asia, citing fears about the fast-spreading coronavirus, a defense official said.

The command has canceled all leave and liberty travel planned within the CENTCOM area until further notice, said Navy Capt. Bill Urban, spokesman for the command. The new restrictions do not impact official or temporary duty travel nor do they impact leave travel to destinations outside the CENTCOM area, such as the continental United States.

"U.S. Central Command is taking multiple prudent measures to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 coronavirus and to

mitigate the operational risk such transmission would pose," Urban wrote in an emailed statement. "One of those steps is to suspend leave and liberty for U.S. service members within the Central Command area of responsibility."

Officials at the Pentagon said there are no known or suspected cases of the coronavirus among its troops in the CENTCOM region.

The move is the latest in a series of travel restrictions placed on American troops across the globe due to the threat of the virus, which initially broke out in China but has spread to at least 47 additional countries, according to the World Health Organization.

Coronavirus cases have been reported in 10 countries within CENTCOM's area of responsibility, though the vast majority of those cases were reported in Iran, where

the U.S. does not have service members. In countries with American troops in the region, 43 cases were reported in Kuwait, 33 in Bahrain, 13 in the United Arab Emirates, six in Iraq, and one each Afghanistan and Egypt. Those numbers were provided Thursday by the WHO.

So far, only one American service member has been confirmed to have contracted the coronavirus. A 23-year-old American soldier stationed at Camp Carroll in South Korea tested positive for coronavirus on Wednesday. South Korea has the second largest outbreak of the virus outside of China.

The WHO reported Thursday that 1,766 cases are confirmed in South Korea. On Wednesday, U.S. troops and Defense Department civilians stationed there were banned from any nonessential travel in South Korea.

Turkey, Russia work to defuse tension after 33 killed

Associated Press

REYHANLI, Turkey — The presidents of Turkey and Russia spoke by phone Friday to try to defuse tensions that rose significantly in Syria after 33 Turkish troops were killed in a Syrian government airstrike, and a new wave of refugees and migrants headed for the Greek border by land and sea after Turkey said it would no longer hold them back.

The attack Thursday marked the deadliest day for the Turkish military since Ankara first entered the Syrian conflict in

2016 and also was the most serious escalation between Turkish and Russian-backed Syrian forces, raising the prospect of an all-out war with millions of Syrian civilians trapped in the middle.

NATO envoys held emergency talks at the request of Turkey, a NATO member. Turkey's 28 allies also expressed their condolences over the deaths and urged de-escalation, but no additional NATO support was offered.

Apart from providing some aerial surveillance over Syria, NATO plays no direct role in the

conflict, but its members are deeply divided over Turkey's actions there, and European allies are concerned about any new wave of refugees.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, whose country already hosts more than 3.5 million Syrian refugees, has long threatened to "open the gates" for millions to flee to Europe unless more international support was provided. Greece and Bulgaria increased security at their borders with Turkey in preparation for an influx.

The crisis stems from a Syrian government offensive

that began Dec. 1 with Russian military support to retake Idlib province in northwestern Syria, the last opposition-held stronghold in Syria. Turkey, the main backer of the Syrian opposition, has lost 54 soldiers this month, including the latest fatalities, and now feels the need to respond strongly.

Thursday's attack sharply raised the risk of direct military confrontation between Turkey and Russia, although Turkish officials blamed Syria for the airstrike.

Democrats shift focus to Super Tuesday

Associated Press

CHARLESTON, S.C. — Bernie Sanders will swing through North Carolina, Virginia and Massachusetts in the coming days. Elizabeth Warren will make stops in Texas and Arkansas. Amy Klobuchar will be in Tennessee and Virginia.

The South Carolina primary is just two days away, but the race is quickly going national as candidates pivot to the 14 states that vote on Tuesday.

The move is in part a recognition of Joe Biden's strength in South Carolina, with most of the focus on the margin of his victory and who might come in second place. But it's also an effort to tap into the hundreds of delegates at stake in the Super Tuesday contests. About a third of the delegates needed to secure the Democratic nomination will be on the table.

The turnaround between Saturday's primary in South Carolina and the contests that follow on Tuesday is creating a hectic stretch for campaigns.

"What happens in South Carolina does matter, mostly because of what the coverage is going to be over the three days leading up to Super Tuesday. If someone seems out of the running, they're going to lose value," said Achim Bergmann, a Democratic strategist. "It's a tough deal for the candidates who are perceived to be at the lower rungs at the moment to figure out where can they get some juice."

