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Trump rejects plan to reopen government

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump on Monday rejected the suggestion that he temporarily reopen government while negotiations continue on his proposed border wall, signaling no speedy resolution to the partial government shutdown now into a fourth week.

Leaving the White House for a trip to New Orleans, Trump said he had dismissed the proposal from Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham to reopen for several weeks and continue dealing with Democrats over Trump's long-promised wall on the U.S.-Mexico border.

"I did reject it, yes," Trump said. "I'm not interested. I want to get it solved. I don't want to just delay it."

Trump also backed farther away from the idea of declaring a national emergency as an escape hatch, saying: "I'm not looking to call a national emergency. This is so simple we shouldn't have to."

As Congress returned to Washington for their second week of legislative business since House control reverted to Democrats, the shutdown hit Day 24, affecting federal workers and services with no end in sight. Trump has demanded \$5.7 billion for his long-promised wall, while Democrats, who oppose the wall as both immoral and wasteful, insist Trump reopen the government before they negotiate border security.

From the White House, Trump argued that he alone was ready to negotiate, noting that a group of House and Senate Democrats were touring hurricane-ravaged Puerto Rico.

"A lot of the Democrats were in Puerto Rico celebrating something. I don't know, maybe they're celebrating the

President says he hasn't worked on behalf of Putin

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump denied Monday he ever worked for Russia, answering a question he declined to directly address over the weekend.

Speaking from the South Lawn before departing the White House for New Orleans, Trump called former FBI and Justice Department officials "known scoundrels" and "dirty cops." He was reacting to a New York Times report that law enforcement officials began investigating, in 2017, whether Trump had been working on behalf of Russia against U.S. interests.

"I never worked for Russia," he told reporters.

shutdown," Trump said.

Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer were not on the trip to Puerto Rico. Pelosi spokesman Drew Hammill tweeted Monday: "Speaker Pelosi has been in DC all weekend working from the Capitol."

Trump also targeted Pelosi and Schumer on Twitter, arguing that the shutdown "has become their, and the Democrats, fault!" But Trump weeks ago asserted that he would "own" the shutdown and polls show that he is taking most of the blame.

Trump has kept Washington on edge over whether he would resort to an emergency declaration, citing what he says is a "crisis" of drug smuggling

and the trafficking of women and children at the border. The president initially sounded as though such a move was imminent, but then pulled back. He has said several times since he first mentioned the idea in public this month that he prefers a legislative solution.

Trump didn't directly answer the question in a Saturday Fox News interview. "I think it's the most insulting thing I've ever been asked," Trump told Jeanine Pirro, a personal friend. "I think it's the most insulting article I've ever had written, and if you read the article you'll see that they found absolutely nothing."

Trump went on to assert that no president has taken a harder stance against Russia than he has.

"If you ask the folks in Russia, I've been tougher on Russia than anybody else, any other ... probably any other president, period, but certainly the last three or four presidents," he said.

A key question is how much more time is Trump willing to give lawmakers. Graham, who spoke with Trump by telephone on Sunday morning, said the legislative path "is just about shut off" and blamed intransigence by Pelosi.

The speaker's office had no immediate comment. Democrats oppose an emergency declaration but may be powerless to block it. Some Republicans are wary, too, fearing how a future Democratic presi-

dent might use that authority. Such a move, should Trump ultimately go that route, would almost certainly be challenged in the courts.

Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del., called Graham's idea to reopen the government a "great place to start."

"I do think if we reopen the government, if the president ends this shutdown crisis, we have folks who can negotiate a responsible, modern investment in technology that will actually make us safer," Coons said.

Trump says technology is nice, but that the border can't be secured without a wall.

The White House has been laying the groundwork for an emergency declaration, which is feared by lawmakers in both parties.

Senate Homeland Security Committee Chairman Ron Johnson, R-Wis., said he'd "hate to see" a declaration issued because the wall wouldn't get built, presumably because of legal challenges. Democrats voted in the past for border security and should again, he said.

"I actually want to see this wall get built," Johnson said. "I want to keep pressure on Democrats to actually come to the negotiating table in good faith and fund what they have supported in the past."

Graham favors a declaration and said the time for talk is running out.

"It's the last option, not the first option, but we're pretty close to that being the only option," he said.

Graham and Coons spoke on "Fox News Sunday" and Johnson appeared on CNN's "State of the Union."

Report: US planning its 1st-ever missile test around Okinawa

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND AYA ICHIHASHI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The U.S. military has informed the Japan Self-Defense Forces of plans to conduct a missile test around Okinawa later this year as a deterrent against an increasingly assertive China, according to Japan's Sankei newspaper.

It is unclear when the test will take place but it will reportedly feature two systems: the Army's High-Mobility Artillery Rocket System — known as HIMARS — and the Army Tactical Missile System — or ATACMS — the paper reported Jan. 3 without citing sources.

HIMARS is a long-range, mobile, land-based launch system capable of targeting ships at sea. ATACMS, which is made by Lockheed Martin, has a range of approximately 186 miles.

This would be the first missile test in or around the southern Japanese island prefecture of Okinawa, Ministry of Defense officials told Stars and Stripes, without confirming the drill would take place. The HIMARS system was first deployed in Japan by the 3rd Marine Division in August 2017 during Northern Viper exercises on the northern island of Hokkaido.

