

Sailors to renew oaths during stand-downs

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The Navy will require its sailors to reaffirm their oaths to the Constitution during day-long unit stand-downs ordered by the defense secretary to address extremism, including white supremacy.

Chief of Naval Personnel Vice Adm. John Nowell Jr. ordered the renewed oaths Sunday in a message to the fleet detailing the Navy's plans for the stand-downs that each service must complete before April 2. Both military and civilian personnel are required to participate.

"As public servants, we took an oath to the Constitution and we will not tolerate those who participate in actions that go against the fundamental principles of the oath we share, particularly actions associated with extremist or dissident ideologies," Nowell said in the message.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Feb. 3 told each service branch to conduct 24-hour operational pauses to address extremism. His order followed the Jan. 6 insurrection at the Capitol by supporters of former President Donald Trump that included more

than two dozen military veterans and at least one current service member, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby told reporters at the time.

In a video message Friday, Austin encouraged service members in all branches to "revisit the oath that you took" when they joined the military.

"Read those words again; consider what they really mean," he said. "And think about the promise that you made to yourselves and to your teammates and to your fellow citizens."

The Pentagon does not know how many service members are involved in extremist activity, Kirby said at a press briefing Monday in Washington. Collecting that kind of information is difficult, he said.

The defense secretary, Kirby said, "very much would like to have a better sense of the data. We need to have a better understanding of how broad and deep the problem is."

Some commands have already held their stand-downs, Kirby said. Others are waiting on training materials being prepared by the Pentagon.

During the Navy's stand-downs, com-

mands must discuss the oath's meaning, "including what we protect (Freedom of Speech/Assembly) and the limits on these rights for service members," according to Nowell's message. Personnel must also review prohibited activities, including "political activity and social media posts and don'ts."

Each stand-down must include a listening session, something the Navy has been pushing since last summer. Discussions on racism in the service were encouraged after the civil unrest across the country following the death in Minneapolis of George Floyd, an unarmed Black man killed by a white police officer who knelt on his neck.

"Every commander or commanding officer will continue to conduct listening sessions and get it into their battle rhythm," Nowell said in the message. "This is where the hard work of establishing trust and connectedness starts."

Kirby on Monday told reporters he did not expect information on numbers of service members involved in extremism to come from those sessions, but "clearly it's about trying to get a better grasp of the degree to which the problem exists."

Navy divers training under ice for Arctic operations

Daily Press

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. — It dipped to 9 below zero before dawn Friday at Camp Ripley, Minn. — the same as at Barrow, Alaska, the northernmost point in the United States — which is why Chief Warrant Officer 2 Joshua Slack has no doubts that his divers are getting the right training for the Navy's stepped up interest in Arctic operations.

The sailors from Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek's Mobile Diving and Salvage Unit 2 are spending February in the middle of Minnesota, diving at least twice daily in water just 4 degrees above its freezing point, and under ice that can be 3 feet thick.

As far as Slack and MDSU-2 are concerned, that's pretty Arctic.

The Navy's latest strategic planning and

NATO's new, Norfolk-based Joint Force Command have heightened their focus on the Arctic over the past several months.

That focus comes in response to increased Russian naval activity, especially important because of signs of growing Chinese interest in the region, and because Arctic waters offer Russian submarines a path to the North Atlantic sea routes and telecommunications lines that link the United States and Europe.

So Slack's divers, who normally train in the warmer waters of Virginia Beach, Va., and downright balmy Key West, Fla., need to know how to operate in those frigid, dangerous conditions. If air supplies run short or equipment fails, divers in the Arctic — and the 36 degree water of Lake Ferrell — can't simply swim up to the surface. There's ice in the way.

And if they need to switch to a backup breathing system, that 36 degree water can provide a disorienting shock when it hits their faces. Divers need to learn to brace for that.

Visibility is poor, too. The MDSU-2 divers' training in Minnesota includes work with a hand-held navigation device and the underwater sonar the team uses when divers search for hazards, mines or items that need to be recovered.

Since the divers are part of the Navy's expeditionary command, they're expected to be ready to go anywhere and set up everything they need to do their jobs.

It's all part of being a Navy diver, Slack said. And the training means that if MDSU-2 sailors need to go to the Arctic, they're ready to carry out their mission, he said.

Suit blames Saudi Arabia for military base attack

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Victims of a 2019 shooting at a Florida military base and their families are suing Saudi Arabia, claiming the kingdom knew the gunman had been radicalized and that it could have prevented the killings.

The suit, filed Monday, also claims that Saudi trainees knew in advance about plans for the shooting but did nothing to stop it.

The suit centers on the Dec. 6, 2019, shooting at Naval Air Station Pensacola in which Mohammed Saeed Alshamrani shot and killed three U.S. sailors. It comes nine months after U.S. officials revealed that Alshamrani, a Saudi Air Force officer, had communicated with al-Qaida operatives about planning and tactics in the weeks leading up to the attack and that he had been radicalized abroad before coming to the United States to participate in a military training program.