New York billionaire Mike Bloomberg bypassed traditional early voting states including South Carolina to focus exclusively on the Super Tuesday states. But even he had to balance the competing demands as he qualified for Tuesday's debate

in Charleston. He went back to New York after the debate only to return to South Carolina the next day to appear at a CNN town hall. Bloomberg will be in Oklahoma, Arkansas, Tennessee and North Carolina — all Super Tuesday states — over the next several days.

Strategists in key Super Tuesday states say voters there are watching to see what happens in South Carolina before they make up their minds.

"Anybody who defies expectations and does better than you expect, it just builds a stronger narrative for them," said Matt Angle, a Democratic strategist.

Texas offers the second-biggest delegate pot on Super Tuesday, with 228 pledged delegates, and Pete Buttigieg and Biden are expected to campaign there after South Carolina votes.

Ex-Philippine aide warns of disaster if US pact ends

Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines — A former Philippine foreign secretary warned Friday that the president's decision to end a key U.S. security pact will undermine the ability of American forces to help the country deal with major disasters and deter aggression in the disputed South China Sea.

Former Foreign Secretary Albert del Rosario cited the deployment of more than 13,000 American military personnel, dozens of aircraft and U.S. Navy ships under the Visiting Forces Agreement when Typhoon Haiyan ravaged the central Philippines in 2013.

"Other countries wanted to immediately respond but were constrained by the lack of legal arrangements for their troops to enter the Philippines," del Rosario told a Manila forum where the repercussions of President Rodrigo Duterte's decision to terminate the VFA were discussed.

Duterte's administration notified the U.S. government two weeks ago that it intends to abrogate the 1998 agreement, which allows the entry of large numbers of American forces for joint training with Filipino troops, including disaster-response maneuvers, and lays down the legal terms for their temporary stay.

The termination will take effect after

180 days unless both sides agree to keep the agreement.

"What is unfolding before us is a national tragedy which should be resisted," del Rosario said. "As a democratic and republican country, we do not believe that one man alone can make this damaging choice for our people."

The move by Duterte, known for his disdain of U.S. security policies while praising China and Russia, would be a major setback for the two countries' decades-long treaty alliance.

Haiyan was one of the most ferocious typhoons on record and left more than 7,300 people dead or missing.

IG probes whether Wilkie sought dirt on House aide

BY STEVE BEYNON

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The inspector general for the Department of Veterans Affairs has launched an investigation into whether VA Secretary Robert Wilkie tried to gather damaging information on a Democratic policy adviser, who is also a Navy Reserve officer, after she reported she was sexually assaulted last year at a VA hospital.

VA Inspector General Michael Missal on Thursday wrote a letter to Rep. Mark Takano, D-Calif., chairman of the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs, telling him the matter is "a high priority" and investigators will report their findings to

Congress once their probe is complete. It was unclear Thursday how long the investigation will take.

Earlier Thursday after a House VA committee budget hearing, Wilkie apologized for initially calling Andrea Goldstein's reported sexual assault at the Washington DC VA Medical Center "unsubstantiated."

"I wasn't calling her a liar ... I was sorry about the implication from the word," Wilkie told a group of reporters before the news of the IG's investigation became public. "It was a word I used from the inspector general's own directive. I've said that to [Rep. Julia Brownley, D-Calif.] and [Takano] I should've never used that word."

Goldstein, a lieutenant in the Navy Re-

serve and senior policy adviser for the House VA committee's Women Veterans Task Force, said in September that a man groped and propositioned her inside the VA hospital. The VA inspector general's office investigated the alleged sexual assault but announced in January that it had closed the case without filing any charges.

Goldstein's report set off a harsh exchange between Democratic lawmakers and the VA. Takano, in a statement earlier this month, said Wilkie's calling out of a congressional staffer was "shockingly tone-deaf" and "outrageous" and an example illustrating how female veterans' concerns are often dismissed by the VA.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Stolen hearse carrying casket recovered

CA LOS ANGELES — A thief stole a hearse — with a body inside — that went on a wild ride, ending with a chase and a crash on a busy freeway.

Authorities say they found the body undisturbed inside a casket Thursday morning and took someone into custody after the crash, which closed the 110 Freeway during the morning commute.

