

Military delivers vaccines in Texas, NY

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The U.S. military on Wednesday began delivering shots at coronavirus vaccination centers in Texas and New York and announced that service members will start staffing four centers in Florida and one in Philadelphia beginning next week.

The expanded vaccination effort came as Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin met with military commanders overseeing the COVID-19 response effort. He also visited the vaccination center in Los Angeles, the first staffed by the new active-duty military teams that are being developed.

The Biden administration has said that delivering the vaccine to Americans is a top priority. The Pentagon is ramping up the deployment of what federal authorities say could be up to 100 vaccination teams around the country.

California has the highest coronavirus death toll in the nation, at more than 50,000.

Austin is touring the federally run vaccination site that is set up on the campus of California State University of Los Angeles, which opened last week. The site, on the east side of LA, is staffed by a 222-member military team from Fort Carson, Colo., and it highlights an effort by state leaders to make the vaccinations more available to communities hit hard by the ongoing pandemic.

Watching the line of cars file slowly through the parking area on campus as people in their cars got shots, Austin spoke with troops who have been giving out vaccines. One soldier from the area told Austin how thrilled he was to be able to give his own mother a shot.

"It almost brought me to tears," Austin said later, recounting the story.

Speaking to another group of service members working at the walk-up vaccination site, Austin said they need to take the leadership, coordination and compassion-

ate skills they have learned doing this to their next mission.

Austin told reporters later that the military is learning every day how to make the process more efficient. And he said one thing that has proved successful has been the mobile vaccination teams, and he intends to talk to agency leaders about expanding those.

Despite the state's high death toll, the rates of new infections and hospitalizations continue to plummet across the state. Health officials said Sunday that the number of patients in California hospitals with COVID-19 has slipped below 7,000, a drop of more than a third over two weeks. Total cases are approaching 3.45 million.

Austin has so far approved the deployment of 25 military vaccination teams, which come in two sizes, 222 members and 139 members, and total about 4,700 service members. So far, 11 have either started or will begin next week.

Marine given Purple Heart 16 years after Fallujah action

By **MATTHEW M. BURKE**

Stars and Stripes

CAMP COURTNEY, Okinawa — A Purple Heart caught up with Marine Capt. Kevin Leishman on Wednesday, more than 16 years after he bandaged a bullet wound and kept on fighting on the streets of Fallujah, Iraq.

A staff sergeant back in November 2004, Leishman was putting down fire with his M240 machine gun while prone atop an amphibious assault vehicle when a ricocheting bullet lodged in the muscle of his right forearm, he told Stars and Stripes at his award presentation.

"I know I'm getting a lot of attention today, but I don't believe I have any unique blend of courage that isn't shared by everybody here," Leishman said. "I was at the right time at the right place and did what I needed to do."

During the ceremony in the Camp Courtney theater, Marines barked the occasional "rah" or "oorah" to punctuate remarks by Brig. Gen. Kyle Ellison, commander of the

3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade, who awarded Leishman his Purple Heart.

Ellison pushed for Leishman, a native of St. Ignatius, Mont., to receive the medal after hearing his story.

"It's days like this that remind me of why I love being a United States Marine," Ellison told the 20 or so Marines in attendance. Leishman "represents now hundreds of others who wear that same award on their chests every single day and some who didn't return."

"It takes men and women who are special to do what we do," he said.

In Fallujah, Leishman's wound eventually became infected and he worked the bullet out himself over several days. Then the wound healed.

At the time, he was attached to 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines, his medical records were not immediately available, and the record of his wounding was temporarily lost, he said.

"We had a lot going on and this wasn't losing a limb or anything, so I didn't push it, obviously," he said. "It finally made its way

through."

The oversight was recognized when Leishman, now the anti-terrorism force protection officer with the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Brigade, arrived on Okinawa less than two years ago.

His wife, Amy Leishman, and their three children, were present, along with the Marines who sat socially distanced from one another, wearing masks, due to coronavirus safety protocols.

Following a brief prayer and "The Star-Spangled Banner," Ellison honored Leishman for having the courage to move "toward the sound of guns."

Leishman had deployed to Iraq in May 2004 with the 11th Marine Expeditionary Unit, a Marine statement announcing his award Friday said. After the Battle of An-Najaf in August, his assault vehicle platoon was sent north to aid in the push into Fallujah to retake control of that city.

The tank and assault vehicle platoons provided supporting fire and evacuated casualties during the house-to-house fighting.

Marine says victim advocate wronged her

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The female Marine whose distressing video about another Marine's sexual misconduct against her said Wednesday that her perpetrator was her unit's platoon sergeant and a uniformed victim advocate.

"I am not a one in a million story. I am lucky I have been able to stay safe," she said in a statement published by Protect Our Defenders, an advocacy organization that works to end sexual violence in the military. "My name is Dalina, I am not a martyr, I am a sergeant in the Marines who has served honorably."

Dalina was deployed in October 2019 when she reported her coworker, a platoon sergeant and a uniformed victim advocate, for sexual misconduct, according to her statement. A uniformed victim advocate is a service member who provides information and support to people who have been sexually assaulted.