The lawsuit casts a wide net of blame beyond Alshamrani. It alleges, for instance, that Saudi Arabia knew about Alshamrani's associations with al-Qaida and his radicalization and yet failed to monitor, supervise or report him. It also says the gunman told fellow Saudi trainees at a dinner party the night before the attack that he planned to carry out the shooting the following day, but instead of reporting

it, they called out sick the morning of the killings. One recorded the shootings while standing outside the building; two others watched from a car nearby.

The complaint also says Alshamrani's Saudi trainees were aware he purchased and stored firearms and ammunition in his barracks, and that he had shared extremist material on social media and screened videos of mass shootings before the attack.

"Al-Shamrani was a Trojan Horse sent by his country, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and its proxy, al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, for flight training at Naval Air Station Pensacola, Florida, under the auspices of a program tied to billions of dollars in military arms sales from the United States to the Kingdom," the lawsuit states. "Little did the American people know that such an arrangement would soon devolve into a horrific, Faustian bargain."

One month after the shooting, then-Attorney General William Barr announced that 21 Saudi trainees found to have had jihadi or anti-American sentiments on social media pages or "contact with child pornography" were being sent home.

The complaint seeks monetary damages against Saudi Arabia under an exemption of the law that allows for lawsuits against foreign countries arising from acts of terrorism.

Navy vaccinates thousands aboard Vinson in one day

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

Nearly 3,000 personnel aboard the USS Carl Vinson were inoculated against the coronavirus in a single day, the Navy's largest distribution of the vaccine on the West Coast, the service said in a news release Monday.

More than 2,900 members of the aircraft carrier's crew, strike group staff and embarked helicopter squadrons were given the first round of the two-dose Pfizer vaccine Friday, the release said. The ship has a crew of about 3,000, Indo-Pacific Command said in September.

The Carl Vinson's medical department administered the shots in the hangar bay while the ship was docked at its homeport in San Diego.

The inoculations are among preparations for the Vinson's upcoming deployment, the Navy said.

The massive vaccination operation was the culmination of weeks of preparation, the Navy said.

"We all received training on the vaccine, how to administer it properly, and the route by which we can most effectively vaccinate the maximum amount of people possible," Petty Officer 3rd Class James Barry, a hospital corpsman who was among the medical personnel giving shots, said in the release.

Vaccination against COVID-19, which is the disease caused by the coronavirus, is voluntary for military personnel.

Afghanistan peace talks resume, but path is not certain

Associated Press

ISLAMABAD — With violence spiking, Afghanistan's warring sides have returned to the negotiation table, ending more than a month of delays amid hopes that the two sides can agree on a reduction of violence — and eventually, an outright ceasefire.

Taliban spokesman Dr. Mohammad Naeem tweeted Monday night that talks had resumed in the Middle Eastern State of Qatar, where the insurgent movement maintains a political office. There were no details other than the atmosphere was "cordial," there was a commitment that negotiations

should continue and an announcement that the first item of business will be setting the agenda.

When talks ended abruptly in January, just days after beginning, both sides submitted their wish lists for agendas. The task now is for the two sides to sift through the respective wish lists, agree on items to negotiate and the order in which they will be tackled.

The priority for the Afghan government, Washington and NATO is a serious reduction in violence leading to a cease fire. The Taliban have said it is negotiable, but until

now have resisted any immediate ceasefire.

Washington is reviewing the February 2020 peace deal the previous Trump administration signed with the Taliban that calls for the final withdrawal of international forces by May 1. The Taliban have resisted suggestions of even a brief extension, but a consensus is mounting in Washington for a delay in the withdrawal deadline.

But neither Washington nor NATO has yet to announce a decision on the fate of an estimated 10,000 troops, including 2,500 American soldiers, still in Afghanistan.

Security officials cast blame in Capitol riot

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Testifying for the first time about the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, former security officials blamed faulty intelligence for the disastrous failure to anticipate the violent intentions of the mob that invaded the building and interrupted the certification of the presidential election.

The officials, including the former chief of the Capitol Police, are blaming other federal agencies — and each other — for their failure to defend the building as supporters of then-President Donald Trump overwhelmed security barriers, breaking windows and doors and sending lawmakers fleeing from the House and Senate chambers. They said they expected the protests to be similar to two pro-Trump events in late 2020 that were far less violent.

Former Capitol Police Chief Steven Sund described a scene that was “like nothing” he had seen in his 30 years of policing.

“When the group arrived at the perimeter, they did not act

like any group of protesters I had ever seen,” the ousted chief said, arguing that the insurrection was not the result of poor planning but of failures across the board from many agencies and officials.

“No single civilian law enforcement agency — and certainly not the USCP — is trained and equipped to repel, without significant military or other law enforcement assistance, an insurrection of thousands of armed, violent and coordinated individuals focused on breaching a building at all costs,” Sund said.

The joint hearing, part of an investigation of Jan. 6 by the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee and the Senate Rules Committee, is the first time the officials have testified publicly about the events of that day. In addition to Sund, former Senate Sergeant-at-Arms Michael Stenger, former House Sergeant-at-Arms Paul Irving and Robert Contee, the acting chief of police for the Metropolitan

Police Department, are testifying.