The crime began Wednesday night, when the thief stole the black Lincoln Navigator from outside St. Anthony Greek Orthodox Church in East Pasadena. The Los Angeles Sheriff's Department pleaded with the thief on social media to return the body.

"Out of all the bad decisions you have made, at least make one good one & bring back the deceased person & casket inside the Navigator," it tweeted.

Beehive, 8-foot long, discovered in apartment

VA RICHMOND — An animal control company in Virginia said it's removed an 8-foot-long beehive from someone's apartment.

Virginia Wildlife Management and Control said in a statement that they removed the hive from the ceiling of a living room in Richmond on Monday. The space was in between tenants at the time. The company said the hive produced about 80 to 100 pounds of honey, although only about 15 to 20 pounds was able to be salvaged.

Rich Perry, owner of the wildlife control company, told The Charlotte Observer that the hive was big enough to support 100,000 to 150,000 bees. But he said it wasn't fully occupied.

Tractor, equipment runs over used cars in lot

NC KINSTON — A tractor hauling a piece of equipment malfunctioned and ran over a number of vehicles in a used car lot, police said Wednesday.

Kinston police said the tractor was hauling a dirt pan used in landscaping when it ran over at least five cars parked at Faith Automotive Sales, WITN reported.

According to police, the tractor had a mechanical malfunction that caused it to veer to the right.

No injuries were reported, and an employee at the dealership estimated damage to the vehicles at around \$20,000.

8-year-old hailed for saving younger cousin

NH LISBON — An 8-year-old girl has been awarded the American Red Cross' Certificate of Extraordinary Personal Action after saving her younger cousin from drowning.

Victoria Lombardi used her water rescue training when 5-year-old Ariana Chattin stepped onto a frog pond that was 5 feet deep and was covered in blue-green algae, The Caledonian Record reported. The girls were at a family picnic last August in New Tripoli, Pa.

Lombardi was given the award Tuesday by Maria Devlin, the CEO of the American Red Cross in New Hampshire and Vermont, at a reception at Evergreen Sports Center.

Lombardi used the "Reach, Throw, Don't Go" rescue procedure she learned in a Red Cross class. She said it made her feel good to save someone's life and encourages more people to learn water safety skills.

Pet oxygen masks given to fire department

WV HURRICANE — Pet oxygen masks have been given to a West Virginia fire department to help animals injured in fires.

Hurricane Fire & Rescue Lt. Bobby Bragg told WSAZ-TV the department received the masks through the Emma Zen Foundation, which donates masks to departments across the country.

Bragg said he noticed a gap in the department about a month ago when two pets were trapped inside a large house fire.

"We were able to save one of the animals and the other one was not able to make it," he said. "So I wanted a better way to help the community and our four-legged family members, as well."

Rescued jet skier says he lost ski saving bird

FL PORT RICHEY — A missing Florida jet skier took refuge in a stilt house after he lost his water scooter attempting to save a bird caught in a wire.

Cole Torrent, 28, borrowed a friend's jet ski and launched around 1 p.m. Tuesday. He was reported missing in the evening by the same friend, news outlets reported. The search began at Millers Bayou in Port Richey. The U.S. Coast Guard was called in around 7 p.m. and a few hours later Port Richey police said they found Torrent's jet ski in a mangrove but not Torrent.

Twelve hours later, the Pasco County Sheriff's Office found Torrent by helicopter Wednesday morning. He was waving at them from a stilt home near the mouth of the Pithlachascotee River.

Torrent told WTVT-TV he saw a bird tangled in wiring and wanted to save it. He docked his jet ski to help the bird but didn't secure the watercraft and it drifted away from him.

Early risers in West see apparent meteor in sky

AZ PHOENIX — Early risers in several Western states reported seeing what appeared to be a meteor streaking across the sky before dawn.

The American Meteor Society received multiple reports from Arizona, California, New Mexico and Utah about the fireball.

The phenomenon was captured on video by meteorite hunter Robert Ward in Prescott, Ariz., that he posted on the organization's website. It was also captured by a video camera mounted on Phoenix City Hall.

Sea lion wanders into woods far from water

WA CASTLE ROCK — A sea lion wandered far from water in southwest Washington state. The Oregonian/OregonLive reported the Steller sea lion, weighing around 600 pounds, was discovered in a wooded area outside the town of Castle Rock, Wash.

The animal was about two miles from a viable water source.