Ministry officials declined to comment on the report. U.S. Forces Japan officials referred Stars and Stripes' inquiry to the U.S. Army, which did not respond.

The HIMARS launcher reportedly will be shipped to Okinawa by cargo aircraft and operated by soldiers from the U.S. Army's 1st Infantry Division, which is headquartered at Fort Riley, Kan., the Sankei report said. The drills are seen as a deterrent against Chinese aircraft carriers and warships, specifically, Sankei said.

The Chinese have built and

militarized man-made islands across the South China Sea. Freedom-of-navigation patrols by the U.S. Navy have led to saber-rattling by Chinese military officials.

Disputes in the East China Sea have further complicated matters, with China claiming the resource-rich Senkaku islands, which are also claimed by Japan and Taiwan. Successive U.S. presidents have said the islands will be protected under the U.S.-Japan security alliance, but that hasn't stopped China from buzzing Japan's contiguous zone — just outside its territorial waters — with ships, submarines and aircraft.

Japan Air Self-Defense Force pilots were forced to sortie 500 times in response to Chinese aircraft incursions in fiscal year 2017, which started in April 2017 and ran through March 2018, the ministry said. The number was up in the first half of FY 2018 to 345 times.

Five submarines have been spotted entering Japan's contiguous zone since 2013, Defense Ministry officials told Stars and Stripes in 2018. A Chinese aircraft carrier passed between Okinawa's main island and Miyako Island in 2016, along with 18 Chinese aircraft in 2017 and seven by May 2018.

Chinese ships intruded into Japan's territorial waters near the Senkakus 36 times in 2016, 29 times in 2017 and eight times in the first three months of 2018, the ministry said in its annual 2018 white paper.

The incidents often lead to protests from Japanese diplomats that have not stopped the intrusions.

In July, the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force deployed surface-to-ship missiles and participated in joint training with U.S. Army HIMARS for the first time at RIMPAC, Sankei reported.

Stars and Stripes correspondent Hana Kusumoto contributed to this report.

Chinese firms eye Subic Bay shipyard

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

The Chinese are seeking a commercial foothold in a strategic port that was once the United States' largest naval facility in the Far East.

A pair of Chinese firms are in the running to take control of a massive shipyard in Subic Bay from South Korea's Hanjin Group, local media reported Saturday.

The harbor, once known as Naval Base Subic Bay, was home to thousands of U.S. sailors and their families before the Navy left in 1992. It's still a regular port call for U.S. warships and Marines who practice beach landings nearby in Zambales province.

Subic's importance has grown in recent years amid Chinese efforts to build military facilities on artificial islands and claim sovereignty over territory to the west in the South China Sea.

News about the Chinese investment plans was met with alarm by former Philippines navy chief Vice Adm. Alexander Pama, who wrote about them Saturday on Facebook.

"This is a VERY SIGNIFICANT NATIONAL SECURITY ISSUE! The ownership of Hanjin shipyard in Subic bay will give the owners unlimited access to one of our most strategic geographic Naval and Maritime asset," he said. "Although it is a commercial shipyard, nothing can prevent the owners from making it into a de-facto Naval base and a maritime facility for other security purposes! Let us all be aware and wary of the serious security and other strategic implications of this issue! I urge our patriotic business community and the government not to allow Hanjin Shipyard to fall into the wrong hands!"

Hanjin Philippines has defaulted on \$412 million in loans,

owes \$900 million to South Korean creditors and recently declared bankruptcy, according to the Philippine Daily Inquirer newspaper.

But the Chinese need a local partner to take control of the shipyard, said Patricio Abinales, a Philippines expert at the University of Hawaii. The concern is that a partner might be associated with Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte, who has sought closer ties to China, he said.

"The Chinese are dangling money but Filipinos are mainly loyal to the U.S.," Abinales said. "There's sentimental loyalty of Filipinos about Subic but probably Duterte will just ignore that."

Relations between the U.S. and the Philippines have warmed since hitting a low point in 2016 when Duterte hurled insults at then-President Barack Obama. However, there doesn't seem to be much urgency to fully implement an agreement to build facilities for U.S. forces visiting the country.

China has set up commercial and military operations in other places where U.S. forces operate overseas. In 2015, as U.S. Marines were building a rotational presence in Australia's Northern Territory, the government granted a 99-year lease for the Port of Darwin to a Chinese company. That same year the Chinese acquired a 99-year lease on a failing Sri Lankan port near Indian Ocean shipping lanes that had been financed with Chinese loans.

In 2017, the People's Liberation Army Navy established its first overseas base in the African nation of Djibouti just a few miles from Camp Lemonnier.

The U.S. and its allies engaged in diplomacy in numerous small South Pacific nations last year to head off Chinese efforts to establish a presence in that region.

Marine unit poised for Africa deployment

BY MARTIN EGNASH

Stars and Stripes

MORON, Spain — The U.S. Marines here sprint the Spanish hills daily, charging past palm trees and through lush fields in a regimen built all around being ready for the absolute worst in some of the world's most dangerous places.

If a sudden crisis happens in Africa, they're likely the first to go.

It's an important mission, said Sgt. Joseph Czajkowski, a joint fires observer with the Marine Corps' ultraready task force in southern Europe.