Sund, Irving and Stenger resigned under pressure immediately after the deadly attack.

Much remains unknown about what happened before and during the assault. How much did law enforcement agencies know about plans for violence that day, many of which were public? How did the agencies share that information with each other? And how could the Capitol Police have been so ill-prepared for a violent insurrection that was organized online?

Sund told the lawmakers that he learned only after the attack that his officers had received a report from the FBI’s field office in Norfolk, Va., that forecast, in detail, the chances that extremists could commit “war” in Washington the following day. The head of the FBI’s office in Washington has said that once he received the Jan. 5 warning, the information was quickly shared with other law enforcement agencies through the joint terrorism task force.

Sund said Tuesday that an officer on the task force had received that memo and forwarded it to a sergeant working on intelligence for the Capitol Police, but that the information was not put forward to any other supervisors. Sund said he wasn’t aware of it.

Senate Homeland Chairman Gary Peters, D-Mich., said the failure of the intelligence report to reach the chief was clearly a major problem.

The officials have also disagreed on when the National Guard was called and on requests for the guard beforehand. Sund said he spoke to both Stenger and Irving about requesting the National Guard in the days before the riot, and that Irving said he was concerned about the “optics” of having them present.

Irving denied that, saying Sund’s account is “categorically false.” Safety, not optics, determined their security posture, he said, and the top question was whether intelligence supported the decision.

Resurrecting Iran nuke deal off to bumpy start

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration’s early efforts to resurrect the 2015 Iran nuclear deal are getting a chilly early response from Tehran. Though few expected a breakthrough in the first month of the new administration, Iran’s tough line suggests a difficult road ahead.

Having made several significant overtures to Iran in its first weeks in office, the administration’s outreach has been all but shunned by the Iranians. They had already rejected Biden’s opening gambit: a U.S. return to the deal from which President Donald Trump withdrew in 2018 if Iran resumes full compliance with its obliga-

tions under the accord.

Biden took office pledging to reverse Trump’s pullout from the deal, which gave it billions of dollars in sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program. Just last week, Biden delivered in at least three ways: agreeing to return to multinational talks with Iran about reviving the deal, rescinding Trump’s determination that all U.N. sanctions on Iran must be restored and easing onerous travel restrictions on Iranian diplomats posted to the United Nations.

Yet, Iran has held firm to demands that it will not respond to anything less than a full lifting of the sanctions Trump reimposed.

GOP working to block Biden’s health care pick

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden’s pick for health secretary, Xavier Becerra, faces two days of contentious Senate hearings. Republicans are portraying the Californian as unfit, but Democrats are unfazed, accusing the GOP of playing politics despite the coronavirus pandemic.

Becerra, now attorney general of the nation’s most populous state, will be grilled by two panels. On Tuesday, it’s the health committee’s turn, followed Wednesday by the Finance Committee, which will vote on sending Becerra’s nomination to the Senate floor. If confirmed, he’d be the first Latino to head the Department of Health and Human

Services, a \$1.4 trillion agency with a broad portfolio that includes health insurance programs, drug safety and approvals, advanced medical research and the welfare of children.

Becerra, 63, represented Hispanic neighborhoods of Los Angeles in the U.S. House for more than 20 years. His politics are liberal, but his style is low-key and oriented toward problem solving. As a congressman, he played a behind-the-scenes role steering President Barack Obama’s health care law through Democratic divisions in the House.

Republicans say Becerra is a radical supporter of socialized medicine, abortion and curbs on religious liberty and that he has no medical experience.

Biden mourns 500K US coronavirus deaths

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — With sunset remarks and a national moment of silence, President Joe Biden on Monday confronted head-on the country's once-unimaginable loss — half a million Americans in the COVID-19 pandemic — as he tried to strike a balance between mourning and hope.

Addressing the “grim, heart-breaking milestone” directly and publicly, Biden stepped to a lectern in the White House Cross Hall, unhooked his face mask and delivered an emotion-filled eulogy for more than 500,000 Americans he said he felt he knew.

A president whose own life has been marked by family tragedy, Biden spoke in deeply personal terms, referencing his own losses as he tried to comfort the huge number of Americans whose lives have been forever changed by the pandemic.

The president ordered flags on federal property lowered to half staff for five days and then led the moment of communal mourning for those lost to a virus that often prevents people from gathering to remember their loved ones.

Florida

MIAMI — Health officials announced Monday that more than 30,000 Floridians have died of COVID-19, but hospitalizations and cases have continued to drop, mirroring the national trend.

Florida's Department of Health reported that 30,065 state residents have died and more than 1.8 million have been infected. Officials said 530 people who live outside the state have died of the virus in Florida.

On Monday, there were 4,147 COVID-19 hospitalizations in Florida, according to a state online census of hospital beds.

Meanwhile, nearly 1.4 million people in the state have received both the first and second doses of the vaccine and another

1.3 million have received the first dose. As more elderly people complete their immunizations, some officials are urging the governor to expand the eligibility list to include people 55 and older as well as law enforcement and teachers.