Sheriff's deputies, Fish and Wildlife officers, and representatives from the Cowlitz County Humane Society had to wait several hours for a trailer to arrive to transport the animal back to the water.

Authorities believe the female sea lion was hunting smelt, a small fish.

From wire reports

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Buckeyes' Young emulating teammate

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Chase Young wants to follow in fellow Ohio State star Nick Bosa's NFL footsteps, and he probably won't have to wait all that long to start.

The freakishly athletic defensive end who's widely viewed as the best player coming out of college — just as Bosa was — figures to start off his pro career just as the 2019 NFL Defensive Rookie of the Year did: as the second selection in the draft behind a hot-shot, Heisman Trophy-winning quarterback.

Bosa helped to lead San Francisco to the Super Bowl after he watched Arizona make Kyler Murray of Oklahoma the top overall pick in last year's draft.

"Nick, he's always setting the standard. That's just motivation for me to achieve a lot of real good things," Young said on Thursday during his media session at the NFL scouting combine.

"It's definitely been a blessing to watch him grow into the player that he is. He's definitely helped me along this passage. He hasn't stopped. I'm just grateful to be able to see him grow."

And to follow suit.

"It's going to be exciting," Young said. "I'm definitely excited to play with the big dogs

and excited to show the world what I can do."

Like Bosa 11 months ago, Young is the consensus cream of this year's crop, an All-Pro in waiting, said NFL Network draft analyst Daniel Jeremiah, who compares Young to Julius Peppers and Mario Williams.

"I definitely think I'm the best player in the draft," Young declared. "I think I showed it on my tape. You can go to every game. I think I showed it. I definitely think I'll put my best foot forward this year. I grinded hard. Two of my biggest things are my hard work and dedication and I'm going to bring those two to the NFL with me."

Young is considered a generational talent, but Joe Burrow, who led LSU to the national title, is expected to be the No. 1 overall pick in the draft in April.

That selection is owned by the Cincinnati Bengals, and Burrow said this week he wouldn't have any qualms playing for them despite their lack of Super Bowl success.

Burrow grew up in Athens, Ohio, about 2½ hours away, and he cracked this week that he'd be able to head out for some home cooking now and again if Cincinnati indeed selects him.

Young would be even closer to his hometown if the Washington Redskins grab him at No. 2.

He was raised in Upper

Marlboro, Md., about 10 miles from FedExField, where the Redskins play.

"Yeah, I always watch the Redskins, the hometown team," said Young, who insisted he wasn't a fan of the team as much as he was of certain players such as Clinton Portis or the late Sean Taylor.

"It'd mean a lot, playing in front of my hometown people, it'd definitely be a blessing," Young said. "Everybody who has known me since I was younger could come to a game and things like that. But right now, I'm not focused on who could draft me. I'm focused on being the best player, the best person, I could be and impress the coaches at the combine."

New Redskins coach Ron Rivera demurred this week when asked about selecting a generational talent such as Young with the second selection.

"Well, before we can do anything with the No. 2 pick, we got to see what happens with the No. 1 pick," Rivera said. "So once that pick goes 1, we'll go from there. But again, as I said, everything's an option."

Young was scheduled to meet with the Redskins on Friday, and Washington quarterback Dwayne Haskins, the Redskins' first-round pick out of Ohio State a year ago, definitely hopes things go so well that the 'Skins don't even consider trading the pick.

"Yeah, me and Dwayne talk all the time. I've known Dwayne since high school. He definitely loves the organization and obviously wants me to come play with him," Young said. "We'll see how this whole thing turns out."

Like many of the top players at their positions who don't need to impress teams physically at the combine this week, Young isn't going to showcase his skills during on-field drills at Lucas Oil Field with the rest of the defensive linemen Friday night.

"I chose — me and my team — we decided that because that first day of camp when I step on the field, I want to be the best player I can be. I don't want to waste time trying to be a combine athlete," Young said. "When I step on the field, I know, I need to know that I put my best foot forward as far as being the best player I can be."

Young said he'll do position drills at Ohio State's pro day instead, but he won't run the 40-yard dash there, either.

Bosa, who also avoided the combine workouts a year ago when he was coming off an injury, did impart some advice to Young.

"He just told me to be myself," Young said. "That's what I have been trying to do the whole time I've been here."

Ruggs comes up short in attempt to break 40 record

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — The stars came out at night inside Lucas Oil Stadium, especially Henry Ruggs III who came up short in his quest to set a record but still clocked the fastest 40-yard dash at the NFL scouting combine.