"If coalition forces get into a tight bind in Africa, we would be able to support them. Or an aircraft goes down, we can go

get them," Czajkowski said. "The more support for this region, the better."

The task force was developed in the wake of the 2012 Benghazi attacks on U.S. diplomatic buildings in Libya, which resulted in the deaths of four Americans, including U.S. Ambassador Chris Stevens. It was a wake-up call for U.S. Africa Command, which lacked its own forces at the ready to send in case of an emergency.

Enter Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force-Crisis Response-Africa, a rotational unit based in Moron and Sigonella, Italy, which was established in 2013.

The unit of about 1,000 Marines formed in time to aid an

emergency embassy evacuation in Tripoli in 2014. But most of the time, the job for Marines here is all about staying ready, even when the odds of being called into action are slim.

The challenge is staying sharp, which the Marines said they do by keeping a high operational tempo that involves lots of time on the range firing weapons and training for fights that can take unpredictable turns.

"Daily life for us is: We wake up, do physical training, do the plan of the day, whatever it is — we do a lot of field (operations) while we're here — then eventually make our way back to the barracks," Czajkowski said. "We spend a lot of time work-

ing with other forces here."

In the six years since it was stood up, the unit has also trained with many African militaries in a variety of roles, such as logistics training in Uganda, small-arms and intelligence training in Tunisia and transportation training in Ghana. Just last month, a team of Marines went down to Morocco to respond to a mock crisis.

They have yet to respond to another Benghazi-like attack, but if the attacks were to happen today, it would be a matter of only hours before the Marines could reinforce an embassy in the continent's north, where militant groups are active, said Col. Thomas Dodds, the task force commander.

Afghanistan bomb kills at least 4; dozens hurt

Stars and Stripes

A truck bomb that detonated near a compound for international workers in Kabul left at least four people dead and dozens more wounded, officials in the Afghan capital said Monday.

The blast near the Green Village compound in Kabul's police district nine, which rattled windows throughout the capital, killed at least one civilian and three security forces personnel, Interior Ministry spokesman Najib Danish

said on Twitter. It left at least 90 people wounded, including 23 children and 12 women, he said. Dozens were taken to area hospitals, Health Ministry spokesman Wahidullah Mayar told the AP.

At least 14 patients had been taken to the trauma hospital operated by the Italian-based nonprofit Emergency, the organization said in a statement posted online. Of those, four were admitted, six were treated and released, and four were dead on arrival, the statement said.

Located in the northeastern part of Kabul, near the international airport, the Green Village camp features restaurants, a cafe, spa, juice bar and business center, as well as 1,800-rooms to house international contractors, nongovernmental organizations and business people, according to its website.

The blast occurred between the compound and the country's customs department, the Associated Press reported. All roads to the area were blocked by security forces and an in-

vestigation had been launched to assess the damage, the news service reported, citing the office of Kabul's police chief.

Locals from throughout the city said on social media that they heard the blast and that it rattled windows miles away in neighborhoods in the capital's northwest.

Dozens of residences in the area of the blast were damaged, Danish said on Twitter.

No one had yet claimed responsibility for the bombing as of late Monday, the AP reported.

Cargo plane crash in Iran kills 15, leaves 1 survivor

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — A decades-old Iranian Boeing 707 military cargo plane reportedly carrying meat from Kyrgyzstan crashed on Monday while trying to land west of Iran's capital, killing 15 people on board and leaving a sole survivor, authorities said.

The crash of the jetliner marked just the latest aviation disaster for Iran, which hoped

to replace its aging fleet under terms of the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

But instead, President Donald Trump's withdrawal from the accord in May scuttled billions of dollars in planned sales by Airbus and Boeing Co. to the Islamic Republic, only increasing the danger for passengers in Iran planes.

The aircraft, which bore the paint scheme of the Iranian air force's civilian Saha Airlines,

was making an emergency landing around 8:30 a.m. Monday at Fath Airport, an airfield controlled by Iran's powerful paramilitary Revolutionary Guard. The plane skidded off the runway, crashed through a perimeter fence and into a residential neighborhood.

Iranian state television aired images of smoke-charred homes and the fuselage of the aircraft lying on the ground in the neighborhood. Nearby

was one of its landing gears, torn away. Small fires burned around it.

The plane was meant to land at the nearby Payam International Airport, about 25 miles west of Tehran, the Iranian capital.

Authorities did not immediately offer a reason for the crew's decision to land instead at Fath Airport. That airport is some 6.2 miles southwest of Payam.

Theresa May mounts last-ditch Brexit bid

Associated Press

LONDON — British Prime Minister Theresa May offered both a promise on workers' rights and a reassuring letter from European Union leaders on Monday as she implored British lawmakers to support her floundering Brexit deal.

But the British leader had few concrete measures up her sleeve a day before a vote in Parliament that looks likely to see her Brexit deal rejected. A defeat on Tuesday would throw Brexit plans into disarray just weeks before the U.K. is due to leave the bloc on March 29.

May warned that the only alternatives to her agreement were an economically damaging, chaotic "no-deal" exit from the EU or a halt to Britain's departure that would defy British voters' decision in 2016 to leave the bloc.

In a speech Monday at a ceramics factory in the central England city of Stoke-on-Trent, May said "people's faith in the democratic process and their politicians would suffer catastrophic harm" if her deal is rejected and Brexit was abandoned.