He was removed from the base after a military protective order was put in place, but she was kept in the dark for months by her former command about what actions were taken against him, according to her statement. Dalina later found out that he had faced administrative punishment and not a court-martial.

After an investigation, the Marine was found guilty of violating Article 117a of the Uniform Code of Military Justice and received a nonjudicial punishment, Capt. Angelica Sposato, a spokeswoman for II Marine Expeditionary Force, said in a statement about the case.

The article prohibits showing or distributing an intimate or sexually explicit image of another person who is identifiable and did not consent to the image being shown or distributed. The Marine Corps said the unnamed male Marine had transferred the images from the woman's phone to his phone and distributed them.

The UCMJ article is relatively new and was adopted in response to the 2017 Marines United scandal in which intimate images of military women and spouses were distributed and viewed through a private Facebook group comprised primarily of active-duty service members and veterans.

The Marine had his rank reduced, forfeited an unknown amount of pay, and was being administratively separated from the service, according to Sposato. The final steps of the separation process are still ongoing, she said.

The Marine's ongoing administrative separation was the impetus for Dalina's viral TikTok video posted last Thursday where she voiced her dismay after hearing that he would be able to stay in the service despite his admission of guilt.

"And this is exactly why ... females in the military ... kill themselves," she said through tears in the video. "This is exactly why nobody ... takes this seriously."

Dalina was able to testify at his separation hearing in December and posted another TikTok video that showed her getting ready beforehand.

"For so long I looked for reasons why I deserved this. How I could let this happen to

me," she wrote as captions on the video, which showed her visibly upset at one point. "But today I'm going to tell the story of how he took me from me. Here's to the first step of getting my life back. Here goes nothing."

Dalina said Wednesday that the separation board had decided to force him out of the Marine Corps but allow him to receive an honorable discharge. Last Thursday, she said she learned a commanding general "had decided to retain this Marine despite his crimes committed against me."

"I was allotted the opportunity to go home and, while under extreme duress, I made a video on TikTok," she said Wednesday. "I will not apologize for using social media as an outlet to grieve. I have been sexually assaulted in the Marine Corps, I have experienced Military Sexual Trauma throughout my entire time in service."

It is still unclear who the commanding general is and why that person would have been able to make changes in the case.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Friday that he found the Marine's video "deeply disturbing" and he had asked his staff for additional information.

After outrage spread last week about the video's content, including responses of concern from members of Congress, Sposato said Dalina has since met with her chain of command at II MEF and was given "advocacy and support resources."

Dalina said she is lucky to have her current command, which has been understanding about her situation.

Navy sends USS Curtis Wilbur through Taiwan Strait

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — The USS Curtis Wilbur sailed through the Taiwan Strait on Wednesday, the second time this month the Navy has sent a warship through the contentious waterway.

The guided-missile destroyer, homeported in Yokosuka, made the trip to "demonstrate the U.S. commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific," 7th Fleet spokesman Lt. Joe Keiley said in the statement Thursday.

The 110-mile-wide strait separates mainland China from self-governed Taiwan.

Beijing considers reunification a top priority and regularly protests Taiwan Strait

transits, claiming foreign vessels must first ask permission before passing through.

However, the strait is considered an open waterway under international law, Keiley said.

"The United States military will continue to fly, sail and operate anywhere international law allows," Keiley said in the statement.

The Curtis Wilbur's trip came less than three weeks after the guided-missile destroyer USS John S. McCain steamed through the strait on Feb. 4.

After that passage — the first under President Joe Biden's administration — Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Wang Wenbin

told reporters that Beijing hopes "the US side will play a constructive role for regional peace and stability, rather than the opposite."

"China will continue to stay on high alert and is ready to respond to all threats and provocations at any time and will resolutely safeguard its national sovereignty and territorial integrity," Wang said during a press conference on Feb. 4.

Before this month, the most recent Taiwan Strait transit happened on Dec. 31, marking the Navy's 13th passage through the waterway in 2020. That trip broke the service's prior record, set in 2016, of 12 Taiwan Strait transits in a single year.

GOP united against Dems' relief package

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republicans rallied solidly against Democrats' proposed \$1.9 trillion COVID-19 relief bill as lawmakers awaited a decision by the Senate's parliamentarian that could bolster or potentially kill a pivotal provision hiking the federal minimum wage.

Despite their paper-thin congressional majorities, Democratic leaders were poised to push the sweeping package through the House on Friday. They were hoping the Senate, where changes seem likely, would follow quickly enough to have legislation on President Joe Biden's desk by mid-March.

By late Wednesday, not one Republican in either chamber had publicly said he or she would back the legislation. GOP leaders were honing attacks on the package as a job killer that does too little to reopen schools or

businesses shuttered for the coronavirus pandemic and that was not only wasteful but also even unscrupulous.

"I haven't seen a Republican yet that's found something in there that they agree with," said House Minority Leader Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif. "I think all Republicans believe in three simple things: They want a bill that puts us back to work, back to school and back to health. This bill is too costly, too corrupt and too liberal."