A 4.27-second time in the 40 is nothing to scoff at, but Ruggs had hoped to run faster.

The 5-foot-11, 188-pound speedster from Alabama fell short of the record 4.22-second

time set by Bengals wide receiver John Ross during a blazing 2017 run.

"I'm trying to hit the lowest ever," Ruggs said earlier in the week. "So, 4.22 or lower."

Ruggs said he had previously run the 40 in 4.25 seconds and felt he could top that in Indianapolis.

He was initially clocked at 4.28 on his first of two runs but the official time was recorded at 4.27 seconds. His second time was 4.31.

Ruggs did back up his other

boast this week, when he said he was the fastest guy at the NFL scouting combine.

Quez Watkins of Southern Miss was the next-fastest at 4.35 seconds when the combine's on-field workouts and 40-yard dash made their prime-time debut.

Ruggs, who is often compared to Tyreek Hill, also had a 42-inch vertical jump, which was tied for second-best among the receivers who later ran routes and caught passes — along with the tight ends

— from the quarterback prospects (excluding projected top overall pick Joe Burrow and a rehabbing Tua Tagovailoa).

Utah State's Jordan Love, around whom buzz has been building this week, shined during the second QB session after Oklahoma's Jalen Hurts stood out in the first group. Oregon's Justin Herbert also impressed.

Other receivers who stood out from an unusually deep group were LSU's Justin Jefferson, Alabama's Jerry Jeudy and Oklahoma's CeeDee Lamb.

Inter Miami ready for its MLS debut

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Used to bending free kicks for goals, David Beckham was not prepared for seven years of twists en route to his team's Major League Soccer debut this weekend.

"This I always knew was going to be a challenge. I didn't realize how big of a challenge it was going to be," the former England captain said Wednesday. "When we announced seven years ago, I thought it would take one or two years and we'll be playing in the league. We'll have a stadium. We'll have great players. But it took slightly longer than that."

Inter Miami opens its first season on Sunday at Los Angeles FC, joining the league along with Nashville as MLS expands to 26 teams. After a match at D.C. United on March 7, Inter plays its home opener

March 14 against the LA Galaxy — not in Miami but at an 18,000-capacity, \$120 million venue and training complex built over about 10 months in Fort Lauderdale on the site of old Lockhart Stadium.

"There were moments where I looked and I thought this might not happen," said Beckham, the team's co-owner and president of soccer operations. "The biggest lesson is I'm more persistent than I thought I was and I'm more stubborn than my wife thinks I am."

Now 44, Beckham won six Premier League titles and the 1999 Champions League while playing with Manchester United from 1992 to 2003, then added a La Liga championship while with Real Madrid. He joined MLS with the Galaxy from 2007-12, winning two titles and boosting the league's

profile as part of a deal that gave him the right to buy an expansion team at a discounted price of \$25 million.

After detouring twice to AC Milan on loans during his time with the Galaxy, he finished his playing career with a Ligue 1 championship with Paris Saint-Germain in 2013.

A jet-setter married to a former Spice Girl, Beckham decided in 2013 on Miami as his preferred site for his team, and MLS made the announcement in February 2014. But the launch repeatedly was put off while the team was stymied in its search for a stadium site.

"I'm obviously not from Miami. I'm from East London," Beckham said. "So me going to Miami, trying to buy a piece of land, talk to the politicians, wasn't actually getting us anywhere, funnily enough."

Jorge and Jose Mas of the telecommunications company MasTec Inc. were added to the ownership group in December 2017, with Jorge becoming the managing owner.

MLS awarded the team the following month, and it was named Inter Miami in September 2018 — the name was picked because owners view Miami as a diverse, global city. Still, it took until March 2019 for the team to say it would start play in 2020 in Fort Lauderdale, where the Strikers of the North American Soccer League were based from 1977-83 and Miami's first MLS team, the Fusion, played from 1998 to 2001 before getting contracted.

A proposed long-term home at Miami's Freedom Park still awaits political and legal approvals and a hoped-for 2022 opening could be pushed back to at least 2023.

NHL roundup

New acquisition Ritchie helps Bruins put away Stars

Associated Press

BOSTON — Nick Ritchie had a goal and an assist for his first points since Boston acquired him at the trade deadline to help the NHL-leading Bruins beat the Dallas Stars 4-3 on Thursday night.