Having Britain leave the EU without a deal "would cause turbulence for our economy, create barriers to security cooperation and disrupt people's daily lives," she said. "The only deal on the table is the one [members of Parliament] will vote on tomorrow night," May said.

Britain and the EU reached a hard-won divorce deal in November, but the agreement has run aground in the U.K. Parliament. May postponed a vote on the deal in December to avoid a resounding defeat, and there are few signs the deal has

picked up much support since then.

Several previously opposed British legislators have swung behind May's agreement in the last few days, but they remain outnumbered by those determined to vote against it.

In a bid to win support, May sought reassurances from EU leaders about the deal's most contentious measure — an insurance policy known as the "backstop" that would keep Britain in an EU customs union to maintain an open border between Northern Ireland and EU member Ireland.

Pro-Brexit lawmakers worry that Britain could be trapped indefinitely in the backstop, unable to strike new trade deals around the world.

In a letter to May published Monday, European Council President Donald Tusk and European Commission President

Jean-Claude Juncker offered an assurance that the backstop "would only be in place for as long as strictly necessary."

They promised that the EU would work quickly to strike a permanent new trade deal with Britain that would render the backstop unnecessary.

But the letter also reiterated the bloc's refusal to renegotiate the divorce deal. The two men said, "We are not in a position to agree to anything that changes or is inconsistent with the Withdrawal Agreement."

May will make a statement to Parliament later Monday expanding on the EU commitments. She also sought to win opposition Labour Party lawmakers' support for her Brexit deal by promising that her Conservative government won't try to water down environmental standards and workers' rights after Brexit.

Italian fugitive arrives home to serve life term

Associated Press

ROME — A left-wing Italian militant who was convicted of murder three decades ago arrived in Rome on Monday to serve a life prison sentence after his life as a celebrity fugitive came to an abrupt end with his arrest in Bolivia by a team of Interpol agents.

An Italian military aircraft carrying Cesare Battisti landed at Rome's Ciampino airport shortly after 11:30 a.m. local time after an overnight flight from Bolivia. As snipers kept close watch, Battisti emerged and descended from the plane, surrounded by police.

Wearing a brown jacket, a look of resignation and no handcuffs, Battisti was escorted to an airport facility to be processed — a remarkably quick finale to one of Italy's most drawn-out and politicized efforts to bring a fugitive home.

Battisti was arrested Saturday in Santa Cruz, Bolivia's

largest city, where he was located by intelligence agents after using one of his mobile devices. Italy sent an aircraft to pick him up and bring him back for the first time since he fled Italy in 1981 as he was awaiting trial.

The 64-year-old, who became a successful author during his life on the run, had lived openly in Brazil and France for years and enjoyed the protection of left-wing governments on both sides of the Atlantic, much to the consternation of Italy.

But Brazil's outgoing president signed a decree last month ordering his extradition, apparently sparking Battisti's latest effort to flee to Bolivia, where he had tried unsuccessfully to obtain political asylum.

He was convicted in absentia in 1990 and faces a life term for the deaths of two police officers, a jeweler and a butcher.

Battisti will serve his sentence at Rome's Rebibbia prison.

New Chechnyan crackdown on gays leaves 2 dead, 40 held

Associated Press

MOSCOW — LGBT activists said Monday that at least two people have died and about 40 people have been detained in what has been described as a new crackdown on gay people in the Russian republic of Chechnya.

The new allegations come after reports in 2017 of more than 100 gay men arrested and subjected to torture, and some of them killed, in the predominantly Muslim region. Chechen authorities denied those accusations, and federal authorities conducted a probe that found nothing to support the reports.

Alvi Karimov, a spokesman for Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov, told the Interfax news agency on Monday that the reports are "complete lies and don't have an ounce of truth in them." Karimov insisted that no one has been detained in Chechnya on suspicion of being gay.

The Russian LGBT Network,

which has been monitoring the situation in Chechnya and helping victims, said in a statement Monday that about 40 men and women have been detained on suspicion of being gay since December and that at least two of them have died of torture in detention.

"Widespread detentions, torture and killings of gay people have resumed in Chechnya," said Igor Kochetkov, program director at the Russian LGBT Network.

Kochetkov said the new wave of persecution started at the end of the year when Chechen authorities detained the administrator of a social media group popular with LGBT people in the North Caucasus. Kochetkov said the mass detentions began after the authorities got hold of contacts on his phone.

Russian authorities have strenuously denied that killings and torture took place in the predominantly Muslim region, where homosexuality is taboo.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Students told to leave pricey hats at home

NY GREAT NECK — Administrators at a New York middle school are begging students to leave their winter hats made by Italian apparel company Moncler at home because the pricey tops keep getting lost.

The New York Post reported that administrators at Great Neck North Middle School on Long Island wrote a letter to parents asking them to “try and redirect your middle schooler from wearing these hats to school.”

Moncler’s knit hats with fur pom poms cost \$350, though kids’ sizes are available for less.

School administrators said time spent looking for lost Montcler hats has been “disruptive to the students’ focus and time.”

Woman has gun at school hoops game

FL BOYNTON BEACH — Police said a Florida woman took a handgun and dozens of rounds of ammunition to a high school girls’ basketball game, almost using the weapon during an altercation.

Palm Beach County schools police said Charnea Mosley, 25, took the 9 mm handgun and 124 rounds of ammunition to Boynton Beach High School last week.