The hardening opposition suggested that Biden's first major legislative initiative could encounter unanimous GOP opposition. That was a counterpoint to the new president's refrain during his campaign about bringing the country together and a replay of the Republican wall that new President Barack Obama encountered in 2009 and most of his administration.

Democrats showed no signs of backing down.

"If congressional Republicans want to oppose all that, my response is: Good luck," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said on the Senate floor.

By Wednesday evening, the most suspense was over a decision anticipated from Elizabeth MacDonough, the Senate's non-partisan arbiter of its rules, that promised enormous political and legislative consequences.

The relief bill includes a provision that over five years would hike the federal minimum wage to \$15 an hour. The parliamentarian is involved because Democrats are pushing the overall \$1.9 trillion measure through Congress under special rules that will let them avoid a Senate filibuster by Republicans.

Jobless claims in US fall to 730,000, but remain high

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of Americans seeking unemployment benefits fell sharply last week but remained high by historical standards.

Applications for benefits declined 111,000 from the previous week to a seasonally adjusted 730,000, the Labor Department said Thursday. It is the lowest figure since late November. Still, before the virus erupted in the United States last March, weekly applications for unemployment benefits had never topped 700,000, even during the Great Recession of 2008-09.

The latest figures come as the job market has made scant progress in the past three months. Hiring averaged just 29,000 a

month from November through January. Though the unemployment rate was 6.3% in January, a broader measure that includes people who have given up on their job searches is closer to 10%.

All told, 19 million people were receiving unemployment aid as of Feb. 6, up from 18.3 million the previous week. About three-quarters of those recipients are receiving checks from federal benefit programs, including programs that provide jobless aid beyond the 26 weeks given by most states.

Key sectors of the economy, though, are showing signs of picking up as vaccinations increase and government rescue aid works its way through the economy. The Federal Reserve's ultra-low-rate policy is providing

key support, too.

Retail sales soared last month as many Americans spent the \$600 checks included in a relief package enacted in December. Factory output also rose and has nearly regained its pre-pandemic levels. And sales of newly-built homes soared last month.

Michelle Meyer, an economist at Bank of America, this week upgraded her forecast for growth this year to 6.5%, which would be the fastest since 1984. Daily coronavirus infections are down more than 70% from their peak, Meyer noted, which should lead to more states and cities relaxing business restrictions. Further economic relief is also likely, she noted, as Congress considers a new aid package.

Sailor who died from virus was chief petty officer from Calif.

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Virginia-based sailor who died from the coronavirus earlier this week was a 39-year-old from California, the Navy announced Wednesday.

Chief Petty Officer Justin Huf, a hull technician, died Monday in the intensive care unit at Norfolk's Sentara Leigh Hospital, according to the Expeditionary Strike Group 2.

Last Tuesday, Huf had symptoms of the virus and was isolated. On Friday, he tested positive for the virus and was hospitalized the next day, according to the Navy.

Huf was assigned to Assault Craft Unit 4 based at Joint Expeditionary Base Little Creek in Virginia Beach at the time of his death. His unit operates air-cushioned landing craft, which are high-speed vehicles that transport people, weapons and equipment from ship to shore, according to the Navy.

"Our deepest condolences are with the family, friends and shipmates of Chief Petty Officer Huf during this extremely difficult time," according to the statement.

Sailors who had been in contact with him have been notified and are taking precautions, according to Navy officials.

Huf was the fifth active-duty sailor to die since the pandemic began nearly a year ago. His death increases the number of service members who have died from the virus to 23.

Huf joined the Navy in November 2003 and achieved the rank of chief petty officer, or E7, last March, according to his service record. His previous assignments include the maintenance/support company for the submarine tender USS Emory S. Land on Guam, Assault Craft Unit 5 based at Camp Pendleton in California, the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Md., and the guided-missile destroyer USS Mahan.

GOP pushes back on Capitol riot commission

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republican leaders in the House and Senate said a proposed plan for an independent commission to study the Capitol insurrection is overly tilted toward Democrats, arguing that the panel should have an even party split like the one formed to study the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks.

House Republican leader Kevin McCarthy and Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said Wednesday that a legitimate commission would be comprised of an equal number of Republicans and Democrats. A draft proposed by House Speaker Nancy Pelosi would create an 11-member commission with four Republicans and seven Democrats, three of whom would be chosen by President Joe Biden, according to

one of multiple aides who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the details under negotiation.

Pelosi has not commented on the draft or said why there should be more Democratic members. Last week, she said the commission must be “strongly bipartisan” and have the power to subpoena witnesses. But on Wednesday, House Democratic Conference Chair Hakeem Jeffries said McCarthy hasn’t operated in good faith and “set a bad tone” when he supported former President Donald Trump’s efforts to overturn Biden’s legitimate election victory.

The partisan bickering before the commission gets off the ground is raising questions about whether lawmakers can coalesce around a thorough re-

view of the Jan. 6 riot that interrupted the presidential electoral count and led to five deaths. Both parties support creating an independent investigation, but much of the consensus ends there, with Democrats demanding accountability for lawmakers who amplified Trump’s falsehoods about the election.

