

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

## Afghans see big gains clearing Taliban

BY CHAD GARLAND

*Stars and Stripes*

KABUL, Afghanistan — A series of intense combat operations in Helmand province has given the Afghan army and air force a chance to improve their joint tactics, especially in coordinating close air support to ground troops.

In the latest operation, Maiwand 10, which began Dec. 23, Afghan unmanned aerial vehicles and light attack planes supported army and police units fighting in and around Marjah district.

The troops cleared roadside bombs and secured the district center and key routes in and out. About 300 U.S. Marines have been advising the Afghan forces since May as part of Task Force Southwest.

“Historically, Marjah has al-

ways been a tough fight,” said Col. Matthew Reid, Task Force Southwest’s deputy commander. But, he said, “the Afghans are now operating freely in areas that were untenable just a few months ago.”

The operation, meant to increase pressure on the Taliban and to bolster security around the provincial capital, also saw the use of Afghan tactical air coordinators and ScanEagle drones to direct airstrikes on targets of opportunity in support of ground forces.

“Their close air support is causing the Taliban to lose ground, while the (security forces) take that ground,” said Marine Capt. Robert Walters, an air adviser with Task Force Southwest.

Over the course of several operations in the last year, the Marines saw a steady progression

of growth in Afghan military capabilities, with new and unexpected advances each time, Walters said. Maiwand 10 was notable for new ways the tactical air coordinators worked with the A-29 Super Tucanos to deliver air support, he said.

Government forces have been relying on their own terminal air coordinators, with limited assistance from coalition forces, to direct strikes regularly with attack planes. But officials said a strike in Helmand on Dec. 29 was the first time in combat that they directed a dynamic strike to support ground maneuvers. Dynamic strikes, as opposed to planned strikes, are conducted in response to changing battlefield conditions.

“Typically, those guys have really only used MD-530s or Mi-17s to help out with that,” Walters said, referring to the

Afghan attack helicopters, in a video released Monday. The increased capabilities were leading to “tangible impact” on the battlefield, he said.

Omar Zwak, spokesman for the provincial governor, said troops had cleared several villages along the road to the provincial capital of Lashkar Gah and were expected to clear more areas after setting up outposts in the villages they’d retaken.

It remains unclear how many of these successes were due to military action, as the Taliban frequently use classic guerrilla tactics and melt away in the face of a superior conventional force. Despite many optimistic statements about progress in the 16-year war, the insurgents have shown resilience to increased battlefield pressure.

## Vets condemn DOJ rollback of Obama-era pot policy

BY NIKKI WENTLING

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Veterans who have advocated for greater access to medical marijuana are concerned about decreased access to the drug following Attorney General Jeff Sessions’ decision Thursday to rescind policies that took a hands-off approach to enforcing federal laws against marijuana in states where it is legal.

Sessions, who has long argued marijuana is a gateway to more dangerous drugs, gave discretion to U.S. attorneys to decide how aggressively to enforce federal marijuana laws, which conflict with state and local laws where marijuana is legal. He did away with a guideline signed in 2013 during President Barack Obama’s ad-

ministration by former Deputy Attorney General James Cole — known as the Cole memo — that discouraged U.S. attorneys from prosecuting marijuana-related cases in cannabis-friendly states. In a statement, Sessions called the change a “return to the rule of law.”

It’s uncertain how prosecutors will put the new guidelines into practice. Veterans and marijuana advocates Nick Etten and Sean Kiernan said the uncertainty increases risk for marijuana investors and retailers whose clientele includes veterans.

“If they crack down on medical or recreational programs, it’s going to hurt access. And then you’re going to see an ornery group of veterans,” said Kiernan, who works with the Weed for Warriors Project, an

organization that provides access to free cannabis for veterans with the proper paperwork.

On his group’s Facebook page Thursday, Kiernan wrote that veterans should “get ready to fight.”

Veterans led the charge in Washington last year on attempts to remove marijuana from the list of Schedule I drugs, which are classified as having no medical use. They argued the Department of Veterans Affairs should allow its doctors to recommend medical marijuana to patients in cannabis-friendly states, and they insisted marijuana was a possible solution to combat the epidemic of opioid overdoses in the United States. Veterans were twice as likely to die from an accidental overdose than civilians in 2014, according to VA data.

Army veteran Boone Cutler, Marine Corps veteran Josh Frey and former NFL lineman Kyle Turley are a few advocates who spoke to lawmakers on Capitol Hill in recent months about their experiences using marijuana as an alternative to opioids.

Some veterans also use cannabis to ease symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder. The first government-approved study of marijuana’s effects on veterans with PTSD is underway in Phoenix.

At a media event in November, Etten, the founder of Veterans Cannabis Project and a retired Navy lieutenant, accused Sessions of prioritizing his personal agenda over patients who use marijuana. “They’re playing politics with the lives of patients,” he said again Thursday.

## Hard-line cleric: Social media fed Iran protests

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — A hard-line cleric leading Friday prayers in Iran's capital called on the Islamic Republic to build its own social media, blaming people taking advantage of the apps to fuel the unrest that followed days of protests over the country's flagging economy.

Ayatollah Ahmad Khatami's comments show the power the internet has wielded amid the demonstrations that began on Dec. 28 and quickly spread.