A police report says Mosley got into an argument with others at the game. When they were escorted out, police said, Mosley got into her vehicle and nearly struck the other people with it, then got out of the vehicle with the gun, saying she was “going to air this thing out.”

Mosley faces charges including possession of a weapon on school property.

Town mayor arrested on school bus for DUI

MN RICE — The new mayor of a central Minnesota town was arrested for driving under the influence as he prepared to drive a school bus.

Authorities said Rice Mayor Erik Bonde was taken into custody after police were investigating a report that he had a suspended driver’s license. Officers said Bonde appeared to be intoxicated and they found a container with an alcoholic beverage on the bus.

Police said a breath test showed that Bonde’s blood alcohol content was above the legal limit for driving. There were no students on the bus.

Gun seized from child, 6, walking into school

OH COLUMBUS — Police said a handgun was confiscated from an Ohio kindergartner walking into school after someone reported that the 6-year-old boy appeared to have a heavy object in his pants.

Columbus police didn’t disclose whether the gun was loaded Friday when it was safely taken from a student at Columbus Africentric Early College.

Police said the boy won’t be charged. They’re investigating where he got the weapon.

Town buys old school for \$1, plans to reuse

IN STINESVILLE — A tiny southern Indiana town that purchased a former elementary school for \$1 plans to turn the building into a hub for the rural community.

The Stinesville Town Council voted Jan. 8 to purchase the former Stinesville Elementary

School.

The Herald-Times reported that the hilltop school was closed last year following years of dwindling student enrollment. A citizens’ committee will be formed to draft proposals for the building’s reuse.

Man to raise another 2020 flag for Trump

VT BURLINGTON — A Vermont man whose Trump 2020 flag was removed and burned by vandals last year has a replacement, and he’s raising it with a bit of fanfare.

Gus Klein told WCAX-TV that his family received death threats after he spoke up about the incident in November. But he also received a call from President Donald Trump’s campaign headquarters promising to replace the flag. It eventually arrived, along with shirts, bumper stickers and a hat signed by the president and Vice President Mike Pence. Klein planned to put up the new flag accompanied by bagpipe music and GOP candidates.

Business to give rare lobster to aquarium

MD SILVER SPRING — A Maryland seafood distributor wants an extremely rare lobster to be viewed by many, rather than enjoyed by just one on a plate.

Ocean City Seafood, of Silver Spring, was unloading a shipment from Maine last month when the owner found a rare “calico” lobster with a shell in speckled orange and black. Lobsters usually have dark blue or greenish-brown shells.

The University of Maine’s Lobster Institute says calico lobsters occur about once in every 30 million lobsters.

Ocean City Seafood spokeswoman Rita Montoya told The Baltimore Sun the lobster is

now in a special tank until it’s relocated to an aquarium.

Man charged after dog abuse recorded

NH PORTSMOUTH — Police in New Hampshire have accused a man of repeatedly jerking a dog’s leash on a walk and kicking the animal.

Police told WMUR-TV the man allegedly was training the 3-year-old Australian Cattle Dog to help the animal adjust to traffic conditions. But cellphone video sent to police appears to show him lifting the dog off the ground by a neck leash, causing the animal to twist in the air.

Another clip shows the dog being kicked in the ribs, and a third shows the dog’s leash jerked violently.

Police charged David Dantino, 36, who isn’t the dog’s owner, with three counts of animal cruelty.

Woman banned from Walmart over incident

TX WICHITA FALLS — Police in northern Texas said a woman was banned from a local Walmart after she spent several hours driving an electric shopping cart around the store’s parking lot while drinking wine from a Pringles can.

Police told the Times Record News that officers responded to a suspicious person call about 9 a.m. Friday at a Walmart in Wichita Falls.

Wichita Falls police spokesman Jeff Hughes said the woman had reportedly been riding the electric cart around the parking lot for about three hours. He said police found the woman in a nearby restaurant and told her not to return to the store.

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Saints rally past Foles, champ Eagles

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — When the New Orleans Saints finally found their rhythm, they marched one step closer to the Super Bowl.

Using a dominant ball-control offense and a few gambles that paid off, the Saints got two touchdown passes from Drew Brees and two interceptions from Marcus Lattimore in a 20-14 victory over the Philadelphia Eagles.

Brees took the Saints on scoring drives of 92, 79 and 67 yards after falling behind 14-0. Lattimore clinched it when Nick Foles' pass from the Saints 27 deflected off usually sure-handed receiver Alshon Jeffery with about two minutes remaining. A couple dozen Saints players surged off the sideline toward the end zone in celebration, while Jeffery fell face-first to the turf in agony.

"We were real calm and poised and we knew we were going to get things done," Brees said.

New Orleans (14-3) will host the NFC title game next week

against the Rams (13-4). Los Angeles, which fell 45-35 at the Superdome in November, will try again next week, with the winner going to the Super Bowl. The Saints' win finished off a sweep of the divisional round by teams coming off byes.

Wil Lutz added two field goals for the Saints, who last got this far in 2009, when they won the Super Bowl.

Philadelphia (10-8) will not repeat as NFL champion; no team has done so since the 2004 Patriots.

This was really two games in one. Philly scored on its first two drives as the Saints could do virtually nothing right.