Brad Marchand broke a second-period tie and Ritchie scored 1:27 later to make it 3-1. Then, after Denis Gurianov cut the deficit to one early in the third, Ritchie fed David Pastrnak in the slot to again make it a two-goal game.

Jaroslav Halak stopped 31 shots, and Charlie Coyle scored on a double-tipped swat out of the air for Boston. The Bruins snapped a two-game losing streak.

John Klingberg and Miro Heiskanen also scored for Dallas.

Blues 3, Islanders 2 (OT): Colton Parayko scored on an unassisted wraparound at

3:23 of overtime to give host St. Louis its sixth consecutive victory.

Vince Dunn tied it for St. Louis with 1:44 left in the third period. Brayden Shenn also scored for the defending Stanley Cup champions, and Jordan Binnington had 14 saves

Maple Leafs 5, Panthers 3: William Nylander scored the go-ahead goal midway through the third period to lift visiting Toronto past Florida.

Auston Matthews, Kasper Kapanen, Zach Hyman and Justin Holl also scored for Toronto. Frederik Andersen stopped 24 shots in his sixth straight start.

Senators 5, Canucks 2: Bobby Ryan had a hat trick in his first game in more than three months, leading host Ottawa past Vancouver.

Ryan entered the joint NHL/NHLPA assistance program Nov. 20 after admitting to having a problem with alcohol. He

last played on Nov. 16 in Buffalo, but had been skating on his own since late December.

Rangers 5, Canadiens 2: Ryan Strome scored twice and added an assist and visiting New York rallied to beat Montreal for its fifth straight victory.

Phillip Di Giuseppe, Adam Fox and Mika Zibanejad also scored for the Rangers and Alexandar Georgiev made 32 saves. New York pulled into a tie with Carolina, two points behind Columbus for the final Eastern Conference playoff berth.

Predators 4, Flames 3 (OT): Mikael Granlund tied it just before the end of regulation and scored 1:20 into overtime to lift host Nashville past Calgary in a showdown of the Western Conference's two wild-card teams.

Roman Josi and Colton Sissons also had a goal apiece, and Ryan Ellis added three assists.

Jets 3, Capitals 0: Connor Hellebuyck stopped 34 shots for his fifth shutout of the season, leading host Winnipeg over Washington.

Dmitry Kulikov, Kyle Connor and Mark Scheifele scored for Winnipeg.

Wild 7, Red Wings 1: Defenseman Matt Dumba had two goals and an assist in visiting Minnesota's rout of Detroit.

Kevin Fiala had a goal and two assists, Ryan Hartman and Ryan Donato had a goal and an assist each and Jordan Greenway and Eric Staal also scored for Minnesota. Alex Stalock made 25 saves.

Sharks 3, Devils 2 (OT): Logan Couture scored 38 seconds into overtime, lifting host San Jose to a comeback win that snapped a five-game skid.

Rookie Mario Ferraro and Marcus Sorensen each scored in regulation for the Sharks. Martin Jones made 22 saves.

College basketball roundup

No. 3 Gonzaga clinches West Coast title

Associated Press

SPOKANE, Wash. — Filip Petrushev had 21 points and nine rebounds as No. 3 Gonzaga beat San Diego 94-59 on Thursday night to clinch its eighth straight West Coast Conference regular-season title.

Corey Kispert scored 16 points and Ryan Woolridge had 15 for Gonzaga (28-2, 14-1 WCC), which rebounded from its loss at BYU on Saturday. The win came on a night when former Gonzaga star Adam Morrison was honored.

Joey Calcaterra scored 19 for undersized San Diego (9-21, 2-13), which has lost 12 straight to Gonzaga.

Gonzaga has won 38 consecutive home games, the longest streak in the country.

No. 14 Oregon 69, Oregon State 54: Payton Pritchard scored 15 of his 23 points in the

second half, and the host Ducks pulled away from the Beavers.

Oregon (22-7, 11-5 Pac-12) had only a four-point halftime lead but started the second half with a 22-4 run to send Oregon State (15-13, 5-11) to its fourth consecutive defeat.

Will Richardson added 15 points for the Ducks, including 13 in the second half as he and Pritchard combined for 28 of Oregon's 40 points after the break. Anthony Mathis finished with 13.

Ethan Thompson led the Beavers with 15 points and Tres Tinkle had 14 points and 10 rebounds.