With travel restricted across Iran, a nation of 80 million people roughly two-and-a-half times the size of Texas, online videos and images posted by activists have served as one of the few ways of seeing the demonstrations in a country where all radio and television stations are state-run.

However, such images represent only a moment in time and can be mischaracterized as well, which makes seeing what's going on that much more difficult.

"Cyberspace was kindling the fire of the battle," Khatami said. "When cyberspace was closed down, the sedition was stopped. The nation does not support a social network that has its key in the hands of the United States."

Amid the unrest and anti-government rallies that began last week, Iran also has seen three days of pro-government demonstrations, with crowds in the tens of thousands. A similar rally followed Friday prayers in Tehran.

Amid the unrest, Iran blocked access to the messaging app Telegram, which protesters have used to share videos and to plan their rallies. Estimates suggest the app has 42 million users in Iran alone and its disruption appears to have affected the protests.

# US halts Pakistan security aid

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The U.S. has announced it is suspending security assistance to Pakistan for failing to take "decisive action" against Taliban militants targeting U.S. personnel in neighboring Afghanistan.

The State Department's declaration Thursday signaled growing frustration over Pakistan's level of cooperation in fighting terrorist networks. Initially, vague information on how much money and materiel was being withheld suggested the primary goal was to substantiate President Donald Trump's surprising New Year's Day tweet that accused Pakistan of playing U.S. leaders for "fools."

Spokeswoman Heather Nauert said the restrictions covered security assistance above and beyond the \$255 million for Pakistani purchases of American military equipment that the administration held up in August.

Nauert made clear the \$255 million was still blocked, and the Pentagon said the new action targets payments of so-called Coalition Support Funds that the U.S. pays to Pakistan to reimburse it for its counterterrorism operations.

Defense spending legislation for 2017 provides for up to \$900 million in Coalition Support Funds, of which \$400 million can be released to Pakistan only if Defense Secretary Jim Mattis certifies that Pakistan has taken specific actions against the Haqqani network. None of the \$900 million has been disbursed so far, the Pentagon said. The last Coalition Support Funds were paid to Pakistan in March last year, provided under defense spending legislation for 2016.

On Monday, Trump said the U.S. "foolishly"

had given Pakistan more than \$33 billion in aid in the past 15 years and had gotten nothing in return but "lies & deceit." He reiterated longstanding allegations that Pakistan gives "safe haven to the terrorists we hunt in Afghanistan."

Trump unveiled in August a South Asia strategy aimed at ending the stalemate in the U.S. war in Afghanistan, now entering its 17th year. Nauert said that despite sustained high-level engagement with Pakistan's government, "the Taliban and Haqqani network continue to find sanctuary inside Pakistan as they plot to destabilize Afghanistan and attack U.S. and allied personnel." She told reporters that until Pakistan takes "decisive action" against those groups, security assistance was suspended.

Civilian development and economic assistance to Pakistan is not affected.

Also on Thursday, the State Department accused Pakistan of severe violations of religious freedom. It announced that it was placing Pakistan on a special watch list, pursuant to 2016 legislation. The step does not carry any serious consequences.

Pakistan's embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to a request for comment Thursday.

But on Tuesday, Pakistan called Trump's tweet "completely incomprehensible" and at odds with recent "trust-building" visits by Secretary of State Rex Tillerson and Mattis. It accused the U.S. of scapegoating Pakistan for its own failure to bring peace to Afghanistan.

A senior Pakistani senator expressed disappointment at the U.S. decision to suspend military aid to Islamabad, saying it will be detrimental to Pakistani-U.S. relations.

## Koreas to meet for formal talks Tuesday

Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — The rival Koreas will sit down for their first formal talks in more than two years next week to find ways to cooperate on the Winter Olympics in the South and to improve their abysmal ties, Seoul officials said Friday. While a positive sign after last year's threats of nuclear war, the Koreas have a long history of failing to move past their deep animosity.

The announcement came hours after the U.S. said it will delay annual military exercises with South Korea until after the Winter Olympics in Py-

eongyang, South Korea, next month. The exercises infuriate North Korea, which claims they are an invasion rehearsal, although South Korea and the U.S. repeatedly have said they are defensive in nature.

On Friday morning, North Korea sent a message saying it would accept South Korea's offer to meet at the border village of Panmunjom on Tuesday to discuss Olympic cooperation and how to improve overall ties, according to South Korea's Unification Ministry, which handles North Korean matters. Panmunjom is where a North Korean soldier dashed across the border into the South in No-

vember. He is recovering after being shot five times by his former comrades.

Unification Ministry spokesman Baik Tae-hyun said he expects the two Koreas will use a recently restored cross-border communication channel to try to determine who will head their respective delegations next week.

Any dialogue between the Koreas is seen as a positive step. But critics say the North's abrupt push to improve ties could be a tactic to divide Seoul and Washington and to weaken international pressure and sanctions on Pyongyang.

# Storm disrupts East Coast life

Associated Press

BOSTON — Frigid temperatures, some that felt as cold as minus 30 degrees, moved across the East Coast on Friday as the region attempted to clean up from a massive winter storm that brought more than a foot of snow, hurricane-force winds and coastal flooding a day earlier.

Forecasters had said strong winds and record-breaking cold air would sweep the region, from the mid-Atlantic to New England, and hang around through the weekend.

The arctic blast made temperatures feel as low as minus 15 degrees to minus 25 degrees from Philadelphia to Boston and made residents of states like Maryland and Virginia shiver from temperatures ranging from 10 degrees to 15 degrees.