The vast majority of Republicans stood by Trump as Democrats impeached him for telling his supporters to “fight like hell” to overturn his election defeat as Congress counted votes.

Republicans have suggested an evenly divided 10-member panel and have also objected to some of the rationale for forming the commission. A second aide said that Pelosi’s proposal would give broad latitude to the commission to investigate what led to the effort to disrupt the

peaceful transfer of power, and that it quotes FBI and intelligence assessments that show some of the violence was motivated by racism and false narratives about the election.

McConnell said on the Senate floor that the language is “artificial cherry picking” and that the commission should either look narrowly at the specific security failures in the Capitol or “potentially do something broader to analyze the full scope of political violence here in our country.”

He said an inquiry “with a hardwired partisan slant would never be legitimate in the eyes of the American people.”

McCarthy pointed to the Sept. 11 commission as the model.

“It’s only Speaker Pelosi who’s trying to make this thing partisan,” he said.

Former aide says NY governor kissed her, suggested strip poker

Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. — A former member of New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s administration who previously accused him of sexual harassment offered new details Wednesday, saying he once kissed her on the lips without consent.

Lindsey Boylan said that during her more than three years in the Democrat’s administration, Cuomo “would go out of his way to touch me on my lower back, arms and legs,” compared her to one of his rumored ex-girlfriends and once remarked they should play strip poker.

Cuomo’s spokesperson Caitlin Girouard said that all Boylan’s “claims of inappropriate behavior are quite simply false.”

But the state legislature’s two top leaders criticized Cuomo’s alleged conduct Wednesday as calls grew for an investigation.

Boylan, a Democrat running for Manhattan borough president, made the new allegations in a post on the website Medium more than two months after she first spoke up about alleged mistreatment by Cuomo. At the time, she hadn’t provided

details, saying she had “no interest in speaking to journalists.”

But on Wednesday, she attributed her decision to say more to Assembly member Ron Kim levying public accusations of bullying and threats from Cuomo and his aides last week.

She wrote that the kiss happened at the end of a one-on-one meeting with Cuomo at his New York City office.

“As I got up to leave and walk toward an open door, he stepped in front of me and kissed me on the lips. I was in shock, but I kept walking,” she wrote. “The idea that someone might think I held my high-ranking position because of the Governor’s ‘crush’ on me was more demeaning than the kiss itself.”

Boylan, a former deputy secretary for economic development and special adviser to the governor, confirmed to The Associated Press that she’d written the blog entry but declined to be interviewed.

Boylan said two other former Cuomo staffers have privately confided in her that they were also sexually harassed by the governor, but did not identify them.

Senator urges DOD to finish F-35 tests

Bloomberg News

The head of the Senate panel that authorizes military programs said he’s impatient for the Pentagon to finish rigorous combat simulation testing of the F-35 and provide an assessment of the stealthy fighter jet’s effectiveness.

“We’ve been building it” for years “and it’s still in operational testing and evaluation, and once that’s finished — and we hope it’s finished promptly — then we can make a much more thorough assessment of the system,” Sen. Jack Reed, chairman of the Armed Services Committee, said in an interview this week.

“We hope that the answer is delivered soon about the effectiveness of the F-35 and the justification for its billing as the ‘premier’ fighter aircraft of the world,” the Rhode Island Democrat added.

Reed will have to wait a while longer.

The Pentagon’s program office is waiting for the results of an assessment by university software experts as to when the final — and often delayed — rigorous combat simulation phase will even begin. The testing was supposed to have occurred in December, the latest date for an exercise once planned for 2017.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Homeowners digging in backyard find bag of guns

AZ PHOENIX — Some homeowners in southwest Phoenix who were digging a hole for a tree in their backyard found a duffel bag full of rusted rifles and handguns, according to authorities.

Phoenix police said the homeowners were digging in the corner of their fenced backyard Sunday when their shovels hit something in the dirt. After finding the bag, they called police and handed over the weapons.

Police said they are investigating to see if the guns were used in any crimes and there's no information yet on how long the weapons might have been buried.

Authorities: Arrested man bragged about robbery

NY NEW YORK — A Brooklyn man was arrested in Florida in the armed robbery of a SoHo luxury store after authorities say he bragged about the heist on social media, authorities said Monday as the defendant was detained without bail.

Eric Spencer, 29, faced a single robbery charge after his Saturday arrest in Fort Lauderdale in the Feb. 2 robbery at a luxury Chanel store. He was detained without bail after a Monday hearing in federal court in Fort Lauderdale.

According to a criminal complaint in Manhattan federal court, Spencer bragged on social media after the robbery that he had so many luxury items that he could open his own small boutique.

Spencer flashed the handle of a handgun toward security guards as he and three accomplices grabbed handbags and other merchandise worth \$189,500, the complaint said.

Legislators OK mandatory kindergarten bill

AL MONTGOMERY — Alabama lawmakers on Tuesday advanced a proposal to require students to complete kindergarten, or demonstrate first-grade readiness, before starting first grade.

The House of Representatives approved the bill by Democratic Rep. Pebblin Warren, of Tuskegee, on a 101-0 vote. It now moves to the Alabama Senate. The bill would require a child to have successfully completed kindergarten or have demonstrated first grade readiness on a district assessment before enrolling in first grade.

