

Minimum wage hike unlikely in aid bill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden laid out his case Friday for moving fast to pass \$1.9 trillion in coronavirus relief, but even as he opened the door to proceeding without Republicans, he conceded that a key element of his plan — hiking the minimum wage to \$15 per hour — was unlikely to become law.

The stakes for the country and economy were amplified Friday morning by the release of the government's jobs report for January, which showed that hiring had stalled to a pace that could hinder a return to full employment for several years. Some 406,000 people left the labor force last month as deaths from the pandemic have surged.

"A lot of folks are losing hope," Biden said in a speech at the White House. "I believe the American people are looking right now to their government for help, to do our job, to not let them down. So I'm going to act. I'm going to act fast. I'd like to be doing it with the support of Republicans ... they're just not willing to go as far as I think we have to go."

The jobs report landed shortly after Senate Democrats cast a decisive vote to muscle the COVID relief plan through the

chamber without Republican support, a step toward final approval next month. Vice President Kamala Harris cast the tiebreaking vote in the Senate, her first.

Biden's speech solidified a marked shift in tone and strategy for a president who entered the White House pledging bipartisanship and met on Monday with 10 Republican senators pushing a slimmed-down \$618 billion alternative. Biden concluded in his Friday speech that aid at that level would only prolong the economic pain.

Still, the president acknowledged Friday that one of his most ambitious proposals, raising the minimum wage, would likely be left out of the final bill.

"I put it in, but I don't think it's going to survive," Biden said in an interview with "CBS Evening News" anchor Norah O'Donnell, adding he would push to raise it in a standalone bill. "No one should work 40 hours a week and live below the poverty wage. And if you're making less than \$15 an hour, you're living below the poverty wage."

Senate Democrats applauded after Harris announced the chamber's 51-50 vote on the budget measure at around 5:30 a.m. The action came after a grueling all-night session, where senators voted on amendments that could define the contours of the event-

al COVID-19 aid bill.

Following Senate approval, the House passed the measure 219-209 on Friday afternoon, also without a Republican vote. The coronavirus aid package can now work its way through congressional committees with the goal of finalizing additional relief by mid-March, when extra unemployment assistance and other pandemic aid expires. It's an aggressive timeline that will test the ability of the new administration and Congress to deliver.

"We have been focused like a laser on getting this done," House Speaker Nancy Pelosi said after leading Democrats in the House met with Biden on Friday. "We hope to be able to put vaccines in people's arms, money in people's pockets, children safely in schools and workers in their jobs. That's what we are doing now."

The push for stimulus comes amid new signs of a weakening U.S. economy. Employers added just 49,000 jobs in January, after cutting 227,000 jobs in December, the Labor Department said Friday. Restaurants, retailers, manufacturers and even the health care sector shed workers last month, meaning that private employers accounted for a meager gain of 6,000 jobs last month.

Navy identifies 2 sailors who died from virus last week

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A submarine information systems technician from Washington state was the second sailor to die from the coronavirus last week, the Navy announced Friday.

Petty Officer Second Class Cody Andrew-Godfredson Myers, 26, died Thursday in the intensive care unit at the University of Florida Hospital in Jacksonville, according to a statement Friday from Submarine Forces.

Myers was assigned to the USS Tennessee, a ballistic-missile submarine located at Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay, Ga. He had been placed on restriction of movement Jan. 18 after he came into close contact with

someone who tested positive for the coronavirus, according to the statement. Myers was admitted to the hospital on Naval Air Station Jacksonville on Saturday and then transferred to the University of Florida hospital on Sunday where he tested positive for the virus.

Other sailors who might have had contact with Myers have been notified and they are taking precautions, according to the Navy. Chaplains, mental health specialists, and counselors are supporting his fellow crewmembers at Kings Bay.

Myers enlisted in the Navy in December 2016 and has been assigned to the USS Tennessee since 2018, according to details of his service record.

His military awards include the Enlisted Submarine Warfare Specialist pin, the Navy and Marine Corps Achievement Medal, and the pistol marksman ribbon.

The other sailor who died last week was Chief Petty Officer Herbert Rojas, who served as a quartermaster. Rojas died Tuesday at his off-base residence due to complications associated with the virus, according to a statement Friday from Recruit Training Command Great Lakes, Ill.

Rojas tested positive as a result of the command's sentinel surveillance testing program that is done for all staff members, Lt. Cmdr. Phillip Chitty, a spokesman for Naval Service Training Command, wrote Friday in an email.

Lawmakers push to curb rape in ranks

CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers, frustrated by the Defense Department's inability to curb rape in the ranks, are moving closer to possibly making a momentous change in the military justice system.

Members of the Senate Armed Services Committee are increasingly receptive to a long-standing proposal by New York Democrat Kirsten Gillibrand, chairwoman of the Armed Services Personnel Subcommittee, to move responsibility for prosecuting sexual assault, and perhaps other major crimes, from military commanders to independent prosecutors.

Several committee members have hinted that they would back Gillibrand, in some cases reversing earlier positions. And, in so doing, they rebuffed abiding Pentagon resistance to the proposal.