Washington

SEATTLE — Seattle Public Schools is delaying a return to the classroom for its youngest students during the coronavirus pandemic by at least a week because it has yet to reach an agreement with the teachers' union.

In a statement Monday, the district said it had not yet negotiated new working conditions with the Seattle Education Association. The district had previously hoped to begin some in-person learning on March 1. That is now delayed until at least March 8.

Last week, Gov. Jay Inslee urged more schools to open up to in-person instruction, saying the online classroom experience wasn't adequate for many. The Democratic governor said moving toward more in-person instruction is in line with the scientific consensus and federal guidance. Inslee said only about 20% of the state's more than 1 million public school students were receiving some form of in-person instruction.

Wisconsin

MADISON — No COVID-19 deaths were reported Monday in Wisconsin, marking the first time since early September that the state has had two such days in a row.

The last time Wisconsin went two or more days without a single reported death from the coronavirus was the three-day stretch of Sept. 6 through Sept. 8.

The state's seven-day average of new cases was at its lowest point since early July, but it increased marginally from Sunday. The seven-day average on Monday was 612, up from 610

the day before.

Nearly 560,000 Wisconsin residents have tested positive for COVID-19 and 6,284 have died of the disease since the pandemic started.

California

SACRAMENTO — California lawmakers on Monday cleared the way for 5.7 million people to get at least \$600 in one-time payments, part of a state-sized relief package aimed at helping those with low-to-moderate incomes weather the pandemic.

Gov. Gavin Newsom said he will sign the bill into law on Tuesday, one day after it passed the state Legislature by a wide margin.

Fewer people will get these payments as compared to the federal relief checks Congress approved last year. But state lawmakers are aiming the money to reach the pockets of people who were left out of those previous checks, including immigrants.

People who are eligible for the money should get it between 45 days and 60 days after receiving their state tax refunds, according to the Franchise Tax Board.

Oklahoma

NORMAN — Oklahoma opened its second phase of coronavirus vaccinations on Monday, providing inoculations to public school teachers and staff and to adults of any age with illnesses that make them susceptible to the virus.

Oklahoma Teacher of the Year Jena Nelson and the six 2021 teacher of the year finalists were the first to be vaccinated at the clinic.

More than 681,000 Oklahomans had been vaccinated as of Friday, according to the state health department, and an estimated 60,000 more vaccinations were administered during the weekend, said deputy health commissioner Keith Reed. About two-thirds of those eligible for the shot in Oklahoma

have received a vaccination, Reed said.

State schools superintendent Joy Hofmeister said that she expects a higher percentage of public school staff to accept the vaccine.

Missouri

O'FALLON — The number of new Missouri coronavirus cases continued to decline on Monday, but state officials cite one cause for concern: Wastewater samples indicate the fast-spreading U.K. variant is “widespread” across the state.

The Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services reported 351 newly confirmed cases of COVID-19 and no new deaths. The state has reported 475,348 confirmed cases and 7,715 deaths since the pandemic began.

The first Missouri case of the U.K. variant, confirmed on Feb. 6 in Marion County in northeast Missouri, remains the only confirmed case in the state.

But the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services said wastewater sampling has found the variant across the state. The sampling is part of the Coronavirus Sewershed Surveillance Project created by researchers at the University of Missouri-Columbia in partnership with state agencies.

Maine

PORTLAND — Vaccinations are coming to Maine's islands.

Maine Seacoast Mission is providing island COVID-19 vaccination clinics starting this week with medical and support staff arriving on the organization's 74-foot boat, Sunbeam.

The organization is working in partnership with island residents, county officials, the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, Mount Desert Island Hospital and Pen Bay Medical Center. The Sunbeam is equipped with health facilities, including a medical-grade refrigerator.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Mom arrested after leaving child at casino

NV LAS VEGAS — A woman was arrested in California after she was accused of abandoning her 3-year-old child in a Las Vegas casino restroom in December, authorities said.

The Las Vegas police department said in a statement that Mariam Ramos, 26, was found by the U.S. Marshals Service and police department's major violators unit.

Ramos faces one count of child abuse or neglect after being accused of abandoning the child in a woman's restroom at Wynn Las Vegas, records from the Las Vegas Justice Court said.

Boy, 15, arrested after leading police on chase

FL MIAMI BEACH — A 15-year-old boy was arrested after leading police on a chase along South Beach in a stolen Cadillac.

The teen ran through a stop sign as nearby officers were conducting traffic stops, and then sped away from officers who tried to stop him, Miami Beach police said in a Twitter post. He hit another officer's motorcycle during the chase.

Police detained three women, who bailed from the vehicle, but are still searching for two men.

The teen faces several felony charges, Rodriguez said.

10 horses die, 15 saved in fire at horse stables

MO CAPE GIRARDEAU — Ten horses died in a fire at a riding academy in southeast Missouri,

fire officials said.

The blaze was reported at the Fox Run Riding Academy stables in Cape Girardeau. Workers were able to save 15 horses, KFVS reported.