Wisconsin 81, No. 19 Michigan 74: D'Mitrik Trice scored 28 points, and the visiting Badgers snapped the Wolverines' winning streak at five.

Wisconsin (18-10, 11-6 Big Ten) extended its own winning streak to five, never trailing in

the game and repelling every Michigan push in the second half. The Wolverines cut a 14-point deficit to three, but after a Wisconsin timeout with 2:50 remaining, Trice sank a three-pointer to double the lead.

Zavier Simpson scored a career-high 32 points for the Wolverines (18-10, 9-8) who were without guard Eli Brooks because of a broken nose.

California 76, No. 21 Colorado 62: Matt Bradley matched his career highs of 26 points and five three-pointers, and the host Golden Bears pulled away in the second half to beat the Buffaloes.

Kareem South had 19 points and Paris Austin added 12 as Cal (12-16, 6-9 Pac-12) emphatically ended a five-game losing streak against Colorado and gave first-year coach Mark Fox his most significant win of the season while handing the Buf-

faloes a stinging setback.

McKinley Wright IV scored 18 points for Colorado.

The Buffaloes (21-8, 10-6) were among a handful of teams who began the night a half-game behind conference-leading Arizona State.

No. 23 Ohio State 75, Nebraska 54: Kaleb Wesson had 16 points and a career-high 18 rebounds, and the visiting Buckeyes got out to a quick double-digit lead on their way to a victory over the Cornhuskers.

Ohio State (19-9, 9-8 Big Ten), playing without injured starting forward Kyle Young, won for the fourth time in five games. Nebraska (7-21, 2-15) lost its 13th straight.

The Buckeyes led 26-12 after making nine of their first 11 shots, including 5 of 6 three-pointers.

NBA roundup

Embiid-less 76ers still able to get past woeful Knicks

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Tobias Harris' performance had the 76ers feeling good during the game, and the doctor's report on Joel Embiid afterward had them feeling even better.

Harris scored 34 points to lead short-handed Philadelphia to a 115-106 victory over the New York Knicks on Thursday night.

The 76ers played without injured All-Stars Embiid and Ben Simmons.

Embiid was hurt in Wednesday night's loss at Cleveland when he collided with Ante Zizic. After Thursday's victory, the 76ers learned that their star center didn't have any structural damage. He has a sprained left shoulder and will be re-evaluated in about a week.

"That's exciting news," 76ers coach Brett Brown said.

Before the game, Brown discussed playing without Embiid and Simmons.

"It's a painfully obvious bind," Brown said. "We're missing two All-Stars. You yank that from the team and it's painful."

The duo's absence didn't hurt against the woeful Knicks.

Shake Milton scored 19 points and Al Horford added 15 for the 76ers, who improved to their NBA-best home record to 28-2.

Harris signed a five-year, \$180 million deal in the offseason.

Thunder 112, Kings 108: Danilo Gallinari scored 24 points, and host Oklahoma City overcame a 19-point deficit to beat Sacramento.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 20 points and Chris Paul added 17 for the Thunder. They

have won five straight and 14 of 17.

Harrison Barnes scored 21 points for the Kings.

Pacers 106, Trail Blazers 100: Domantas Sabonis had 20 points and 11 rebounds in host Indiana's victory over Portland.

Malcolm Brogdon had 17 points, eight assists and six rebounds, and T.J. Warren and Victor Oladipo scored 15 points each. The Pacers have won four of their last five.

CJ McCollum had 28 points and eight assists for the Trail Blazers. They have lost five of six.

Lakers 116, Warriors 86: Anthony Davis had 23 points and six rebounds in three quarters, and visiting Los Angeles won its seventh straight game and NBA-record 18th in a row on the road against the Western

Conference, beating injury-plagued Golden State without LeBron James.

Rajon Rondo started in place of James and contributed 12 points and six assists as the Lakers turned it into a rout with a 40-17 third quarter. James sat out because of recurring soreness in his troublesome left groin.

Davis shot 6-for-13, made 10 of 12 free throws and also had a pair of blocked shots and steals for Los Angeles, whose 12 first-half turnovers allowed the Warriors to keep it close. Kyle Kuzma added 18 points off the bench.

Rookie Eric Paschall scored 23 points off the bench for his 11th 20-point game and Jordan Poole had 16 in the Warriors' eighth straight loss both overall and at home in new Chase Center.