The wind chill made it feel like minus 35 degrees in the Berkshire hills of western Massachusetts, the National

Weather Service said.

The storm began days ago in the Gulf of Mexico and first struck the Florida Panhandle. By Thursday, it was wreaking havoc as blizzard warnings and states of emergency went into effect along the Eastern Seaboard. Wind gusts hit more than 70 mph in places, and some areas saw as much as 18 inches of snow.

The storm caused school and business closings, airline and rail service cancellations or reductions, and thousands of utilities outages. Some ferry services even had to be shut down along the Canadian coast.

In the South, the winter weather forced portable toilets to be put in place outside Mississippi's Capitol after pipes burst. Residents of southeast Georgia were treated to a rare half-foot of snow.

In New England, powerful winds brought coastal flooding that reached historic levels

in some communities, with icy water overflowing piers, streets and restaurants, and stranding some people who had to be rescued.

The only place where blizzard conditions were reported during Thursday's storm, however, was Block Island, R.I.

At least seven people died in weather-related accidents.

Four people were killed in the Carolinas after their vehicles ran off snow-covered roads, authorities said. Another fatality was reported near Philadelphia when a car could not stop at the bottom of a steep, snow-covered hill and slammed into a commuter train. A passenger in the vehicle was killed. No one on the train was hurt.

In Virginia, a girl was struck by a pickup truck while sledding, and a 75-year-old man was hit by a snowplow while clearing business parking lots, authorities said. Both died at hospitals from their injuries, police said.

# Iguanas falling out of trees in frigid Fla.

The Washington Post

On Thursday, Frank Cerabino, a columnist for the Palm Beach Post, woke up to 40-degree weather and was greeted by a "frozen iguana" lounging by his pool in Boca Raton, Fla.

He responded as many people probably would: He shared a photo on social media. Then he pondered, "What do you do?" he told The New York Times.

Green iguanas, like all reptiles, are cold-blooded animals, so when the temperature falls to a certain level, iguanas become immobile, said Kristen Sommers, of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. Under 50 degrees Fahrenheit, they become sluggish. Under 40 degrees, their blood stops moving as much, Sommers said.

They like to sit in trees, and "it's become cold enough that they fall out."

But what should one do with a fallen iguana?

Cerabino told The New York Times that he prodded the iguana with a pool skimmer.

"He didn't move," Cerabino said. "But he's probably still alive. My experience is that they take a while to die."

Maxine Bentzel, a reporter at CBS12 News, suggested that "iguanas have a good chance of thawing out if you move them into the sun."

The experts would prefer you didn't.

Sommers said the reptiles could become frightened as they warm.

"Like any wild animal, it will try to defend itself," she said.

And there are cautionary tales.

Ron Magill, of the Miami Zoo, told WPLG TV in 2010 about a man who collected sleeping iguanas and put them in his station wagon. Then they awoke.

"All of a sudden, these things are coming alive, crawling on his back, and almost caused a wreck."

# US employers add 148K jobs in December

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. employers added 148,000 jobs in December, a modest gain but still enough to suggest that the economy entered the new year with solid momentum.

The unemployment rate remained at 4.1 percent for a third straight month, the lowest level since 2000, the Labor Department said Friday.

For all of 2017, employers added nearly 2.1 million jobs, enough to lower the unemployment rate from 4.7 percent a year ago.

Still, the data indicates job gains are slowing, which typically happens when unemployment falls to ultra-low levels and fewer people are available to be hired. Average job gains have declined to 171,000 this year from a peak of 250,000 in 2014. Last year's gains were the fewest since 2010.

Despite the low unemployment and the difficulty some employers face in finding enough qualified workers, pay gains remain sluggish. Average hourly earnings rose 2.5 percent in December from a year earlier — about a full percentage point lower than is typical in a healthy economy.

The unemployment rate for African-Americans reached a record low of 6.8 percent in December. And the jobless rate for veterans of Afghanistan and Iraq fell to 3.3 percent, also a record low.

Solid economic growth in both the U.S. and major countries overseas is supporting more hiring. Factory managers received the most new or-

ders in December than in any month since 2004. Retailers have reported strong holiday sales. Builders are ramping up home construction to meet growing demand.

Sales of existing homes reached their fastest pace in nearly 11 years in November. Consumer confidence is at nearly a 17-year high. And the Dow Jones industrial average reached 25,000 for the first time Thursday.

Manufacturing and construction reported strong job gains in December, adding 25,000 and 30,000 jobs, respectively. A category that includes hotels and restaurants gained 29,200.

Retailers cut 20,300 jobs, mostly in department store chains such as Macy's, which announced this week that it would close 11 additional stores. That suggests that stores hired fewer seasonal workers for the winter holidays.

Transportation and warehousing, which has grown substantially to keep up with online deliveries, added 1,800 positions in December.

Most economists expect the Trump administration's tax cuts to help speed the economy's already decent pace of growth. Some envision the unemployment rate dropping as low as 3.5 percent by the end of 2018.

A rate that low would mark the lowest such level in nearly a half-century, and it likely would force businesses to accelerate pay raises to attract and retain employees.

## Trump moves to expand offshore drilling

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration moved Thursday to vastly expand offshore drilling from the Atlantic to the Arctic oceans with a plan that would open federal waters off California for the first time in more than three decades.