Momentum may be gathering, meanwhile, behind a similar House proposal by Jackie Speier, the California Democrat who chairs the comparable Armed Services personnel panel.

Nearly half the House co-sponsored her bill in the last Congress.

Gillibrand has long argued that major crimes such as murder and rape should be prosecuted independent of military brass. Speier's legislation, by comparison, is targeted at sex crimes.

President Joe Biden, unlike his two immediate predecessors, unequivocally supports such a change, so Defense Secretary Lloyd J. Austin III may soon implement it.

Biden "is further along on the solution than many of our military leaders," Gillibrand told CQ Roll Call in a statement.

GOP movement

Even more important than Biden's backing is the mounting support in Congress for enshrining the change in law — a potentially historic milestone.

In 2014, when Gillibrand's proposal came up for a Senate floor vote, three-quarters of Senate Republicans voted against it. Some of them are no longer in office.

But now many Republicans, including key Senate Armed Services members, are beginning to file into Gillibrand's camp.

One Republican Senate Armed Services member, Thom Tillis of North Carolina, who was not in the Senate in 2014, said in a brief interview this week that he is dismay-

ed by the military's lack of progress in dealing with sexual offenses and is considering supporting Gillibrand's proposal.

"I'm beginning to be more open to it," Tillis said. "A lot of time's passed, and a lot of things haven't changed."

Similarly, another committee Republican who was not in the Senate in 2014, Dan Sullivan of Alaska, said he has been speaking with Gillibrand about her proposal.

"I think it's in play," said Sullivan, a former active-duty Marine who still serves as a reservist.

Some influential Senate Republicans will continue to oppose Gillibrand's proposal. James M. Inhofe of Oklahoma, the most senior Republican on the Senate panel, told CQ Roll Call it is more important to prevent sex crimes than to prosecute them.

"There's more we can and must do on this serious issue, but taking military leaders out of the equation is not the answer — finding better ways to prevent it from happening in the first place is," he said via email.

Democrats reconsidering

With Biden backing the Gillibrand-Speier idea, Democrats are likely to largely fall in line behind it.

Some Democratic senators who voted against Gillibrand's proposal in 2013 and 2014 hinted this week that they may change their minds.

When the Senate Armed Services Committee voted in 2013 to oppose Gillibrand's proposal, a key "swing bloc" of senators did so reluctantly and said they would prefer to give the Pentagon a chance to fix its rape problem, Virginia Democratic Sen. Tim Kaine said at a committee hearing Tuesday.

But today, Kaine said, "virtually all" of those key senators are disappointed with the unremitting reports of sexual assaults in the military, and those lawmakers are ready to consider "a different path" — an apparent allusion to Gillibrand's proposal.

Maine Independent Angus King, who was also among the Armed Services senators who voted against Gillibrand's proposal in 2013, said at the same hearing: "I'm also in the camp of being receptive to a more significant change."

One key unanswered question is whether Rhode Island Democrat Jack Reed, the

Senate Armed Services chairman, would reverse his 2013 vote against Gillibrand's proposal. West Virginia Democratic Sen. Joe Manchin III also voted against Gillibrand eight years ago.

The House might be a more hospitable venue than the more narrowly divided Senate for an attempt to change how sexual crimes are prosecuted in the ranks.

But that is not a foregone conclusion, and the chamber has yet to weigh in on the question.

"It's time to move those cases from the chain of command to give survivors the trust and confidence in the system to come forward," Speier told CQ Roll Call in a statement.

Speier secured a provision last year in the House's fiscal 2021 defense authorization bill that would set up a temporary pilot program to have a chief prosecutor at the service academies handle sex crimes.

The provision never made it into the final bill, amid opposition from key senators and Pentagon officials, congressional observers said.

Rising assault, retaliation

Since the Senate votes of 2013 and 2014, the problem of sexual assault in the military has gotten worse, by many measures. Last year saw a record number of assaults reported and the lowest conviction rate yet, Gillibrand said during Austin's Jan. 19 Senate confirmation hearing.

Protect Our Defenders, a group dedicated to combating the problem, calls it "an epidemic of rape."

"There are an estimated 20,500 military men and women sexually assaulted in a year, yet barely 100 offenders are convicted," Don Christensen, the group's president, said in an email.

What's more, 64% of those who reported a sex crime perceived some form of retaliation, a recent Defense Department survey showed.

Inhofe, on the other hand, said the rising reports show victims have growing confidence in the system and are more willing to come forward.

In any event, concern about the problem has grown too, Christensen and others said, due partly to growing awareness of it and partly to the #MeToo movement against sexual crimes.

Explosives go missing during training

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Military investigators said Friday that they are searching for several pounds of explosives that went missing during a training exercise at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twentynine Palms in California.

About 10 pounds of C4 plastic explosive disappeared two weeks ago during a training exercise, according to a report Thursday by ABC10 News in San Diego. The TV station also reported the explosives might have been stolen.