No people were injured.

The Missouri State Fire Marshal was investigating the cause of the fire.

Museums form World War II Heritage Trail

GA SAVANNAH — A group of museums and historic sites are working together to promote a Georgia World War II Heritage Trail with stops across the state.

The trail has officially launched and ties together 10 sites connected to Georgia's history during the war.

They include the Currahee Military Museum in Toccoa, where the Army trained its first paratroopers, and the National Infantry Museum at Fort Benning outside Columbus.

On the coast there's the St. Mary's Submarine Museum near Kings Bay Naval Submarine Base, while South Georgia has the World War II Flight Training Museum in Douglas, where Army pilots trained at South Georgia College.

Police accuse man of stealing tree heaters

CA RIVERSIDE — A California man was arrested for allegedly stealing hundreds of heaters used to prevent citrus trees from freezing.

The 29-year-old man was accused of taking the heaters, known as smudge pots, from farms in Mentone and the University of California Riverside Citrus Research Center in January, The Press-Enterprise re-

ported.

Police arrested the man at his Calimesa home on suspicion of grand theft.

The San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department said the man was seen Jan. 12 at one of the Mentone farms loading smudge pots into his pickup truck. Employees attempted to stop him before he fled with 100 heaters. The man's truck was seen again Jan. 24 leaving with 100 more heaters.

An employee at a second Mentone farm reported seeing the man take smudge pots on Jan. 28, police said.

10 rescued after being stranded on ice floes

OH CLEVELAND — Coast Guard and fire department personnel rescued 10 people who were stranded on ice floes in Lake Erie in Cleveland, authorities said.

Coast Guard Great Lakes said in a Twitter post that an ice rescue team and local agencies responded to a report of 10 people stranded on two separate ice floes near Edgewater Park. A helicopter was dispatched from Air Station Detroit for air support.

The Coast Guard said six people were rescued via an ice skiff and fire department rescuers escorted the other four people off the ice.

Doctor charged with hate crime on Hispanic man

FL MIAMI — A Florida anesthesiologist has been arrested and charged with a hate crime for assaulting a Hispanic man outside a supermarket, according to news outlets citing police reports.

The Miami Herald reported

that Dr. Jennifer Susan Wright, 58, of Miami, had become enraged after the man asked her in Spanish to keep her distance due to COVID-19 guidelines while waiting in line at a supermarket.

Wright ignored him, so he repeated it in English. She responded by "mumbling bad words," the newspaper said, citing an arrest report. Wright then walked up to him in the parking lot and — after he asked her to back up — she hurled racial and other insults at him.

The arrest report said Wright also proceeded "to stab the victim's vehicle with her keys while saying he needed to go back to his country" and punched and kicked the man.

Lawmakers reconsider charging for rescues

HI HONOLULU — The Hawaii Senate is reconsidering allowing county emergency departments to charge out-of-bounds hikers for rescue costs as government spending remains under pressure because of the coronavirus pandemic.

A Senate bill would allow counties to issue criminal fines in addition to seeking reimbursement from hikers requiring rescue after leaving marked trails or ignoring "closed" or "no trespassing" signs, the Honolulu Star-Advertiser reported. The bill also would add new petty misdemeanor penalties for hiking illegally.

Hikers across the islands every year are rescued by county police and fire departments using helicopters and other equipment in costly operations that can risk the lives of their personnel.

— From wire reports



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Time dwindling on Trout's playoff clock

Associated Press

ANAHEIM, Calif. — Mike Trout is beginning a new season with the same old question.

How long will the Los Angeles Angels' three-time AL MVP have to wait for his first playoff victory?

"It's definitely weighed on me," Trout said Monday before the Angels' first full workout of spring training in Tempe, Ariz. "I hear it every year. The only way to change that is to get to the playoffs, no matter how that is."

Trout has been waiting for his answer to that query for nearly a full decade since his major league debut in July 2011. After the Angels' latest failure last fall, Trout knows he won't win a postseason game before he turns 30 this summer.

The big-budget Angels are tied with Detroit for the third-longest playoff drought in the majors at six seasons, trailing only Seattle and Philadelphia. Not even the expanded 2020 postseason helped Los Angeles, which finished 26-34 for its fifth straight losing campaign — the franchise's worst stretch since the 1970s.

Yet the eight-time All-Star re-

mains indefatigably optimistic about the Angels' chances, even after owner Arte Moreno triggered yet another offseason overhaul by firing general manager Billy Eppler, Trout's good friend.

"I'm trying to get to the playoffs," Trout said. "We all are. If that's not the mindset, you shouldn't be here. We've got one goal. That's to get to the playoffs and win a World Series here. It's still the same goal. Obviously a lot of new faces this year. We kind of cleaned house a little bit."

"I'm looking for a fresh start, and you know, I'm getting older for sure, but I'm still young. I still feel great. It's a lot different now this year. I'm a dad. I don't know if that's something different, but maybe it'll change the luck."

The Angels' biggest problems are all on the mound, so they remain out of Trout's hands no matter how brilliantly the \$426 million center fielder plays.