"Listen, they got off to a fast start, they're a great team," Brees said. "Nick Foles has done a phenomenal job for them. We knew it was going to be different than last time."

After that opening period, it was all New Orleans, yet the resilient Eagles kept it close enough that when Lutz missed a 52-yard field goal with 2:58 remaining, they were only one-score behind.

Foles, the hero of last year's Super Bowl run, got them in position for yet another late winning score — just like last week at Chicago and last February against New England for the championship.

Then, Jeffery couldn't handle a second-down pass, and it was over.

"That's a great championship team," Saints coach Sean Payton said of the Eagles. "We remained confident."

Brees had 2-yard touchdown passes to rookie Keith Kirkwood and All-Pro wideout Michael Thomas, who had 12 receptions for a franchise play-off-record 171 yards.

Thomas' touchdown capped an 18-play, 92-yard drive in which the Saints actually covered more than 100 yards because of penalties. It lasted 11½ minutes.

"What you saw from him today is what I see every day in practice," Brees said of Thomas. "He's a big-time player who wants to be the guy to make plays."

Philadelphia had the ball for

more than nine minutes in the first quarter, after which the Eagles had the ball about 13 minutes and never scored.

New Orleans, which routed Philadelphia 48-7 in November, gambled on its first play — and lost. Brees was a bit short on a deep pass to Ted Ginn Jr., and it was picked off by Cre'Von LeBlanc, one of several Eagles backups being used in the secondary due to injuries during the regular season.

"I just think we had to find our rhythm," Brees said. "I tried to take a shot on the first play. Unfortunately, that didn't work."

Foles completed all five throws on a 76-yard drive capped by Jordan Matthews' 37-yard TD catch. The Eagles, who quickly fell behind 17-0 in that previous Superdome loss, suddenly led 7-0.

The visitors were in control until Lattimore picked off Foles' deep throw to Zach Ertz. The Saints showed plenty of moxie on their 79-yard march to a touchdown, faking a punt at their 30, with Taysom Hill running 4 yards for a first down.

Patriots flash dominance in win over Chargers

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — New England tight end Rob Gronkowski said the Patriots would take the night to enjoy it. Safety Devin McCourty said it would be closer to just a few hours of celebration.

However long the Patriots players planned to relax after their dominating 41-28 divisional-round win over the Chargers on Sunday, this much is clear: A very good Kansas City Chiefs team is waiting in the AFC championship game.

Meanwhile, in the losing locker room in Foxborough on Sunday, the Chargers headed back across the country after dropping their lone game of the season outside the state of California.

New England needed a field goal from Stephen Gostkowski in the waning seconds to slip past the Chiefs 43-40 in one of the wildest games of the regular season in Week 6. Tom Brady had one of his best games of the season in the Oct. 14 victory over KC, throwing for 340 yards and a touchdown and running for another to earn his 200th career victory as starting quarterback.

All of it was needed on a night in which counterpart Patrick Mahomes rallied his team from a 24-9 halftime deficit, throwing for 352 yards and four touchdowns in what was the Chiefs' first loss of the season and his first as a starting quarterback.

Now comes a rematch against a Kansas City team that oddsmakers have installed as an early favorite. It will be rare air for the Patriots.

Sunday's win over the Chargers sent the Patriots to the conference title game for the eighth straight season. It will be the 13th conference championship game appearance by the Patriots during the Tom Brady-Bill Belichick era.

McCourty said despite their unprecedented run and performance Sunday, nobody in the Patriots locker room believes they can just show up and win at Arrowhead Stadium.

"You go to eight straight AFC championship games, you're in the playoffs 10 years in a row, you kind of get in a mode like it'll keep happening, it'll be there," McCourty said. "But this is a special group, and I think we're starting to realize that we have

one opportunity to try to take advantage of everything that's in front of us."

New England got three first-half touchdowns from rookie Sony Michel to set the early tone against the Chargers. He finished with 129 yards rushing, his fifth 100-yard rushing game of the season.

The Patriots scored touchdowns on their first four possessions, building a 35-7 halftime lead.

Buoyed by the run game, Brady was in vintage form at age 41, completing 34 of 44 for 343 yards and a touchdown. He improved to 8-0 as a starter against Philip Rivers, who drops to 1-8 against New England all-time.

Afterward, Brady acknowledged that he heard the voices this season who doubted the Patriots and thought "we can't win any games."

Asked if he thought the win might have quieted those voices, he simply smiled and paused.

"I just like winning," he said. "I just like winning."

Murray limps out early at Aussie Open

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — If this was it for Andy Murray, if this truly was it, he gave himself — and an appreciative, raucous crowd that included his mother and brother — quite a gutsy goodbye, the type of never-give-in performance he's famous for.

What Murray could not quite do Monday at the Australian Open was finish off a stirring comeback and prolong what might just be the final tournament of his career.

Playing on a surgically repaired right hip so painful that pulling on socks is a chore, he summoned the strength and strokes to erase a big deficit and force a fifth set before eventually succumbing to 22nd-seeded Roberto Bautista Agut 6-4, 6-4, 6-7 (5), 6-7 (4), 6-2, Murray's first opening-round loss at a Grand Slam tournament in 11 years.

"If this was my last match ... I gave literally everything I had," Murray told a full house at Melbourne Arena, his voice shaking. "It wasn't enough tonight."