About 3,500 Marines and sailors from the 2nd Marine Division from Camp Lejeune, N.C., the 1st Marine Division from Camp Pendleton, Calif., and other units from Hawaii and North Carolina are in-

involved in the Integrated Training Exercise 2-21 at Twentynine Palms.

C4 is a powerful, pliable explosive that is suitable for cutting and breaching. It usually comes in thin, 1¼-pound blocks or is packed in white plastic containers.

The Naval Criminal Investigative Service is leading the investigation, spokesman Jeff Houston said Friday.

A monetary reward is also being offered for information that helps find the explosives, ABC10 News reported.

Houston and a spokesman from the North Carolina-based 2nd Marine Division declined to provide further details while the investigation is ongoing.

A base advisory issued last month said the training exercise was slated to begin on Jan. 15 and run through Feb. 18.

ABC10 News reported the exercise could be extended until the explosives are found.

1st Lt. Dan Linfante, a spokesman for the 2nd Marine Division, declined to say whether the Marines would have to stay longer at Twentynine Palms, citing operational security concerns of discussing future troop movement.

Twentynine Palms and other units in California and Hawaii did not immediately respond to inquiries.

The base, located about 150 miles from Los Angeles, is the Marine Corps' premier training facility and the largest Marine base in the world at 932 square miles. More than 11,000 Marines and sailors are stationed at the combat center, according to the base website.

Unemployment aid fraud revealed within tax forms

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Unemployment agencies across the U.S. became lucrative targets for criminals when they were bombarded with claims last year as millions lost jobs due to coronavirus shutdowns.

Now, simple tax forms being sent to people who never collected unemployment benefits are revealing that their identity was likely stolen months ago and used to claim bogus benefits that have totaled billions of dollars nationwide.

Unemployment benefits are taxable, so government agencies send a 1099-G form to people who received them so they can report the income on their tax returns. States are mailing 1099-Gs in huge numbers this year after processing and paying a record number of claims.

In Ohio, Bernie Irwin was shocked two weeks ago when she opened the mail and found a 1099-G form saying her husband had claimed \$17,292 in unemployment benefits last year. The only problem: Jim Irwin, 83, hadn't worked in 13 years.

Bernie Irwin, 86, said her daughter-in-law and a friend also received the tax forms. So did Republican Gov. Mike DeWine, his wife, Fran, and Republican Lt. Gov. Jon Husted, even though none of them had claimed unemployment benefits.

Nearly 26 million people requested unemployment aid in the initial months after states began ordering shutdowns. The unprecedented surge strained unemployment offices that are governed by federal rules but administered in patchwork fashion by state governments, with many relying on 1960s-era software to process applications and issue payments.

The federal government, as part of its \$2 trillion relief package approved in March, significantly expanded jobless aid, making it a richer target for fraud. By November, the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Inspector General estimated states had paid as much as \$36 billion in improper benefits, with a significant portion of that blamed on fraud.

Biden says 'erratic' Trump shouldn't get intel updates

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden said Friday that Donald Trump's "erratic behavior" should prevent him from receiving classified intelligence briefings, a courtesy that historically has been granted to outgoing presidents.

Asked in an interview with CBS News what he feared if Trump continued to receive the briefings, Biden said he did not want to "speculate out loud" but made clear he did not want Trump to continue getting them.

"I just think that there is no need for him to have the intelligence briefings," Biden said. "What value is giving him an intelligence briefing? What impact does he have at all, other than the fact he might slip and say something?"

White House press secretary Jen Psaki said earlier this week that the issue of granting Trump intelligence briefings was "something that is under review."

Some Democratic lawmakers, and even some former Trump administration officials,

have questioned the wisdom of allowing Trump to continue to be briefed.

Susan Gordon, who served as the principal deputy director of national intelligence during the Trump administration from 2017 to 2019, in a Washington Post op-ed last month urged Biden to cut off Trump.

"His post-White House 'security profile,' as the professionals like to call it, is daunting," Gordon wrote days after a pro-Trump mob laid siege to the U.S. Capitol as lawmakers sought to certify his defeat in last November's election. "Any former president is by definition a target and presents some risks. But a former president Trump, even before the events of last week, might be unusually vulnerable to bad actors with ill intent."

Whether to give a past president intelligence briefings is solely the current officeholder's prerogative. Biden voiced his opposition to giving Trump access to briefings as the former president's second impeachment trial is set to begin soon.

Court: Calif. can't ban church indoors

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court is telling California that it can't bar indoor church services because of the coronavirus pandemic, but it can keep for now a ban on singing and chanting indoors.

The high court issued orders late Friday in two cases where churches had sued over coronavirus-related restrictions in the state. The high court said that for now, California can't ban indoor worship as it had in almost all of the state because virus cases are high.

The justices said the state can cap indoor services at 25% of a building's capacity. The justices also declined to stop California from enforcing a ban put in place last summer on indoor singing and chanting. California had put the restrictions in place because the virus is more easily transmitted indoors and singing releases tiny droplets that can carry the disease.

The justices were acting on emergency requests to halt the restrictions from South Bay United Pentecostal Church in Chula Vista and Pasadena-based Harvest Rock Church and Harvest International Ministry, which has more than 160 churches across the state.