The new five-year drilling plan also could open new areas of oil and gas exploration in areas off the East Coast from Florida to Maine, where drilling has been blocked for decades. While some lawmakers in those states support offshore drilling, the plan drew immediate opposition from governors up and down the East Coast, including Republican Govs. Rick Scott, of Florida, and Larry Hogan, of Maryland, who pressed President Donald Trump to withdraw their states from consideration.

Democratic governors on both coasts blasted the plan. New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo called it “another federal assault on our environment,” while California Gov. Jerry Brown vowed to block “this reckless, short-sighted action.”

Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke announced the plan, saying that responsible development of offshore energy resources would boost jobs and economic security while providing billions of dollars to fund conservation along U.S. coastlines.

The five-year plan would open 90 percent of the nation’s offshore reserves to development by private companies, Zinke said, with 47 leases proposed off the nation’s coastlines from 2019 to 2024.

Industry groups praised the announcement, which would be the most expansive offshore drilling proposal in decades.

A coalition of more than 60 environmental groups denounced the plan, saying it would impose “severe and unacceptable harm” to America’s oceans, coastal economies, public health and marine life.

## Split with Trump costly for Bannon

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The acrimony surrounding former White House adviser Steve Bannon’s very public break with President Donald Trump is escalating, suggesting a permanent split between the president and the pugilistic strategist who helped put him in the Oval Office.

The new fissure in an already fractious Republican Party cast doubt on Bannon’s hopes to foment a movement centered on “Trumpism without Trump.”

It already has cost him a key backer. Rebekah Mercer, the billionaire GOP donor and Breitbart co-owner, issued a statement Thursday distancing her family from Bannon.

“I support President Trump and the platform upon which he was elected,” she said. “My family and I have not communicated with Steve Bannon in many months and have provided no financial support to his political agenda, nor do we support his recent actions and statements.”

White House officials described the president as furious at Bannon’s criticisms, laid out in an explosive new book that quoted the former aide as questioning Trump’s competence and describing a June 2016 meeting at Trump Tower between Donald Trump Jr., Trump campaign aides and a Russian lawyer as “treasonous” and “unpatriotic.”

On Twitter on Thursday night, Trump said the book was full of “lies, misrepresentations and sources that don’t exist.” He also came up with a new nickname for Bannon: “Sloppy Steve.”

A parade of administration officials and allies worked to discredit Bannon as a disgruntled has-been. White House press secretary Sarah

Huckabee Sanders went so far as to suggest that Bannon ought to be booted from Breitbart, the populist website he helps run.

“I certainly think that it’s something they should look at and consider,” she said.

Michael Wolff, author of “Fire and Fury: Inside the Trump White House,” spoke on NBC’s “Today Show” on Friday, defending his reporting and saying the president’s efforts to halt publication have been good for sales.

Asked about Bannon’s comments in the book and in recent days, Wolff said, “The president has tried to put this — this book is about Steve Bannon. So let me say very forthrightly: This book is not about Steve Bannon. This book is about Donald Trump.”

Bannon had helped Trump form a coalition of anti-establishment Republicans, blue-collar working class and economic nationalists that launched him to the White House, but Trump long ago had grown frustrated that Bannon seemed to be overstepping his role as a staffer.

The self-appointed keeper of Trump’s nationalist flame during the president’s first six months in office, Bannon had soured on the president even before he was pushed out of the White House for feeding the perception that he was Trump’s puppeteer.

None of Bannon’s close associates was willing to speak publicly about the fallout but some privately conceded that the explosive comments could tarnish his brand forever. Bannon’s political appeal had been deeply tied to the perception that he was an ally of Trump’s. Those close to Bannon feared that the connection had been severed permanently.

## Source: Trump had lawyer tell Sessions not to recuse himself in Russia probe

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump directed his White House counsel to tell Attorney General Jeff Sessions to not recuse himself from the Justice Department’s investigation into potential ties between Russia and the Trump campaign, according to a person familiar with the matter.

The conversation between Don McGahn, the president’s White House counsel, and Sessions took place on the president’s orders and occurred just before the attorney general announced that he would step aside from the ongoing inquiry into Russian meddling in the

2016 presidential election, according to a person with knowledge of the interaction. Two other people confirmed details of the conversation between McGahn and Sessions.

All three people spoke on condition of anonymity to The Associated Press to avoid publicly discussing an ongoing investigation.

The episode is known to special counsel Robert Mueller and his team of prosecutors and is likely of interest to them as they look into whether Trump’s actions as president, including the May firing of FBI Director James Comey, amount to improper efforts to obstruct the Russia investigation.

Investigators recently concluded a round of interviews with current and former White House officials, including McGahn and former White House Chief of Staff Reince Priebus.

The New York Times first reported that Trump had McGahn lobby Sessions against a recusal.

Reached on Thursday evening, Trump personal attorney John Dowd said, “I know nothing about that” and hung up. Jay Sekulow, another of the president’s personal lawyers, did not immediately respond to a phone message seeking comment.

Sessions announced March 2 that he would recuse himself from the Russia probe.

# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Brake for beaks: Officers save chickens

**CA** LOS ANGELES — It was a race against the cluck as California Highway Patrol officers scrambled to rescue nearly 20 chickens that ran through highway lanes near Los Angeles.