Nineteen states and the District of Columbia require that children attend kindergarten, according to the Education Commission of the States.

Firefighter accused of attempting to kill wife

IL CHICAGO — A Chicago firefighter was ordered held without bond Tuesday after being accused of attempting to kill his wife.

Joseph X. Ramirez, 55, is charged with attempted murder and aggravated battery and was ordered held by Cook County Judge Charles Beach.

Court records show Ramirez's wife suffered head injuries during the incident shortly before 5 a.m. Sunday in their home. Police found the woman on the street near her home and

she was taken to a hospital for treatment.

Ramirez's lawyer, Steven Decker, said his client was acting in self-defense.

A Chicago Fire Department spokesman said Ramirez has been temporarily relieved of his normal duties.

Police search for man slashing car brake lines

WA DES MOINES — Des Moines police are trying to identify a man who is slashing the brake lines on parked cars, leaving at least 18 vehicles sabotaged.

Several porch cameras have recorded this man in the act of cutting through the lines, KOMO-TV reported. The footage shows him under some cars for less than a minute, but it's all the time he needs to set up a driver for a serious crash.

Jackie Tran had no idea her car had been targeted until she pulled out of the driveway and suddenly realized she couldn't stop. Tran eventually pulled the parking brake but said the shock of nearly crashing left her in a panic.

"I tried to back up but I was so scared I couldn't do anything," she said.

EPA removes sunken, oil-leaking boat from lake

CA SOUTH LAKE TAHOE — A crew for a private contractor hired by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency removed an abandoned boat from Lake Tahoe on Tuesday that sank off the lake's south shore in January and was believed to be leaking oil.

The 40-foot recreational vessel was first reported Jan. 15 to

have sunk in about 15 feet of water about 300 yards offshore from Pope Beach in South Lake Tahoe, the EPA said.

Repeated efforts by multiple agencies to identify and contact the owner of the vessel had been unsuccessful, EPA spokeswoman Margot Perez Sullivan said.

The recovery crew battled steady winds and about foot-tall waves crashing onto Pope Beach before the recovery was completed Tuesday afternoon, the Tahoe Daily Tribune reported.

Jeff Cowen, spokesman for the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, told the Reno Gazette-Journal the boat will be taken to the U.S. Coast Guard's facility in Tahoe City, where law enforcement will oversee the boat's disposal or auction.

Police: Man hid in store bathroom, raped woman

PA PHILADELPHIA — Police were searching for a man who hid in a department store bathroom and raped a woman.

The attack happened Sunday morning in the third-floor restroom at the Macy's on Market Street, police said. The man waited for about 20 minutes before the 55-year-old entered and he attacked her, police said.

"When she went inside the bathroom he was in the stall," Police Capt. Mark Burgmann said Monday. "He jumped over the stall into her stall."

The suspect fled the store and entered the subway, police said. The suspect wore a surgical mask.

— From wire reports

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Locking up Soto, Turner priority for Nats

Associated Press

Juan Soto and Trea Turner both will be key cogs in the Washington Nationals lineup this season, 20-something hitting stars who are coming off top-seven finishes in NL MVP voting.

They also are both keen on improving their defense — Turner at shortstop, Soto as he moves from left field to right.

And both could be cornerstones for the club's future if they eventually agree to long-term deals, which the Nationals have tried to make happen, so far unsuccessfully.

Turner, 27, has two years left before he can become a free agent; Soto, still just 22, has four.

Both were asked Tuesday via video conference after Washington's first full-squad

workout in West Palm Beach, Fla., about their contract status and thoughts about the future.

Soto was coy — “I just try to come here and play baseball; I don't think about any of that,” he said — and Turner was, well, more forthcoming.

“I would love to play here, and any time that guy is on your team, I definitely don't want him on the other team. So let's keep him as long as possible. ... It goes without saying that we'd love to play with each other for a long time. We push each other,” Turner said.

“I would love to play my entire career here. I would love for him to play his entire career here,” Turner said. “But we'll see. Those are big, big questions.”

After helping win the 2019

World Series, Soto and Turner offered rare bright spots in pandemic-shortened 2020, when Washington tied for last in the NL East at 26-34.

Soto won the NL batting title at .351; Turner was fourth at .335 and led in hits with 78. Soto led in OPS at 1.185; Turner was sixth at .982.

“What a duo,” manager Dave Martinez said.

Fernando Tatis Jr.'s \$340 million, 14-year contract at age 22 with San Diego makes it natural to wonder whether Washington might try to lock up Soto. General manager Mike Rizzo said last week there were discussions as far back as spring training a year ago.

Rizzo has said there have been talks with Turner, too.

The Nationals have seen homegrown stars such as

Bryce Harper and Anthony Rendon leave via free agency in recent offseasons, while managing to keep Stephen Strasburg and Ryan Zimmerman.

Turner described the complicated calculus in play when it comes to making a sign-or-wait decision.