Chief Justice John Roberts wrote that "federal courts owe significant deference to politically accountable officials" when it comes to public health restrictions, but he said deference "has its limits."

Louisiana

HOUMA — The coronavirus outbreak has sent a Louisiana school back to online-only learning, forcing it to forfeit playoff games for both the boys' and girls' soccer teams.

The state health department recommended closing in-person classes at H.L. Bourgeois High School based both on the number of COVID-19 cases and contact tracing that found pos-

sible exposures at the school, Terrebonne Parish Superintendent of Schools Philip Martin told The Courier.

With a Mardi Gras break scheduled Feb. 15-19, students are scheduled to return to campus Feb. 22.

Iowa

DES MOINES — Gov. Kim Reynolds announced Friday that she would end most restrictions aimed at slowing the spread of the coronavirus in Iowa.

Reynolds issued a proclamation that removes a mask requirement for those spending 15 minutes or more in an indoor area within 6 feet of people not in their household. She also ended mask requirements for those in state buildings and some businesses, such as barber shops.

The governor's new order also ends limits on the number of customers in a business or a requirement that they stay socially distant.

Texas

AUSTIN — Texas again reported more than 400 new COVID-19 deaths Friday as the state is on the brink of surpassing 3 million administered doses of vaccine.

The number of hospitalized virus patients fell to fewer than 10,300 as more beds continue opening after a bleak few weeks following the Christmas holidays. More than 38,000 people in Texas have died from COVID-19, the third-highest in the nation.

Texas continues to have among the most new cases per capita, with one in every 216 people diagnosed with the virus between Jan. 28 and Feb. 4, according to John Hopkins University.

Roughly 7.5% of Texas residents have received at least one dose of the vaccine, and about 2% are fully vaccinated.

Tennessee

NASHVILLE — As Tennessee slowly begins to loosen restrictions on who may receive the COVID-19 vaccine, Nashville on Friday had the strictest eligibility to receive the doses in the entire state.

Earlier this week, Tennessee's Department of Health announced people age 70 and older may start receiving the doses. While local counties had the authority to set different instructions, most areas quickly expanded to include the new eligible age group.

However, Davidson County — which encompasses Nashville — has held off. As of Friday, the metro area was officially the only county limiting vaccine distribution to front-line workers and those 75 and older.

Minnesota

MINNEAPOLIS — Minnesota's food shelves saw a big jump in need in 2020 amid the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting economic instability, according to an annual report released Friday.

Hunger Solutions Minnesota, which collects data from 350 food shelves across the state, said they saw a record 3.8 million visits in 2020, up 7% from the year before, led by a 31% jump in visits by older people.

Those numbers represent both the "great need" statewide, and the "great work" by programs to adapt how they provide services and to take advantage of state and federal COVID-19 relief funding, said Colleen Moriarity, the group's executive director. Hunger Solutions distributed \$21 million of that aid money to food programs across the state.

The Minneapolis-St. Paul area saw the greatest increase in need for food. Visits were up 17% overall and 39% among older residents in Hennepin County, which includes Min-

neapolis.

West Virginia

CHARLESTON — West Virginia's coronavirus czar said Friday that vaccinations are already reducing COVID-19 deaths and hospitalizations in the state.

Less than two months into the vaccination drive, Dr. Clay Marsh, a high-ranking West Virginia University health official, said there is a 40 to 45% reduction in deaths linked to COVID-19 from December to January and hospitalizations are down more than 50%.

"Which we do believe is directly related to the aggressive vaccination that we've done," Marsh said at the governor's coronavirus news conference.

About 11.5% of the state's population has received at least one vaccine dose, while nearly 5% are fully vaccinated.

Virginia

RICHMOND — Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam said Friday that all schools in the state should make in-person instruction available at least as an option next month, noting the coronavirus pandemic's steep toll on children and families.

Northam said during a news conference that all K-12 school divisions should make the option available by March 15. He also encouraged schools to offer summer classes for kids who want to take them. The governor did not say the guidance was mandatory, but his office later said Northam expects all districts in the state to be on board with the March 15 deadline.

"My fellow pediatricians say they're seeing an increase in behavioral problems, mental health issues and even increases in substance abuse among their young patients," said Northam, who is a pediatric neurologist and the nation's only governor who is a doctor.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Robber takes chicken, waffles from restaurant

CA PASADENA — A man who was refused service at a Southern California restaurant because he was not wearing a mask came back with a gun and robbed the eatery of chicken and waffles.

The robbery occurred at the Roscoe's House of Chicken and Waffles location in Pasadena, police Lt. Marcia Taglioretti told Southern California News Group. No one was hurt and the man got away.

After being turned away, the man showed up with a gun in the kitchen at the back of the restaurant as security cameras recorded the scene.

Manager Angela Prieto said the man did not take any cash.

31 counties approve ballots in Spanish

FL TALLAHASSEE — As part of a lawsuit settlement, 31 Florida counties have agreed to provide Spanish-language elections ballots and other materials in Spanish.