The agency said the birds blocked a portion of Interstate 605 in the Norwalk area Tuesday morning after their cage fell from the back of a truck.

The agency tweeted photos and video of the chickens on the highway and a motorcycle officer collecting them. Officers managed to rescue 17 birds. Two died. The driver transporting the chickens was unaware that the birds fell off the truck and did not stop.

## State approves first medical pot dispensary

**PA** HARRISBURG—The Pennsylvania Health Department said it's given the state's first all-clear for a medical marijuana dispensary to begin providing the drug, once it's available from a licensed grower.

The Keystone Canna Remedies dispensary in Bethlehem received state authorization Thursday, a major milestone in Pennsylvania's new medical marijuana program.

Nine entities previously have been approved to grow and process medical marijuana. Officials said their products are expected to be available in the coming four months. A 2016 state law legalized medical pot for people suffering from one of 17 qualifying conditions.

## Airbnb bans renter who threw big party

**OH** SEVEN HILLS — Airbnb said it has

permanently banned a man who threw a huge New Year's party at a house in suburban Cleveland where he was renting a room.

Police said about 250 people were crammed inside the home in Seven Hills when officers arrived. They reported seeing partygoers vomiting and breaking windows. Officers from nearby departments were called in to help disperse the crowd.

Investigators said the man advertised the party online and charged \$5 to enter. He was renting a room for \$40 per night. The homeowner locked himself in his bedroom and called police as the party spiraled out of control. He said the renter had agreed not to throw a party.

Police said the party thrower faces charges including disorderly conduct.

## Treatment ordered for man fixated on navels

**OH** AKRON — An Ohio judge has extended the probation of an autistic man who fixates on belly buttons, ordering him to attend an inpatient treatment program for sexual offenders.

Graig Burrier, 29, pleaded guilty to sexual battery in 2012 and received probation for attacking a 19-year-old pregnant woman in a stairwell and insisting he had to touch her belly button to pledge a fraternity. Authorities said he has continued asking to touch women's belly buttons during his probation.

The Akron Beacon Journal reported Summit County prosecutors had pushed to send Burrier, of Stow, to prison for violating probation.

Judge Mary Margaret Rowlands extended Burrier's probation Thursday by ordering him to attend a residential program in Minnesota followed by supervision at a halfway house there.

## Trooper hanging from helo rescues man

**MA** LOWELL — A Massachusetts State Police trooper hanging out of a helicopter as it skimmed the frigid Merrimack River plucked a man from the water in a last-ditch rescue effort.

A state police spokesman told the Boston Globe the helicopter was on scene in Lowell on Wednesday night to provide illumination via spotlight. But when efforts to reach the man by boat were foiled by ice and rocks, the flight crew decided to attempt a rescue.

Trooper John Hazelrigg maneuvered around the river's surface, dipping the helicopter's skids into the icy water as Trooper Russ Phippen pulled the man aboard.

The man was flown to a hospital and is expected to survive.

## Language barrier foils attempted robbery

**VT** RUTLAND — Police in Vermont said a man tried to rob a Chinese restaurant, but left with nothing after an employee who didn't speak English couldn't understand his note or what he said.

The Rutland Herald reported Tyler Edwards, 28, of Fair Haven, pleaded not guilty Wednesday to attempted larceny, assault, and robbery.

According to police, two brothers who own the China City restaurant said a man approached their mother as she was closing Saturday. He wore a hooded sweatshirt and covered his face with a scarf. She didn't understand what he said other than the word "cash." Police said he held his hand like he was simulating a gun and threw a note on the counter demanding cash. Edwards' lawyer said police hadn't shown actual or threatened force; a judge disagreed.

## Craigslist renter accused of stealing

**CO** COLORADO SPRINGS — Police said a man has been scamming people on Craigslist by responding to postings for a roommate and then stealing their belongings.

The Colorado Springs Gazette reported Wednesday that Tyshawn L. Gayle, 23, is accused of stealing from at least three people who posted on Craigslist in search of a roommate and at least one other person who did not use the website.

Gayle is wanted on suspicion of second-degree burglary in a November case and the same charge plus misdemeanor theft in a December case.

He is accused of stealing the belongings after staying with the victims for nearly a month. The victims were at work when their belongings were stolen.

## Rat boards flight, spurring cancellation

**CA** OAKLAND — Alaska Airlines is calling in an exterminator, according to the company, after a rat boarded one of its planes at Oakland International Airport in California and forced the airline to cancel the flight.

The airline said passengers were boarding the Portland, Ore.-bound flight Tuesday when the rat jumped from the jet way onto the plane.

Passengers already aboard came off, and the plane was taken out of service. Most of the 110 passengers scheduled to take the flight were rebooked on a later flight to Portland.

Alaska Airlines said it will resume using the plane when a professional exterminator certifies it is rodent-free. The aircraft also will be inspected for any damage.

From wire reports

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# Report suggests rift between Pats' Brady, Belichick

*New York Daily News*

Talk about a Bomb Cyclone. ESPN published a bombshell report Friday exploring the power struggle brewing in Foxborough among Tom Brady, Bill Belichick and Robert Kraft.

Revealed in the story is the claim that Brady went to Kraft behind Belichick's back demanding the team trade backup quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo.

According to Boston Sports Media Watch, the story highlights how the rift between Brady, Kraft and Belichick has become so severe that some Patriots personnel believe this may be the final year together for the trio in New England.