“For me, it's risk vs. reward. It's a simple concept, but it's very hard to come to an answer. Do you feel like you've played your best baseball? Do you feel like you have way more to prove? Do you want to bet on yourself? Do you want to have security?” Turner said. “I think a lot of these things, you can't put a blanket answer on every player. ... There's so much gray, for me, that I think each person needs to do what makes them happy.”

Padres owner Seidler: ‘There is nothing we can't do

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — Padres majority owner Peter Seidler couldn't make it any clearer.

He doesn't think San Diego is a small market, but rather views it for what it is, the eighth-largest city in the United States.

And he's certain the Padres can handle the three nine-figure contracts they've doled out in the last four years.

Outsiders have questioned how the Padres will be able to afford the \$340 million, 14-year contract they gave electrifying shortstop Fernando Tatis Jr. on Monday, the longest deal in baseball history. That deal comes on top of the \$300 million, 10-year deal they handed slugger Manny Machado in 2019 and the \$144 million, eight-year contract they gave first baseman Eric Hosmer in 2018.

After a relatively bruising two decades in which ownership wasn't willing or able to spend on big deals, these Padres are committed to competing.

“We love this city,” Seidler told The Associated Press hours after the Padres announced the deal for Tatis, who has become one of the faces of baseball. “We want to honor the support our extraordinary fans give us.”

“In 1984 and 1998, this place went crazy.

And those were real teams that went to the World Series. I know we have the city's trust and the city trusts us. We're going to put good teams out there. From a franchise standpoint, we're going to get support and we're going to back it up with our actions reflective of the eighth-largest city in America.”

Seidler is a grandson of the late Walter O'Malley, who moved the Dodgers from Brooklyn to Los Angeles in 1958, and a nephew of Peter O'Malley, who owned the Dodgers until 1998.

He and civic leader Ron Fowler headed a group that bought the Padres in 2012 from John Moores. Moores' ownership had become tumultuous in the years after his stewardship resulted in San Diego reaching the 1998 World Series and then getting Petco Park built downtown.

In November, Fowler stepped down as executive chairman and Seidler was approved by fellow Major League Baseball owners to take over control of the team as chairman. Fowler will remain with the club in an advisory role and will continue to sit on MLB's Labor Policy Committee.

Besides his involvement in baseball, Seidler is co-founder and managing partner of Seidler Equity Partners, whose net worth

has been estimated to be \$3 billion.

Seidler declined to delve deep into finances.

“We don't need to talk about it, but we'll let actions speak for themselves,” he said. “We're very humble about what we're trying to do here because it's hard and we're not the only team chasing the trophy. But we're in the mix, we believe.”

Baseball is coming off a pandemic-shortened season in which Commissioner Rob Manfred said teams combined to lose \$2.7 billion to \$3 billion during the pandemic.

Seidler did say the Padres have set up the franchise “to be flexible so we have the opportunity to be opportunistic when it does make sense. We make decisions really with 10 years in mind, not year to year to year, although we are cognizant of the current year. I could not be happier with where we are in every way, business-wise, baseball-wise, and I'll speak for the people of San Diego. We're the eighth-largest city in America. There's nothing we can't do.”

Led by Tatis and Machado, the Padres ended a 13-year playoff drought last year and beat the St. Louis Cardinals in a wild-card round before being swept out of the NL Division Series by the eventual World Series champion Dodgers.

NBA-leading Jazz rout Lakers, improve to 26-6

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — Rudy Gobert and Jordan Clarkson each scored 18 points and the NBA-leading Utah Jazz routed the Los Angeles Lakers 114-89 on Wednesday night.

Gobert also had nine rebounds to help the Jazz improve to 26-6 with their 22nd victory in their last 24 games.

Bojan Bogdanovic added 15 points, Mike Conley had 14 points, eight rebounds and eight assists, and Donovan Mitchell finished with 13 points, 10 rebounds, and eight assists.

LeBron James scored 19 points and Montrezel Harrell added 16 to lead the Lakers (22-11), who lost their fourth straight and fifth in six games.

Utah slammed the door early in the third quarter when Gobert threw down back-to-back alley-oop dunks to extend the Jazz's lead to 71-47.

Pelicans 128, Pistons 118: Zion Williamson scored 32 points in his first game since being named a first-time All-Star, and host New Orleans beat De-

troit.

Highlighting his performance with quick-dribbling spin moves to elude multiple converging defenders in the paint and set up short floaters and layups, or with thunderous one-handed dunks on cuts down the lane or along the baseline, Williamson made 13 of his 18 shots in reaching the 30-point threshold for the eighth time this season.

Hornets 124, Suns 121: Malik Monk scored 29 points, LaMelo Ball added 20 points and eight assists and Charlotte won at Phoenix.

The Suns lost for just the second time in 11 games. Phoenix star Devin Booker missed an off-balance three-pointer at the buzzer with replays showing Gordon Hayward made contact with Booker's arm. There was no foul call and the play wasn't reviewed.

Hawks 127, Celtics 112: Danilo Gallinari set an Atlanta franchise record with 10 three-pointers in a 38-point spree that carried the team past visiting

Boston. Gallinari finished 10-for-12 from three-point range and 13-for-16 overall.