Although Los Angeles didn't address its endemic pitching woes with any splashy signings, Trout and manager Joe Maddon are hoping the Halos can build on their strong finish to last sea-

son over a full year of play in a division that appears to be less daunting than last season.

The Angels' top brass has spoken frequently of its determination to win in the prime of Trout's career, and it's a key motivation behind the organization's resistance to a thorough rebuild. They've simply continued to add pieces around Trout, hoping to get new results from various roster tweaks.

Maddon agrees with the philosophy, and he doesn't shy from the Angels' responsibility to get Trout to the playoffs.

"It would absolutely be almost like a mortal sin in the Catholic faith," Maddon said. "You just can't miss out on that kind of an opportunity where you have that kind of generational talent. ... There (are) a lot of great players that never played in a World Series, so it goes beyond Michael, but I don't want that to happen to him. This guy loves to play. He's wonderful to be around. Of course I want to see it for Michael and his family, but I want to see it for everybody."

Though Trout is more involved in family life and in union business these days, he

said he still did the same extensive offseason workouts with the same trainers. He wants to improve his fielding this season after what he called a down year in the outfield, so he intends to increase his spring work with the glove and his arm.

Trout is also optimistic about the latest change in leadership atop the franchise, even though he is still close to Eppler, who was canned by Moreno in September.

Trout said it was "obviously sad" to see Eppler's departure, but he also feels comfortable already with new general manager Perry Minasian, who kept Trout firmly in the loop on the Angels' offseason moves.

No matter who's running Moreno's front office, Trout believes the Angels in uniform will determine whether his playoff drought extends for another season — and whether fans will finally give him a break.

"I'm tired of hearing, 'Hey, Mike! Adding this guy, is this going to help you?'" Trout said with a chuckle. "I've got to worry about myself and try to do what's best for me and the team."

Mariners CEO, president Mather resigns after video

Associated Press

In one 45-minute conversation, Kevin Mather undermined the Seattle Mariners far beyond being the organization with the longest playoff drought in baseball.

He took insensitive shots at a former All-Star from Japan and a top prospect from the Dominican Republic for their English skills. He admitted to the team possibly manipulating service time for some of its top prospects.

All this from a top executive who once was accused of harassing a female employee and kept his job despite a settlement.

The latest transgression by Mather ended up costing him his position as president and CEO of the Mariners. Mather resigned on Monday after video surfaced over the weekend of him expressing his views of the club's organizational strategy and making insensitive remarks about players during a recent online event.

Mariners Chairman John Stanton announced the decision and said Mather resigned before a decision had to be made whether he'd be fired.

But the choice seemed predetermined as the firestorm over Mather's comments raged since they were first

posted to Twitter on Sunday — which is how Stanton first learned of their existence. There's been no determination whether Mather will receive a severance or what will happen to his small ownership stake in the franchise.

Mather, with the team since 1996 and promoted to CEO and team president in 2017, apologized late Sunday after his comments from Feb. 5 made to the Bellevue, Wash., Breakfast Rotary Club were posted online. They were revealing and unfiltered. They were also a stain to a franchise that hasn't seen the postseason since 2001, has seen fan in-

terest dwindle significantly during a two-decade swoon, and are in the midst of a rebuild.

Mather's most inflammatory comments were references to top prospect Julio Rodriguez and former star pitcher Hisashi Iwakuma and their grasp of English. Mather said Rodriguez, a 20-year-old from the Dominican Republic, didn't have "tremendous" English.

Mather also complained about the cost associated with having an interpreter for Iwakuma, a former All-Star who pitched a no-hitter for the Mariners and is a current special assistant for the club.

Shockers solidifying shaky bubble spot

Associated Press

WICHITA, Kan. — Wichita State headed north to South Dakota to open its season with an interim coach a week on the job, a roster almost completely turned over from last season and almost no expectations when a wave of positive COVID-19 tests forced the Shockers to turn right around and head home.

Turns out it merely delayed the start of a season nobody will soon forget.

Isaac Brown's revamped bunch is not only cruising along at 13-4 and 9-2 in the American Athletic Conference, Wichita State jumped into first place Thursday night with a 68-63 win over sixth-ranked Houston. It was the Shockers' eighth victory this season by five points or fewer, and their highest-ranked victim at home since beating No. 2 Louisville in 1967.

Suddenly, a program that began the season in turmoil is on the right side of the NCAA Tournament bubble.

"I'm just proud of these guys," Brown said. "You know, with everything when I first got this job, we told these kids, 'Just trust us,' and we're going to give them 110% every day, and all those guys trust the proc-

ess.

"They just basically stepped up and have just been doing a tremendous job."

Tyson Etienne and Alterique Gilbert scored 16 points apiece in the win over the Cougars, their latest effort in making fans forget about the seven players that bolted from the program since the end of last season.

Just like the rest of the team has made folks forget — at least at some level — about Gregg Marshall, the winningest coach in program history, who agreed to a buyout just weeks before the start of the season. It was Marshall who led Wichita State to the Final Four, but left when former players accused him of physical and verbal abuse going back several years.