ESPN's Sarah Spain confirmed the validity of Boston Sports Media Watch's report.

Brady has frequently aired his desire to play until he's 45 and finish his career as a Patriot. The fact that Brady didn't appear ready to retire any time

soon led to the Patriots having to make a decision on Garoppolo's future with the team. The Patriots ultimately traded the backup quarterback to the 49ers for only a second-round pick, leading many to question Belichick's decision-making.

Belichick has historically had no trouble moving on from older veterans, having previously traded Drew Bledsoe and Richard Seymour and releasing the likes of Ty Law and Vince Wilfork. Belichick has also long been fond of Garoppolo, leading some to speculate he may prefer to deal Brady and stick with Garoppolo for the long term.

This report now sheds light onto the fact that may very well have been the case.

If the trio behind the Patriots dynasty breaks up, Belichick would most likely be the odd man out as Kraft won't sell the team any time soon and it seems unlikely Brady is going anywhere.

## NBA roundup

# Golden State defeats Harden-less Houston

*Associated Press*

HOUSTON — Stephen Curry had 29 points, Klay Thompson added 28 and the Golden State Warriors pulled away late in the fourth quarter for a 124-114 victory over the Houston Rockets on Thursday night.

Draymond Green had a triple-double with 17 points, 14 rebounds and 10 assists. The Warriors extended their road winning streak to nine games and have won an NBA-best 16 road games this season.

The teams stayed close through most of the game, but the Warriors had a seven-point lead with about 3½ minutes left. They scored the next five points, highlighted by a three-pointer from Curry, to make it 120-109 and send many of the home fans streaming for the exits.

The Rockets got 30 points from Eric Gordon, and Gerald Green came off the bench to score 29 and tie a career high with eight three-pointers. Houston played its second game without injured star James Harden, out for at least two weeks with a hamstring strain.

The Warriors were short-

handed, too, playing without Kevin Durant, who missed the game with a strained right calf. But Andre Iguodala returned after sitting out Wednesday night with back and hip strains and had 10 points and eight assists.

Curry added nine rebounds, five assists and a steal in his third game back after missing 11 with a sprained right ankle.

**Thunder 127, Clippers 117:** Russell Westbrook had his 13th triple-double of the season, Paul George scored 31 points and Oklahoma City snapped Los Angeles' four-game winning streak.

Westbrook finished with 29 points, 12 rebounds and 11 assists in his latest homecoming. Carmelo Anthony added 22 points for the Thunder.

DeAndre Jordan led the Clippers with a season-high 26 points and 17 rebounds. Lou Williams had 26 points and Blake Griffin scored 24.

The Thunder have won eight of 10. They beat the Lakers on Wednesday night and completed a back-to-back sweep in Los Angeles.

## Briefly

# Louisville QB Jackson will enter NFL Draft

*From wire reports*

Lamar Jackson is leaving Louisville to enter the NFL Draft, one season after becoming the youngest Heisman Trophy winner.

The 20-year-old junior quarterback tweeted Friday that he talked with his family before announcing the decision, which was confirmed by the school.

His decision was somewhat expected after he compiled some statistics that were better than those from his Heisman-winning numbers as a sopho-

more. He finished third in this year's vote.

Jackson thanked Cardinals coach Bobby Petrino, teammates and fans on Twitter.

Jackson, 6-foot-3 and 212 pounds, is a dynamic player but it's uncertain how high he'll be drafted this spring. Despite accounting for 5,261 offensive yards and 45 touchdowns — his second consecutive season in which he surpassed 1,500 yards rushing and 3,500 passing — questions remain about his accuracy and size.

## Defending champion Williams out of Aussie

MELBOURNE, Australia — Defending champion Serena Williams has withdrawn from the Australian Open, saying she is not ready to return to tournament tennis.

Williams was pregnant with her first child when she won last year's tournament at Melbourne Park, her 23rd Grand Slam singles title of her career.

She gave birth to her daughter, Alexis, in September.

## Dodgers get Alexander in 3-team trade

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The Los Angeles Dodgers have acquired lefty reliever Scott Alexander from Kansas City in a three-team trade that also included the Chicago White Sox.

The White Sox got veteran relievers Luis Avilan and Joakim Soria and cash. The Dodgers also obtained minor league infielder Jake Peter and the Royals added a pair of minor leaguers in the deal Thursday.

# Colorado upsets No. 4 Arizona St. in OT

Associated Press

BOULDER, Colo. — The pre-game screening was motivation for the Colorado Buffaloes — a clip of all the wins the program has posted over ranked teams through the years.

Time for a rewrite. They need to add another segment.

Namon Wright scored five of his 19 points in overtime, including a pair of game-sealing free throws at the end, and Colorado beat No. 4 Arizona State 90-81 on Thursday night.

“We showed them (a clip) and said, ‘Now, it’s time for you guys to write your next chapter,’” coach Tad Boyle said.

They did that. It just took a little bit to warm up.

Down 11-0 to start the game, the Buffaloes (9-6, 1-2 Pac-12) steadily whittled away and opened up a six-point lead with 1:17 remaining in regulation. But the Sun Devils (12-2, 0-2) stormed back, with Mickey Mitchell tying the game at 74 with 5 seconds left on an emphatic dunk.