Murray, just 31, is a year removed from the operation, and he announced in the days leading up to the Australian Open that he will retire in 2019. The biggest looming question is whether he'll be able to make it to July for Wimbledon, where he won two of his three major titles, including the first for a British man in 77 years.

He had raised the prospect that he might not be able to continue past this week, although he did leave a bit of room for himself

after Monday's match, saying: "Maybe I'll see you again. I'll do everything possible to try. If I want to go again, I'll need to have a big operation (and) there's no guarantees I'll be able to come back, anyway."

Even with a hitch in his gait, even as he leaned forward to rest his hands on his knees between points, Murray summoned the strength and the strokes to push the match beyond the 4-hour mark.

And the fans tried to will him past Bautista Agut, who had lost in straight sets all three previous matches the two men had played. They roared when Murray managed to break back to 2-all on the way to taking the third set, with his mom, Judy, smiling widely as she stood alongside other spectators. They chanted his name when he grabbed the fourth set. They rose when the compelling contest ended.

"Andy deserves this atmosphere. Andy deserves (that) all the people came to watch him," Bautista Agut said. "He's a tough, tough fighter. A tough opponent. He gives everything until the last point. I want to congratulate him for all he did for tennis."

Afterward, a video was shown in the stadium with tributes to Murray from various players, including rivals Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic, along with Nick Kyrgios, Caroline Wozniacki, Karolina Pliskova and Sloane Stephens.

"Amazing career. Congratulations, buddy," Federer said. "I'm your biggest fan."

Federer opened his bid for a third consecutive Australian Open championship, and record seventh overall, with a 6-3, 6-4, 6-4 victory over Denis Istomin at Rod Laver Arena. Nadal, whose 17 career majors are second among men only to Federer's 20, overpowered Australian wild-card entry James Duckworth 6-4, 6-3, 7-5 earlier.

Nadal, who had surgery on his right ankle in November, hadn't competed since stopping during his U.S. Open semifinal in September because of a bad knee.

"It's very difficult to start (again) after an injury," Nadal said. "I know it very well."

Other major title winners who advanced on Day 1, when the temperature approached 90 degrees, included defending champion Wozniacki, Maria Sharapova — who beat Harriet Dart 6-0, 6-0 — Angelique Kerber, Sloane Stephens and Petra Kvitova.

Wozniacki saved a break point in the opening game but there was little trouble to follow as she beat Alison Van Uytvanck 6-3, 6-4. Wozniacki, who saved both break points she faced, clinched the match on her third match point with a forehand to the open court.

The highest-seeded player to exit was No. 9 John Isner, who hit 47 aces but lost 7-6 (4), 7-6 (6), 6-7 (4), 7-6 (5) against 97th-ranked Reilly Opelka in an all-American match.

The most attention, though, was drawn by Murray, who is as popular for his success on the court as his attitude away from it.

Top 25 roundup

No. 2 Michigan rolls past Northwestern

Associated Press

ANN ARBOR, Mich. — Xavier Simpson is Michigan's gritty point guard, and Jon Teske is the 7-foot-1 center. Together, they anchor the Wolverines' stellar defense.

When they suddenly start making three-pointers as well, there's not much an opponent can do.

Simpson scored a career-high 24 points and Teske tied a career high with 17, leading No. 2 Michigan to an 80-60 victory over Northwestern on Sunday night. Simpson made five three-pointers and Teske made three. With the win, the

Wolverines are off to their best start in program history.

Michigan (17-0, 6-0 Big Ten) started 16-0 on two previous occasions, including once before under coach John Beilein, in 2012-13.

"We've had some great teams, and I hate comparing great to great," Beilein said. "But I do say that this team has the capacity — if we get that out of those two, I wouldn't like to guard that."

Before Sunday, Teske had made five three-pointers in 77 games at Michigan. Simpson had shot 28 percent beyond the arc in his 2½ seasons with the Wolverines. They made eight of

Michigan's 11 three-pointers on Sunday.

Northwestern (10-7, 1-5) was without leading scorer Vic Law, who was out with a lower-body injury. The Wildcats lost by two to the Wolverines last month — one of only two Michigan games this season decided by single digits — but this one was no contest.

The Wolverines have matched the longest winning streak in school history. They won 17 in a row in 1985 before losing in the NCAA Tournament.

Michigan and Virginia are the only unbeaten teams remaining in Division I.

No. 6 Michigan State 71, Penn State 56: Nick Ward had 16 points and 11 rebounds to lead the visiting Spartans past the Nittany Lions.

Matt McQuaid added 15 points and Cassius Winston chipped in 11 for Michigan State (15-2, 6-0 Big Ten), which has won 10 straight. The Spartans also beat Penn State (7-10, 0-6) for the 10th consecutive time.

Kenny Goins added 10 rebounds for the Spartans, who only trailed for 10 seconds and led by as many as 21 with 6:44 to play.

Lamar Stevens led Penn State (7-10, 0-6) with 20 points.

NBA roundup

Curry hits 11 threes to top Mavericks

Associated Press

DALLAS — Stephen Curry scored 48 points, making 11 three-pointers, and the Golden State Warriors held off the Dallas Mavericks 119-114 on Sunday night.

Kevin Durant added 28 points and Klay Thompson had nine of his 16 in the fourth quarter.