U.S. District Judge Mark Walker approved the settlement between the county election supervisors and Latino advocacy groups who complained the counties were in violation of the Voting Rights Act.

Under the terms of the settlement, the counties must have Spanish-language ballots, have Spanish-language polling place materials, provide vote-by-mail ballot request forms in Spanish, have a hotline to help Spanish speakers and provide a Spanish-language translation of the elections supervisor's website.

Police charge man who used child as shield

MO KANSAS CITY —A man accused of using a relative as a human shield after he fired at officers inside a Kansas City home was charged, prosecutors said.

Willie Wren, 37, of Kansas City, was charged with first-degree assault, two counts of armed criminal action, unlawful use of a weapon and unlawful possession of a weapon, the Jackson County Prosecutor's office said.

Officers responded after witnesses reported a man dragging a screaming child in the street, police said in a news release. Arriving officers entered a house after hearing a child screaming inside. The officers encountered a man, 37, holding a gun in an upstairs bedroom, police said.

Police said that after a brief exchange, an officer fired a stun gun at the man, who then fired at the officers. One officer was injured when he was pushed down the stairs as police retreated.

When officers tried to engage the man again, police said, he was holding the screaming girl in front of him. Officers overpowered the man and rescued the girl, 6, who was not injured.

Officials kill moose after seeing feeding video

AK ANCHORAGE — Alaska Wildlife Troopers have killed a moose after a woman posted a video on social media showing herself feeding and petting the animal.

Troopers said the juvenile

male moose had become comfortable around people and subsequently posed a public safety risk, Anchorage Daily News reported.

The video posted on Facebook by Angel Bunch of Palmer was sent to Matanuska-Susitna authorities, Alaska State Troopers spokesman Austin McDaniel said.

There were no reports of nuisance moose in the area, but troopers decided to kill the animal and donate the meat to charity to avoid a potential safety risk, McDaniel said. Bunch received a misdemeanor citation for negligently feeding game.

Chucky doll featured in errant Amber Alerts

TX SAN ANTONIO — The Texas Department of Public Safety apologized after mistakenly issuing an Amber Alert that said the killer doll featured in the 1988 horror film "Child's Play" was a suspect in the kidnapping of his son, Glen Ray, 5, who was featured in "Seed of Chucky."

The emergency alert described Chucky as a 3-foot, 1-inch-tall doll wearing "blue denim overalls with multi-colored striped long sleeve shirt wielding a huge kitchen knife."

The alert was mistakenly sent out three times to Amber Alert subscribers. The agency said it was a test malfunction.

Citizens vote on official state dinosaur

MA BOSTON — The people of Massachusetts have spoken and selected an official state dinosaur.

Podokesaurus holyokensis received more than 60% of the roughly 35,000 votes cast in a social media campaign started by state Rep. Jack Lewis, besting the other choice, *Anchisaurus polyselus*. The winner was announced during a live virtual event hosted by Boston's Museum of Science.

Lewis, a Framingham Democrat, was inspired to select a state dinosaur by one of his children's Cub Scouts dens, which was studying fossils. He said his goal was to teach children about the legislative process and spur interest in paleontology.

Fossils of both dinosaurs were discovered in Massachusetts.

Bowling alley fights draw mayor's scrutiny

GA MACON — A Macon bowling alley was warned to follow local nuisance laws and state COVID-19 distancing rules after videos of fights at the alley were publicized on social media.

Macon-Bibb Mayor Lester Miller sent the bowling alley a letter, saying officials have "received a number of reports" that on weekends teens and minors have been dropped off "to play or loiter without adult supervision for hours at a time."

Miller also said the bowling alley appears to be disobeying state COVID-19 requirements to limit the number of bowling lanes that can be used and to sanitize each lane after use.

Pin Strikes Director of Operations Kimberly Appler said Pin Stikes is trying to enforce rules, but said customers cross over into closed lanes.

— The Associated Press



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Storylines abound in historic Super Bowl

Associated Press

Someone will make history Sunday in a Super Bowl so filled with storylines it would fill a season of TV programming.

Tom Brady, already the true Game of Thrones king, going for a seventh ring. Patrick Mahomes, the apparent heir to the quarterbacking summit, seeking a second in a row with Kansas City — something no team has done since Brady led New England to the double in the 2003 and '04 seasons.

Brady, 43 is in his 10th NFL title game, but with a new outfit, the Buccaneers — who happen to call Tampa home. Yes, Tampa, Fla., where the Super Bowl is being played this year. Pirates of the Caribbean make port: No host team has ever played in the big one in its home stadium.

"There's a lot that comes along with the Super Bowl," says Rob Gronkowski, the three-time champion tight end who came out of retirement to reunite with Brady. "There's a lot that comes along with this week. I've been there before. I've experienced it all before. But just having it at home, cutting out the travel, knowing where you can stay, where your friends can stay, where your family can stay, it just makes it a lot easier to have it at your home stadium, big time."