In overtime, the Buffaloes hit

six straight free throws down the stretch to secure the victory. It was the highest-ranked team Colorado has beaten since knocking off No. 3 Texas on Feb. 4, 2003. Colorado fans stormed the court to celebrate.

“That’s crazy,” said freshman McKinley Wright IV, who scored 19 points. “It’s a confidence builder. This is what we needed. When we’re playing like this, having fun, we can beat anyone in our league.”

George King chipped in 18 as Colorado snapped a three-game skid, including two straight losses to start conference play. The Buffaloes began 0-7 in the league a season ago.

Tra Holder had 24 points for Arizona State before fouling out in the waning seconds of OT. The Sun Devils have dropped two straight after reeling off 12 wins in a row.

“It’s a long season,” Sun Devils guard Shannon Evans II said. “We’ll be all right.”

Arizona State coach Bobby Hurley couldn’t have asked for a better start on the road — and

at higher elevation — as Arizona State raced out to an early lead. That’s about when Boyle subbed out his starting five and put in the next crew.

It did the trick.

“We just stuck together,” Wright said. “Nobody held their head down.”

It paid off with a celebration with their fans at midcourt.

“If you would have asked me before I got to Arizona State, if I would have seen a situation where there was a court storm after our game because an opponent beat us I might have thought you were crazy,” Hurley said. “That’s the job our team has done this year to make the game that meaningful that an opponent would storm the floor after the game.”

## Big picture

**Arizona State:** Too much 1-on-1 and not enough driving, Hurley said. “I’ll take some hits here for not working more in some zone in our practices,” Hurley said.

**Colorado:** The Buffaloes im-

proved to 16-29 against ranked teams under Boyle. The 16 wins represents more than 25 percent of the school’s victories over ranked opponents (60) since 1949-50.

## Sun Devil debut

Arizona State freshman Kimani Lawrence made his debut after missing the start of the season with a broken left foot. He played only a minute in the first half after picking up two fouls. Lawrence finished with one point in 4 minutes of work.

## Strong message

King and Namon Wright delivered a strong message as the team huddled before overtime.

“They said, ‘We’re built for this. We love moments like this,’” McKinley Wright recounted.

Boyle appreciated that sort of pep talk.

“We feel like every overtime, especially in the Coors Events Center, it should be ours,” Boyle said.

## College basketball roundup

# Bridges, No. 1 Michigan State pull away from Maryland

Associated Press

EAST LANSING, Mich. — Miles Bridges played one of his best all-around games and had plenty of help from his teammates to turn a closely contested game into another lopsided victory.

Bridges had 15 points, seven assists, six rebounds and two blocks to help No. 1 Michigan State pull away and beat Maryland 91-61 on Thursday night.

“Miles had one of his more solid games,” Spartans coach Tom Izzo said. “He just made plays. Something I hadn’t seen him do myself. And, his defense was a lot better.”

The Spartans (15-1, 3-0 Big Ten) went on a 15-0 run late in the first half to take control and led 44-32 at halftime. They

refused to be content with the 12-point lead, building 30-plus-point cushions in the second half by diving for loose balls, playing tough defense and finishing with a season-high 16 three-pointers.

**No. 9 Wichita State 81, Houston 63:** Landry Shamet scored 18 points in just 22 minutes to lead the host Shockers.

Wichita State (12-2, 2-0 American Athletic Conference) made nine of its first 11 three-point shots and led by as many as 25 in the first half. Starting guards Shamet and Conner Frankamp (15 points) were a combined 12-for-15 from the field.

**No. 14 Arizona 94, Utah 82:** Deandre Ayton scored 24 points and grabbed 14 rebounds for the visiting Wildcats.

Arizona (12-3, 2-0 Pac-12) has won nine straight.

Rawle Alkins finished with 22 points for Arizona and Parker Jackson-Cartwright added 19.

Sedrick Barefield led Utah (10-4, 2-1) with 23 points and David Collette added 19.

**No. 19 Cincinnati 55, Temple 53:** Jacob Evans III hit the winner with 0.4 seconds to play and the visiting Bearcats got a needed assist from a soaring water bottle.

Cincinnati (13-2, 2-0 American Athletic Conference) rallied down the stretch to win its sixth straight game.

Temple led by two points when a turnover and an offensive foul caused coach Fran Dunphy to angrily smack a water bottle on the scorer’s

table and send the plastic container to the court. Dunphy was whistled for the technical. Gary Clark made one of two free throws to cut the Bearcats’ deficit to one.

**No. 19 Gonzaga 89, Pepperdine 59:** Killian Tillie had 22 points and eight rebounds to lead the visiting Bulldogs.

Johnathan Williams scored 13 points and Rui Hachimura had 12 points and six rebounds for Gonzaga (13-3, 3-0 West Coast Conference), which has not lost to Pepperdine since 2002.

Gonzaga outscored Pepperdine 48-14 in the paint and had a 36-13 edge off the bench, with Corey Kispert adding nine points and eight rebounds. Zach Norvell Jr. scored all 10 of his points in the second half.

## NHL roundup

## Hutton, Blues hold off Golden Knights

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Paul Stastny broke a third-period tie with his eighth goal of the season, Carter Hutton continued his strong play in goal and the St. Louis Blues beat the Vegas Golden Knights 2-1 on Thursday night.

Alexander Steen also scored for the Blues, who won their third straight. Hutton made 32 saves, including two tough stops early in the third while the game was tied.