He broke the mark of nine three-pointers by Steve Smith in a 1997 game against Seattle.

Warriors 111, Pacers 107: Stephen Curry scored 24 points, Draymond Green fell just short of a triple-double and weary Golden State won at Indiana.

Green had 12 points, 11 rebounds, nine assists and three steals. The Warriors took control with a late 6-0 run to seal their second straight victory on a four-game trip.

Cavaliers 112, Rockets 96: Jarrett Allen tied his career high with 26 points, grabbed 18 rebounds and blocked four shots to help Cleveland hand visiting Houston its ninth straight loss. Allen, who leads the NBA making 67.2% of his field goals, made 10 of 11 shots from the floor as the Cavs won for the second straight night after dropping their previous 10 contests.

Bulls 133, Timberwolves 126 (OT): Zach LaVine cele-

brated his first All-Star selection with 35 points against his original NBA team, helping host Chicago beat Minnesota in overtime.

LaVine, named an All-Star reserve Tuesday night, made 14 of 21 shots in his 16th game this season with at least 30 points. Chicago shot 59% from the field.

Thunder 102, Spurs 99: Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored a career-high 42 points, and Lu Dort hit a three-pointer as time expired to lift Oklahoma City past visiting San Antonio.

The Spurs turned the ball over with 3.9 seconds remaining, giving the Thunder the ball with the score tied. Dort's corner three-pointer dropped as the buzzer sounded, and his teammates mobbed him.

Heat 116, Raptors 108: Jimmy Butler scored 27 points, 14 of them in the final quarter, and host Miami beat Toronto for its fourth consecutive victory. Butler also had 10 assists and eight rebounds.

It was the eighth win in the last 11 games for the Heat.

Arkansas' Williams keys run in win over Alabama

Associated Press

FAYETTEVILLE, Ark. — Freshman Jaylin Williams scored 10 of his season-high 13 points during a decisive run and No. 20 Arkansas beat sixth-ranked Alabama 81-66 on Wednesday night.

It was the Razorbacks' first win at home over a ranked team in three years.

Williams keyed the 17-2 run that turned a six-point deficit into a nine-point lead with less than 10 minutes to play. He was one of five players to finish in double figures for Arkansas (18-5, 10-4 Southeastern Conference). Justin Smith scored 11, Jalen Tate and J.D. Notae had 12 apiece and Moses Moody led all scorers with 24 points, 16 of which came from the free-throw line.

The Crimson Tide (18-6, 13-2) managed only the two points during that stretch, a John Petty Jr. jumper, for a span of 8:53.

No. 11 Florida State 88, Miami 71: Sar-daar Calhoun scored a career-high 16 points

and the Seminoles coasted to a road win.

Florida State (14-3, 10-2 Atlantic Coast Conference) was never threatened after a 19-2 run early in the first half. Anthony Polite hit consecutive three-pointers and Scottie Barnes' jumper with 10:32 remaining capped the surge and increased the Seminoles' lead to 27-8.

The Hurricanes (7-14, 3-13) have lost eight of their past nine. Isaiah Wong scored 29 points for Miami.

No. 13 Creighton 77, DePaul 53: Marcus Zegarowski, Christian Bishop and Denzel Mahoney scored 13 points apiece and the host Bluejays made fast work of the Blue Demons.

Creighton (17-5, 13-4 Big East) has won seven of its last eight games, including four straight.

DePaul (4-11, 2-11) sustained its most lopsided loss since a 38-point defeat to Providence last March.

N.C. State 68, No. 15 Virginia 61: DJ

Funderburk scored nine of his 14 points in the second half and the Wolfpack opened a big lead and held off the Cavaliers for their fourth straight Atlantic Coast Conference road victory.

Cam Hayes had 16 points and Shakeel Moore had 12 for N.C. State (11-9, 7-8 ACC), which last won four in a row on the road in the last two games of 1980-81 season and the first two the following season. Sam Hauser led Virginia with 21 points and Jay Huff had 19 points and 11 rebounds, but the Cavaliers (15-6, 11-4) lost their third straight for the first time since the 2016-17 season.

No. 25 Tennessee 70, Vanderbilt 58: Victor Bailey Jr. made 5-of-8 three-pointers and finished with 21 points as the visiting Vols swept the season series with the in-state rival Commodores.

Air Force 62, New Mexico 55: Joseph Octave scored 18 points, A.J. Walker had 16, and the host Falcons beat the Lobos to snap a 10-game losing streak.

Vasilevskiy helps Bolts blank Canes

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Ross Colton scored in his NHL debut and Andrei Vasilevskiy made 25 saves in the Tampa Bay Lightning's 3-0 victory over the Carolina Hurricanes on Wednesday night.

Blake Coleman and Barclay Goodrow also scored, and Alex Killorn had two assists in the third of four straight games between the teams. Vasilevskiy had his 22nd career shutout and first since March 2020 against Montreal.

Alex Nedeljkovic made 25 saves for the Hurricanes after shutting out the Lightning in his previous start. Carolina has lost consecutive games for the first time this season.