Add in two sixty-something head coach-

es, Kansas City's Andy Reid and Tampa Bay's Bruce Arians, both offensive masterminds as comfortable with today's high-scoring, creative NFL attacks as all those kid coaches who are all the rage.

"There's nobody that would ever say a bad thing about B.A., he's just so endearing to everybody and I think everyone wants to win for him," Brady says of Arians, the kind of praise the quarterback rarely used about his previous head coach.

"He's got almost like a father-figure kind of role in the building and it's because everyone loves him so much," Chiefs unanimous All-Pro tight end Travis Kelce says of Reid. "He's got an unbelievable way of getting the best out of everybody that is relating to all different aspects and all different forms of life."

Don't forget the defenses, which could easily be ignored with all the dynamism on both offenses. Tampa has probably the best set of linebackers in the NFL with Shaq Barrett, Lavonte David and Devin White, studs up front in Ndamukong Suh and Jason Pierre-Paul, and an ever-improving secondary.

KC has All-Pro safety Tyrann Mathieu, linemen Frank Clark and Chris Jones — and a coordinator, Steve Spagnuolo, who doesn't back off.

"I've played for a lot of coaches in high

school and college," Clark notes, "and I'm not saying they were bad, but I'm not saying their intentions were to bring out the best in players. I can say that for sure with coach Spags. His intentions are not negative or anything like that. His intentions are solely to have the best defense on that field."

All of this at the end of a season played during a pandemic, yet not delayed, with no games canceled, and each of the Super Bowl participants experiencing relatively few COVID-19 setbacks.

"I think with the pandemic and the sacrifices they have all made for each other, they go to work and go home," Arians says. "They don't get to sit and eat together, don't get to have conversations, it is amazing to me how close they are. It is the commitment they made to each other to beat the virus."

The NFL and Florida health officials have approved about 22,000 fans and all will be required to wear masks. Raymond James Stadium normally has a capacity of 75,000 fans.

Playing before real people rather than just cardboard cutouts — oh, there will be plenty of those, too, with proceeds donated to local charities — has been rare in the NFL all season. But both the Chiefs and Buccaneers were among the few teams to have fans on hand for some games.

Somehow, NFL pulled off this pandemic season

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Playing a contact sport in the middle of a pandemic seemed unthinkable to everyone except the NFL when the novel coronavirus shut down the country in March.

The improbable became achievable thanks to collaboration and sacrifice.

Super Bowl 55 takes place Sunday right on schedule. That was the plan all along. The league played 256 games in the regular season without any cancellations and made it through the playoffs to get here.

The NFL spent more than \$75 million on testing alone, played games on all seven days of the week, shuffled the schedule numerous times, and constantly revised health and safety proto-

cols.

It paid off.

"There's so many people that had to work together to get this done," NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell said Thursday. "There were doubters. Obviously, there were people that didn't believe we could do it. Obviously, we had a lot of unknowns. But we believed that staying on schedule and working toward trying to get to 256 games done -- as we sort of say shorthand, avoid the asterisk. I think we were able to do that, but we've still got a few days left here, so we're focused on making sure we finish out strong."

Fresh off contentious negotiations for a new collective bargaining agreement, the league and the players' union worked

together to ensure health and safety were paramount. That meant the Denver Broncos had to play a game with a practice squad wide receiver as their quarterback. The Cleveland Browns had a playoff game with coach Kevin Stefanski at home on his couch.

"We have worked together to find solutions and work past our differences," Goodell said. "We've had our dustups in the past. But this season it really took all of us to get through this."

NFL Players Association Executive Director DeMaurice Smith even joined Goodell on stage toward the end of his news conference in a seemingly celebratory moment.

"This year has been, I think across businesses in the coun-

try, one of the best of labor and management working together to do something we couldn't do alone," Smith said.

There were nervous moments along the way as several teams experienced breakouts. The league had to impose intensive protocol measures to prevent disaster and keep things going.

"It started in Tennessee where we weren't sure how to control this, what was causing this," Goodell said. "Those were some anxious days, there's no question about it. But we believed in our medical experts. We believed in the protocols. We were able to get that under control, and we learned a lot from that, that we then applied and changed, and I think that helped us."

Bruins strike fast, surprise Flyers

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Sean Kuraly and Brad Marchand scored 27 seconds apart in the third period to lead the Boston Bruins to a 2-1 victory over the Philadelphia Flyers on Friday night.

Tuukka Rask made 23 saves for the Bruins, who have won seven of eight overall and all four matchups against the Flyers this season.

James van Riemsdyk scored for Philadelphia.

Kuraly netted the game-winner with a wrist shot from above the left circle that beat Brian Elliott on the glove side, went off the post and in with 7:32 remaining.

Boston has more third-period goals (19) than all other periods and overtime combined (15).

The teams next will meet on Feb. 21 as part of the NHL's outdoor series at Lake Tahoe.

Panthers 2, Predators 1: Carter Verhaeghe had the go-ahead goal and an assist, and Aleksander Barkov also scored as host Florida defeated Nashville.

Chris Drieger turned back 24 shots for Florida, which improved to 6-0-2.