Hutton, making his third consecutive start, earned his eighth win of the season and is 12-3 in his last 15 starts.

Erik Haula scored for Vegas, which had its NHL expansion record eight-game winning streak snapped. Marc-Andre Fleury made 37 saves but lost for the first time in six starts.

**Canadiens 2, Lightning 1 (SO):** Carey Price made 44

saves, Paul Byron scored the only goal in a shootout and host Montreal ended a five-game losing streak with a victory over Tampa Bay.

Max Pacioretty scored in regulation for the Canadiens in their first victory since Dec. 22.

**Hurricanes 4, Penguins 0:** Sebastian Aho scored twice, Cam Ward stopped 21 shots and visiting Carolina blanked Pittsburgh.

The Hurricanes also beat the Penguins 2-1 last Friday in Carolina.

**Maple Leafs 3, Sharks 2 (SO):** Auston Matthews and Tyler Bozak scored in a shootout to give their team a victory over San Jose in a game that opened with a fight that saw host Toronto's Nazem Kadri rip out part of Joe Thornton's mountain-man beard.

**Flyers 6, Islanders 4:** Ivan Provorov had two goals and an

assist, and Sean Couturier had a goal, an assist and participated in one of several fights for host Philadelphia in a feisty victory over slumping New York.

**Wild 6, Sabres 2:** Nino Niederreiter had a hat trick in his return from injury, Mikko Koivu contributed a goal and two assists, and finally fully healthy Minnesota beat visiting Buffalo.

Niederreiter, who missed the previous five games because of a lower leg injury, needed less than 25 minutes of game time to get the second hat trick of his seven-year career.

**Stars 4, Devils 3:** Tyler Seguin scored his team-leading 20th goal short-handed, Alexander Radulov had a goal and two assists and host Dallas beat New Jersey.

**Avalanche 2, Blue Jackets 0:** Jonathan Bernier made 18 of his 34 saves in the third period for his second shutout of the

season, leading host Colorado past Columbus.

**Coyotes 3, Predators 2 (OT):** Christian Fischer scored off Jakob Chychrun's rebound at 2:41 of overtime to give host Arizona a comeback win over Nashville.

The goal was reviewed, then challenged by the Predators and reviewed again.

**Flames 4, Kings 3:** Sean Monahan and Micheal Ferland each had a goal and an assist as host Calgary scored four times in the second period for a comeback victory over Los Angeles.

**Oilers 2, Ducks 1 (SO):** Ryan Nugent-Hopkins scored the shootout winner and host Edmonton snapped a four-game skid with a victory over Anaheim.

Kris Russell scored in regulation for the Oilers, outscored 10-0 in their previous two games.

## Chen sits atop field in US Figure Skating Championships

Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif. — A downer of a practice led to some soaring skating and jumping for Nathan Chen.

Chen made it look easy on the ice and in the standings Thursday night, running away with the short program at the U.S. Figure Skating Championships. His winning performance came one day after "my mind was not in the right place."

Pretty much everything was in the right place when it needed to be.

The defending champion and America's best hope for an Olympic gold medal next month at the Pyeongchang Games, the 18-year-old Chen spun his usual quad magic, hitting two of the four-rotation jumps, one in competition. His energy lit up the SAP Center, and though his triple axel was funky, Chen earned 104.45 points.

That's territory none of his countrymen can reach.

"I try to just make sure that I'm in my zone every competition," he said. "I'll always get nervous regardless of how big or small the competition is. I definitely feel the energy is different than last year (being an Olympic year). Ultimately, I have to do what I set out to do and focus on my new goals."

Coming closest to Chen was veteran Adam Rippon, who had a career-best 96.52.

"I am waiting for my day of reckoning, which is Saturday," Rippon said. "It's the one-year anniversary of breaking my foot. I am here for that drama and ... I told myself I was going to give every single individual element my total focus, and I did that."

Jason Brown, a 2014 team bronze medalist at the Sochi Olympics, was third heading to Saturday's free skate at 93.23.

Grant Hochstein put on the performance of his life, nailing every element to wind up fourth at 92.18. Hochstein included a quadruple toe loop-triple toe at the outset. His spins were precise, his footwork smooth, and by the conclusion of his 2-minute, 40-second routine, he'd drawn the first standing ovation of the competition.

Earlier, Chris Knierim and wife Alexa Scimeca-Knierim won the short program for pairs.

When he stumbled just before a key element in their short program, Chris Knierim didn't lose his perspective. While talking about it, he didn't lose his sense of humor.

"She tried to trip me," he joked.

"It was a pretty close call," his wife said. "I cut a hole in his pants. I did nick it."

They also stood atop the field heading into Saturday's free

skate for the one pairs spot the United States gets at the Pyeongchang Olympics.

Both quickly recovered from his misstep for a throw triple flip that they pulled off superbly. The rest of their program was not perfect — Chris stepped out of a side-by-side triple salchow — but it was good enough for 71.10 points. Much of that was built on a huge triple twist lift to open the program.

"We had two mistakes, little ones, but we were just happy to be back at the U.S. championships and it was a really good event," Alexa said.

The 2015 national champions who have battled injuries the last two years were 2.17 points ahead of Tarah Kayne and Danny O'Shea. With 67.84 points were Deanna Stellato-Dudek and Nathan Bartholomay, a 2014 Sochi Olympian with a different partner.