Brown, his longtime assistant, has brought a sense of calm and confidence as the interim coach, while former SEC coach Billy Kennedy — brought on before the season — has provided another valuable voice in the locker room.

On the rise

North Carolina (14-7, 8-5 ACC). So much for the Tar Heels joining fellow bluebloods such as Duke on the bubble. They just ripped Louisville by 45 at home — granted,

the Cardinals were coming off a COVID-19 pause — for arguably their best win of the season, and they have won three of their past four with the loss a competitive one to ninth-ranked Virginia.

Seton Hall (13-9, 10-6 Big East). Kevin Willard's team had won four straight before a competitive loss to Georgetown slowed its momentum. Still, the Pirates are only 1 1/2 games behind Villanova for first place in the conference, and they have should be favored against Butler, UConn and St. John's as they finish the regular season.

Fading hopes

Minnesota (13-10, 6-10 Big Ten). Remember when the Golden Gophers capped a 9-1 start to the season with consecutive spankings of No. 4 Iowa and No. 17 Michigan State? Seems like a long time ago. Richard Pitino's bunch has lost six of its last eight and is coming off a 94-63 blowout at the hands of No. 5 Illinois.

Stanford (14-9, 10-7 Pac-12). The Cardinal have split their past eight games, but the four wins have come against teams in the lower half of the league. That makes their game against Oregon on Thursday night crucial for helping out a shaky resume.

Oklahoma State tops No. 18 Texas Tech in overtime

Associated Press

STILLWATER, Okla. — Cade Cunningham scored 20 points and Oklahoma State got past Texas Tech in overtime for the second time this season, beating the 18th-ranked Red Raiders 74-69 on Monday night.

Cunningham, the Big 12's leading scorer and one of the nation's top freshmen, put on a show in front of about a dozen NBA scouts and executives, including Oklahoma City Thunder general manager Sam Presti. Cunningham made 8 of 13 shots and had five rebounds.

Kalib Boone scored 18 points and Avery Anderson III added 16 for the Cowboys (15-6, 8-6 Big 12), who rallied from an 11-point second-half deficit with Cunningham on the bench due to foul trouble. Oklahoma State also beat Texas Tech in overtime

on Jan. 2.

The Cowboys rallied without Cunningham. Keylan Boone made a three-pointer to finally get the team on the board in the second half. Anderson's layup on a baseline cut tied the game at 47, and Oklahoma State finally took the lead on a pair of free throws by Kalib Boone.

"I think what it says is we have a really good team," Cowboys coach Mike Boynton said. "Maybe those other guys aren't as high in terms of their ceiling. I don't think you'll see them next year in an NBA uniform. They are some really gritty, really good college basketball players on our roster."

No. 19 Southern California 72, Oregon 58: Tahj Eaddy scored 24 points and the host Trojans led by 16 after a blistering start on their way to a win

over the Ducks.

Southern California (19-4, 13-3) moved into sole possession of first place in the Pac-12 by dominating Oregon with just a seven-man rotation. Second-leading rebounder Isaiah Mobley strained his right calf earlier in the day and missed his first start of the season.

LJ Figueroa and Eric Williams Jr. scored 14 points each for the Ducks, who had their five-game winning streak snapped. Oregon (14-5, 9-4) came in tied with USC and UCLA at three losses apiece in league play.

Duke 85, Syracuse 71: Freshman DJ Steward scored 21 points with seven assists, classmate Mark Williams set season highs with 18 points and 11 rebounds for his first double-double, and the host Blue Devils

eased past the Orange for a season-best four-game winning streak.

Duke made eight of its first 12 three-pointers and had an assist on its first 16 field goals. The Blue Devils shot 61.3% in the first half, including 10-for-18 from distance, and scored a season-high 52 points with Steward, Jeremy Roach and Matthew Hurt each reaching double figures.

New Mexico 73, Air Force 65: Makuach Maluach had 22 points as the Lobos won on the road.

Valdir Manuel had 14 points for New Mexico (6-13, 2-13 Mountain West Conference), which ended its five-game losing streak.

A.J. Walker had 26 points for the Falcons (4-17, 2-15), who have now lost 10 games in a row.

Wizards rally past Lakers, win 5th straight

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Bradley Beal scored six of his 33 points on three consecutive possessions late in overtime, and the Washington Wizards extended their longest winning streak in three years to five straight with a 127-124 victory over the slumping Los Angeles Lakers on Monday night.

Russell Westbrook scored six of his 32 points in overtime for the Wizards, who rallied from a 17-point deficit in the second half. Washington then took advantage of a missed free throw by LeBron James late in regulation and went on to its first win over the Lakers at Staples Center since March 2017.

Kentavious Caldwell-Pope hit a three-pointer with 36 seconds left in overtime to trim Washington's lead to 125-124. Westbrook made a layup before missing a free throw, but

James and Kyle Kuzma missed late threes before the buzzer.

James had 31 points, 13 assists and nine rebounds for Los Angeles, which struggled in the second half of its fourth loss in five games.