Colton Sissons had the lone goal for the Predators, who split the two-game series. Pekka Rinne had 34 saves for Nashville.

Lightning 3, Red Wings 1: Barclay Goodrow scored a pair of goals and host Tampa Bay remained undefeated on home ice with a victory over Detroit.

Pat Maroon also scored for the Lightning, who improved to 5-0 at Amalie Arena. Andrei Vasilevskiy finished with 27 saves.

Goodrow's second goal of the game was the 6,000th goal

in Lightning franchise history.

Tampa Bay extended its point streak against Detroit to 19 games (18-0-1) and has won 16 consecutive regular-season home games against the Red Wings.

Vladislav Namestnikov scored for Detroit, which is winless in eight games (0-6-2). Thomas Greiss finished with 29 saves.

Golden Knights 5, Kings 2: Nic Hague and William Karlsson each had a goal and two assists as host Vegas returned to action after being sidelined due to COVID protocols and beat Los Angeles.

Vegas was playing for the first time since Jan. 26.

Mark Stone and Jonathan Marchessault also scored for Vegas with goals 62 seconds apart. Cody Glass also scored for Vegas, while Marc-Andre Fleury improved to 4-0-0 after making 27 saves.

Austin Wagner scored his first goal of the season for the Kings, while Dustin Brown scored his fourth. Goaltenders Jonathan Quick and Calvin Peterson combined to make 32 saves. Quick allowed Vegas' first four goals.

Sharks 5, Ducks 4 (SO): Kevin Labanc and Ryan Donato scored shootout goals on similar moves and visiting San Jose snapped a two-game losing streak with a win over Anaheim.

Brent Burns and Evander Kane each had a goal and an assist in regulation. Matt Nieto and Logan Couture also scored for the Sharks, and Martin Jones made 33 saves.

Max Comtois had two goals, Troy Terry had a goal and an assist, and Adam Henrique also scored for Anaheim. John Gibson stopped 26 shots.

Jazz continue winning ways, beat Hornets

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Bojan Bogdanovic scored 31 points, Donovan Mitchell had 30 and the Jazz beat the Hornets 138-121 for their 14th victory in 15 games.

Rudy Gobert added 12 points and 15 rebounds for the Jazz, who overcame an early 12-point deficit by outscoring the Hornets 39-22 in the second quarter.

Utah shot 26-for-50 from three-point range, with Mitchell chipping in with five threes.

LaMelo Ball had 34 points and eight assists for the Hornets. It was the first 30-point game by a Hornets rookie since Walter Herrmann in 2007.

Raptors 123, Nets 117: With Kevin Durant forced out of the game in the third quarter because of the NBA's health and safety protocols, Toronto beat host Brooklyn behind 33 points from Pascal Siakam.

Durant's first game against the Raptors since rupturing his Achilles tendon in the 2019 NBA Finals was a frustrating one for him and a confusing night for everyone. The superstar forward wasn't available to start the game — entering as a reserve for the first time in his 867-game NBA career — then was told he had to depart in the third quarter.

NBA spokesman Tim Frank said in a statement that Durant had tested negative three times in the last 24 hours, including two negative PCR tests Friday. He said someone whom Durant interacted with in the afternoon had an inconclusive test result return shortly before the game. Durant was initially held out while that result was reviewed.

Celtics 119, Clippers 115: Jayson Tatum led a three-point shooting spree and scored 34 points, helping visiting Boston hold off Los Angeles, which didn't have Paul George in the lineup.

Kawhi Leonard had 28 points

and 11 rebounds for the Clippers, but missed all five of his three-point attempts. The team was 14-for-32 from long range.

Pelicans 114, Pacers 113: Brandon Ingram scored 30 points to lead the Pelicans to the road win.

Lonzo Ball added 20 points and nine rebounds as New Orleans won for the fourth time in six games. Zion Williamson had 18 points, and Steven Adams finished with 12 points and 12 rebounds.

Bucks 123, Cavaliers 105: Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 33 points, and Milwaukee won the opener of a six-game road trip that began with travel delays.

Antetokounmpo picked up two early fouls and started slowly. But the reigning NBA MVP found his groove in the second half, scoring 22 points and muscling his way inside for easy baskets.

Suns 109, Pistons 92: Devin Booker scored 23 points, Chris Paul added 20 points and nine assists, and host Phoenix rolled to the win.

Paul — who came to the desert in a trade with Oklahoma City during the offseason — is averaging more than 22 points over the past seven games, and the Suns have won four of them.

Heat 122, Wizards 95: Kendrick Nunn had 25 points and eight rebounds, and host Miami shut down Washington's Bradley Beal in the win.

Beal — the NBA's scoring leader, averaging 34.8 points entering Friday — had seven points on 1-for-14 shooting.

Magic 123, Bulls 119: Nikola Vucevic scored a career-best 43 points and grabbed 19 rebounds, helping host Orlando stop a four-game losing streak.

Timberwolves 106, Thunder 103: D'Angelo Russell made a three-pointer with 3.7 seconds remaining to lift Minnesota to the road win.