Colton opened the scoring on his first career shot on goal during his second career shift, pushing the puck under Nedeljkovic's pads at 6:43. Colton is the ninth player in franchise history to score in his NHL debut.

Maple Leafs 2, Flames 1 (OT): William Nylander tied it with 1:28 left in regulation and scored 1:06 into overtime to lift

NHL-leading Toronto past visiting Calgary.

Michael Hutchinson stopped 21 shots in his second consecutive start with Frederik Andersen out with a lower-body ailment. Auston Matthews had two assists to help the Leafs split the two-game series and improve to 15-4-2.

Andrew Mangiapane scored for Calgary with 3:27 left in the third.

David Rittich made 37 saves in his second straight start with Jacob Markstrom sidelined by an upper-body injury. He beat the Maple Leafs 3-0 on Monday night.

Stars 3, Panthers 0: Anton Khudobin made 43 saves for his second shutout of the season, helping visiting Dallas beat Florida to end a six-game winless streak.

Defensemen John Klingberg, Esa Lindell and Joel Kiviranta scored for the Stars in the second of three straight against the Panthers.

Khudobin has shut out Florida three times in nine career starts. He has 10 career shutouts overall.

Coyotes 4, Ducks 3 (SO): Connor Garland and Christian Dvorak scored in a shootout and host Arizona overcame a three-goal deficit for the second straight game to beat Anaheim.

The Coyotes came back from a 3-0 deficit to beat the Ducks 4-3 in a testy, fight-filled game Monday night.

The Ducks had a three-goal lead in the second period of the rematch on goals by Max Comtois, Max Jones and Josh Mahura. The Coyotes again revved it up late, pulling to 3-2 on goals by Tyler Pitlick and Jakob Chychrun less than two minutes apart in the third period. Phil Kessel tied it with 3:21 left in regulation.

Flyers 4, Rangers 3: James van Riemsdyk and Shayne Gostisbehere each scored a power-play goal and Claude Giroux had three assists in his return from a COVID-19 absence to lead host Philadelphia past New York.

Chris Kreider had a hat trick for the Rangers on three tap-ins in front.

Giroux, the Flyers' captain, sat out two weeks after testing

positive for coronavirus and missed their loss Sunday to Boston at Lake Tahoe. He played his 903rd career game to tie with Bill Barber for most in the regular season with the Flyers.

Erik Gustafsson and Kevin Hayes also scored for the Flyers, and Brian Elliott stopped 24 shots.

Kings 2, Blues 1: Alex Iafallo and Andreas Athanasiou scored in the second period and visiting Los Angeles beat St. Louis for its sixth consecutive victory.

Cal Petersen made 35 saves, improving to 3-0-1 in his last four starts.

Oskar Sundqvist scored late in the third for the Blues. They are 1-5-1 in their last seven home games.

Wild 6, Avalanche 2: Nico Sturm scored twice, Kaapo Kahkonen made 30 saves and visiting Minnesota beat Colorado for its fourth straight victory.

Mats Zuccarello, Zach Parise, Marcus Foligno and Ryan Hartman also scored for the Wild, who finished 4-1 on their road swing.

J.T. Compher and Nazem Kadri scored for Colorado.

Rapinoe-led US beats Argentina for SheBelieves Cup

Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. — Megan Rapinoe scored two first-half goals and the United States won the SheBelieves Cup title with a 6-0 victory over Argentina on Wednesday night.

The United States is undefeated in 37 games in a row overall and 53 on American soil.

Carli Lloyd, Kristie Mewis, Alex Morgan and Christen Press also scored, and the U.S. women also became the first team to have three straight shutouts in the SheBelieves Cup, which is in its sixth year.

The defending champion U.S. team blanked Canada in

the round-robin tournament opener and then downed Brazil 2-0 on Sunday. Earlier Wednesday, Brazil beat Canada 2-0 at Exploria Stadium. Brazil finished second.

"Overall, very happy with how we performed and how we were able to unlock Argentina early in the game, and how we finished the game as well," U.S. coach Vlatko Andonovski said.

Argentina, a late addition after Japan dropped out because of coronavirus concerns, did not win a match but did impress with gritty performances.

Rapinoe scored in the 16th minute with a well-timed strike

on a through ball from Rose Lavelle for the early lead.

Rapinoe added another in the 26th minute, tapping in a cross from Lloyd. Rapinoe is the top SheBelieves career leader with seven goals, including three in this edition.

"We wanted to come out fast as always. It's always dangerous to leave teams hanging around, so we definitely didn't do that today," Rapinoe said. "Just tried to find the space, be aggressive."

Lloyd added a goal in the 34th. It was Lloyd's 124th international goal and it came in her 299th appearance with the national team.

Kristie Mewis scored on an angle into the far corner for her fourth career international goal in the 41st minute, and the United States took a 4-0 lead into the half.

Morgan scored in the 84th, her first goal since giving birth to her daughter Charlie last May. It was her 108th international goal, moving her into sole possession of fifth place on the team's career list.

Press scored on a header before the final whistle for her 11th goal in her last 15 games.

Rose Lavelle was named the MVP for the tournament.

The United States improved to 4-0 against Argentina.