After carrying the Lakers back in the fourth quarter, James made a tying layup with 9.8 seconds left in regulation, but missed the ensuing free throw that would've put LA ahead. Beal missed a long jumper at the buzzer.

Montrezl Harrell had a season-high 26 points and nine rebounds for the defending NBA champions, who have lost three straight for the first time this season — not coincidentally during three consecutive games without Anthony Davis and Dennis Schröder.

Mavericks 102, Grizzlies 92: Tim Hardaway Jr. scored 29 points and Dallas built a big

first-half lead on its way to a victory over visiting Memphis.

Dallas was playing for the first time in eight days after two postponements because of a wintry weather blast in Texas. Kristaps Porzingis didn't play after showing up on the injury report the day of the game with back stiffness.

Suns 132, Trail Blazers 100: Devin Booker scored 34 points, Deandre Ayton added 19 and host Phoenix kept rolling with a lopsided win over Portland.

It was the largest margin of victory this season for the Suns, who have won nine of 10.

Jazz 132, Hornets 110: Donovan Mitchell had 23 points and eight assists as Utah enjoyed a record-breaking performance from long range against visiting Charlotte.

The Jazz (25-6) set a franchise mark for three-pointers with 28, including 19 off the

bench — the most by any team's backups in NBA history, according to STATS.

Bulls 120, Rockets 100: Coby White scored 24 points and visiting Chicago used a big third quarter to pull away from short-handed Houston.

Zach LaVine scored 14 of the Bulls' 46 third-quarter points, finishing with 21, and Chicago outscored the Rockets by 20 in the period to break open a tight game.

Heat 108, Thunder 94: Duncan Robinson scored 22 points and made six three-pointers, leading Miami to a win at Oklahoma City in the finale of its seven-game road trip.

Kendrick Nunn added 20 points and nine assists, Bam Adebayo had 19 points and 13 rebounds, and they hooked up on an alley-oop dunk during Miami's 15-0 run to start the fourth quarter.

Rittich, Flames stop NHL-leading Maple Leafs

Associated Press

TORONTO — David Rittich made 34 saves for his first shutout of the season and fourth of his career as the Calgary Flames beat NHL-leading Toronto 3-0 on Monday night.

Matthew Tkachuk and Sean Monahan each had a goal and an assist, and Sam Bennett added a goal for Calgary.

Rasmus Andersson added two assists for the Flames, who had lost four of five in regulation and had been outscored 14-3 in three straight losses, including a 7-1 decision to Edmonton on Saturday.

Michael Hutchinson stopped 30 shots in a surprise start for the Maple Leafs (14-4-2).

Both teams were without their No. 1 goalies. Frederik Andersen sat out for Toronto with a lower-body injury. Jacob Markstrom, who was pulled in his last two starts, didn't dress for Calgary because of an upper-body ail-

ment.

Golden Knights 3, Avalanche 0: Alex Tuch scored twice as part of his team's three-goal spree in the second period, Marc-Andre Fleury stopped 34 shots and visiting Vegas cruised past Colorado.

Fleury earned his 64th career shutout in the finale of the four-game series, with the Knights and Avs each recording two wins.

Kings 3, Blues 0: Dustin Brown scored two goals and veteran Jonathan Quick stopped 31 shots for his 54th career shutout, lifting Los Angeles to a win at St. Louis.

It was the second shutout this season for the 35-year-old Quick, who helped the Kings win two Stanley Cup championships in his career.

Gabriel Vilardi added a goal for Los Angeles, which scored in each period and extended its

winning streak to five games.

Islanders 3, Sabres 2: Jean-Gabriel Pageau scored a tie-breaking power-play goal in the third period and Semyon Varlamov made 34 saves, leading host New York over last-place Buffalo.

The Islanders beat the Sabres for the third straight time this season after two victories in Buffalo last week. New York also moved to 5-0-1 at Nassau Coliseum.

Panthers 3, Stars 1: Aaron Ekblad and Keith Yandle scored, Chris Driedger made 24 saves and host Florida beat slumping Dallas.

Aleksander Barkov scored an empty-net goal to seal the Panthers' sixth win in eight games.

Blake Comeau scored for the Stars, and Anton Khudobin stopped 49 of 51 shots. Dallas lost its sixth in a row and eighth of nine overall while playing its first

game since Feb. 13 due to the weather conditions in Dallas.

Lightning 4, Hurricanes 2: Ondrej Palat snapped a tie 8:04 into the third period, and Tampa Bay won at Carolina.

Palat, Steven Stamkos and Victor Hedman each had a goal and an assist for the Lightning, who were shut out in each of their first two matchups with the Hurricanes this season.

Coyotes 4, Ducks 3: Christian Dvorak scored two goals and host Arizona rallied from a three-goal deficit to beat Anaheim in a testy game.

The Ducks, the NHL's lowest-scoring team, scored twice in the opening period and had a 3-0 lead early in the second.

Wild 6, Sharks 2: Mats Zuccarello had a goal and three assists, and Minnesota won at San Jose for its third consecutive win.

It was the highest scoring game of the season for the Wild.