Serena, Nadal eye records at Aussie Open

Associated Press

Easy as it is to assemble a list of significant Australian Open story lines — from Rafael Nadal's bid for a men's-record 21st Grand Slam singles trophy to Serena Williams' try for her 24th, from Novak Djokovic's attempt to win a third consecutive title at Melbourne Park to Sofia Kenin's defense of her first major championship, and so on — nothing hangs over the upcoming two weeks quite like questions involving the coronavirus.

There is, after all, still a pandemic in progress.

"During the tough months of quarantine in Spain," said Nadal, who equaled Roger Federer at 20 majors, three ahead of Djokovic, by winning the French Open in October, "(there) have been too many problems to think about tennis, no?"

And no matter how much better Australia has contained its COVID-19 outbreak than countries such as the United States, a reminder of the precarious nature of a large, international sports event came just a hand-

ful of days before the scheduled beginning of the year's first Grand Slam tennis tournament on Monday (Sunday EST): A full day of competition at the half-dozen tuneups in Melbourne was postponed because of a positive test for a worker at a hotel that housed 160 players in January.

The draw for the Australian Open was pushed back a day, too.

Before the 24-hour break was announced, Australian player Nick Kyrgios captured a common sentiment, tweeting: "Am I playing tomorrow?"

"It was a bit of uncertainty," he said later. "I had no idea what was going on."

Those sorts of doubts could linger at a major tournament that already was pushed back three weeks from its original start date to allow for all of the entrants and their entourages to quarantine upon arrival on the continent.

"From a tennis point of view, you cannot prepare 100%," 2019 U.S. Open runner-up Daniil Medvedev said. "You try to do what you can."

Williams, a seven-time champion in Melbourne, said that the Achilles tendon issue that hampered her last year in a loss at the U.S. Open and forced her to withdraw from the French Open might have prevented her from competing at all in Australia if not for that extra bit of rest.

Most participants were limited to leaving their hotels for five hours of training per day. More than 70 players were banned from leaving their rooms at all during that period because they potentially were exposed to the virus during the chartered flights that carried them from various spots in the globe to Melbourne.

"Everyone experienced different challenges when it came to that period," three-time major semifinalist Johanna Konta said. "Some had it a lot more difficult than others, that's for sure."

The mental and physical tolls of that kind of lockdown certainly would be liable to affect anyone, athlete or otherwise.

"The players are just getting thrown off-guard a lot. I think

it's going to demand a lot of patience and a lot of flexibility and who is going to really adjust and adapt the best," said Chris Evert, whose 18 major championships include the 1982 and 1984 Australian Opens.

"Players are so used to routines. They like to be in control. They're not in control," said Evert, now an ESPN analyst. "It's not easy."

Because of that one positive COVID-19 test, more than 500 people associated with the Australian Open and its warmup tournaments were told to isolate until they tested negative.

One day later, action resumed.

Australian Open tournament director Craig Tiley chalked it up as "just one of those additional challenges" and stated unequivocally: "We are starting on Monday."

The plan is to let in 30,000 spectators per day, about 50% of the usual crowds — and a big departure from the last Grand Slam tournament of 2020, the French Open, which had about 1,000 fans per day, and the U.S. Open, which did not allow any.

Bauer joins Dodgers, signs three-year contract

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Trevor Bauer is coming home to pitch for the World Series champion Los Angeles Dodgers.

The reigning NL Cy Young Award winner announced his decision on Friday in a two-minute video posted to his Twitter account. Bauer narrated the piece, which ended with him saying, "This season is about making sure history remembers us as we wish to be remembered. This season is about adding to our legacy. And I can't wait, Dodger fans."

The Dodgers made it worth his while: His contract is for \$102 million over three years, according to multiple media re-

ports.

Bauer, who turned 30 last month, was born in North Hollywood, went to high school in Santa Clarita and played baseball at UCLA.

Chiefs assistant in crash that injures kids

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Kansas City Chiefs assistant coach Britt Reid, the son of head coach Andy Reid, was involved in a multi-vehicle crash late Thursday that injured two young children near the team's training complex adjacent to Arrowhead Stadium.

According to Kansas City, Mo., police, the crash occurred about 9 p.m. on Interstate 435. A

vehicle had run out of gas and called for help on the entrance ramp to the highway, and another vehicle parked nearby to assist them. Reid's pickup truck struck the left front of the first car before hitting the rear of the second car.

Two children in the second car, ages 5 and 4, were taken to the hospital. Their status was not immediately available.

Local television station KSHB reported that Reid told an officer on the scene he had "two or three drinks," according to a search warrant filed just before midnight. Reid then complained of stomach pain and also was taken to the hospital.

MLS, players reach agreement on new CBA

Major League Soccer and its players struck an agreement Friday night on a reworked collective bargaining agreement that will run through the 2027 season.

The league had invoked a force majeure clause in December to reopen negotiations over the current CBA, citing ongoing uncertainty because of the COVID-19 crisis.

The agreement reached Friday night gives the players their full salaries this season and extends the current CBA for two seasons.