Both Curry and Warriors coach Steve Kerr credited Durant for switching play calls to get Curry shots rather than taking shots of his own.

“That was just [Durant] taking the initiative, knowing that I had a hot hand going,” Curry said. “Call it a decoy in terms of him being in the action, but allowing me to work. The way they were defending us, it just made sense tonight.”

Curry’s 11th three-pointer — tying a season high — gave the Warriors a 117-114 lead.

“We just couldn’t get Curry under control,” Mavericks coach Rick Carlisle said. “He was brilliant tonight.”

Draymond Green blocked Jalen Brunson’s drive at the other end and secured the loose ball. The Mavericks forced

a miss, but Harrison Barnes turned the ball over in the front-court with 5 seconds left. Curry sealed the game with free throws.

Luka Doncic scored 26 points for Dallas and Barnes had 22. Brunson had 12 off the bench in 30 minutes, in place of the injured J.J. Barea and Dennis Smith Jr.

Magic 116, Rockets 109: Nikola Vucevic and Aaron Gordon each scored 22 points and host Orlando took advantage of James Harden’s awful three-point shooting to beat Houston.

Harden scored 38 points to push his run of 30-point games to 16, but was 1-for-17 from three-point range to tie Damon Stoudamire’s NBA record for misses in a game. Stoudamire was 5-for-21 from three-point range for Portland on April 15, 2005. Harden was 11-for-32 overall from the field, made 15 of 16 free throws and had 12 assists and nine rebounds.

Evan Fournier and Terrence Ross each had 17 points for Orlando.

Raptors 140, Wizards 138 (2OT): Serge Ibaka hit a three-

pointer with 15 seconds left in the second overtime and visiting Toronto outlasted Washington for its fifth straight victory despite blowing a 23-point lead.

Kawhi Leonard led Toronto with 41 points and 11 rebounds.

Bradley Beal had his second triple-double of the season for Washington, finishing with season highs of 43 points and 15 rebounds and adding 10 assists.

Nuggets 116, Trail Blazers 113: Nikola Jokic scored a season-high 40 points, Jamal Murray fought through a bloody lip to add 24 and host Denver beat Portland.

Jokic finished a point off his career high. He added 10 rebounds and eight assists, just missing his sixth-triple double of the season. Murray’s lip was bloodied when he took an elbow to the mouth from Jusuf Nurkic on a drive to the basket in the third quarter.

Cavaliers 101, Lakers 95: Cedi Osman scored 20 points, Collin Sexton added 17 and visiting Cleveland beat Los An-

geles to end a 12-game losing streak.

Kyle Kuzma had 29 points and nine rebounds for the Lakers, who have lost two straight and five of seven.

Bucks 133, Hawks 114: Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 33 points, Eric Bledsoe added 24 points and 10 assists, and Milwaukee won in coach Mike Budenholzer’s return to Atlanta.

Khris Middleton finished with 17 points and 11 rebounds to help the Bucks improve to 30-12, second-best in the NBA. Coming off a loss at Washington that Antetokounmpo missed with injuries, Milwaukee is 12-0 following a defeat and remained the league’s only team not to drop consecutive games.

76ers 108, Knicks 105: Ben Simmons had 20 points, 22 rebounds and nine assists, and Joel Embiid scored 26 points to help visiting Philadelphia beat New York.

Emmanuel Mudiay missed a three-pointer at the buzzer for the Knicks, who have lost four straight and 19 of 22.

NHL roundup

Foligno, Bobrovsky lift Columbus over Rangers

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio—After winning their past two games in overtime, the Columbus Blue Jackets went up by three goals in the third period Sunday night against the New York Rangers and appeared ready to hit cruise control.

It wasn’t going to be that easy, though.

The Rangers scored two quick goals later in the third to turn a rout into a tight game down the stretch. It wasn’t until Nick Foligno scored a wrap-around goal with 1:21 left that Columbus had some breathing room on the way to a 7-5 victory.

Foligno scored twice and Sergei Bobrovsky returned from a team suspension to stop 22 shots for the Blue Jackets, who

have won four of the past five and jumped Pittsburgh to move into second place behind Washington in the Metropolitan Division.

“It’s a weird game when you’re up 6-3 and they’re pushing and pressing and get some fluky ones,” Foligno said. “But we stuck with it and did the right things and found a way to get the job done. That’s what you have to do — you don’t care how it gets done, just get those two points.”

Islanders 5, Lightning 1: Casey Cizikas and Cal Clutterbuck each had a goal and an assist, Thomas Greiss stopped 38 shots, and host New York beat league-leading Tampa Bay.

Jets 4, Ducks 3 (OT): Bryan Little scored at 4:49 of overtime as host Winnipeg beat Anaheim and extended the Ducks’ losing

streak to a franchise-record 11 games.

Hurricanes 6, Predators 3: Sebastian Aho had three goals and an assist to lead host Carolina past Nashville.

Justin Williams, Saku Maenalanen and Lucas Wallmark also scored for Carolina, which won for the seventh time in eight games and earned its fifth consecutive victory at home.

Canucks 5, Panthers 1: Loui Eriksson had a goal and two assists as Vancouver dealt Florida its sixth straight loss.

Flames 7, Coyotes 1: Mark Giordano had two goals and an assist in his 800th career game and host Calgary routed Arizona.