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Short-term deal to end shutdown reached

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Yielding to growing pressure, President Donald Trump announced on Friday a short-term deal to reopen the government for three weeks while negotiations continue over the president's demands for money to build his long-promised wall at the U.S.-Mexico border.

Trump spoke about the 35-day impasse as intensifying delays at the nation's airports and widespread disruptions brought new urgency to efforts to resolve the standoff.

After saying for weeks that he would not reopen the government without border wall money, Trump agreed to a bill to reopen the government without additional money for his signature campaign prom-

ise, according to five people familiar with the negotiations who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to reveal private discussions.

Three people familiar with the negotiations on Capitol Hill said the deal would restore money for the shuttered agencies for three weeks, while negotiations continue on a longer-term solution.

Overnight and into Friday, at least five Republican senators had been calling Trump, urging him to reopen the government and have the Senate consider his request for border wall money through regular legislation, according to a person familiar with the situation who was not authorized to discuss the private talks publicly.

The burst of movement came

as LaGuardia Airport in New York and Newark Liberty International Airport in New Jersey were both experiencing at least 90-minute delays in take-offs Friday.

Trump and the Democrats in Congress had remained at odds over his demand that any compromise include money for his coveted border wall.

Senators were talking with increased urgency after Thursday's defeat of competing proposals from Trump and the Democrats. The bipartisan talks provided a glimmer of hope that some agreement could be reached to halt the longest-ever closure of federal agencies, at least temporarily.

Pressure has been building among both parties to reopen agencies immediately and pay hundreds of thousands of belea-

guered federal workers while bargainers hunt for a deal.

At the White House Thursday, Trump told reporters he'd support "a reasonable agreement" to reopen the government. He suggested he'd also want a "prorated down payment" for his long-sought border wall with Mexico but didn't describe the terms. He said he had "other alternatives" for getting wall money, an apparent reference to his disputed claim that he could declare a national emergency and fund the wall's construction using other programs in the federal budget.

Contributing to the pressure on lawmakers to find a solution was the harsh reality confronting 800,000 federal workers, who on Friday faced a second two-week payday with no paychecks.

Panel considers extending Selective Service to women

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — More than three years after combat roles were opened to women, a commission is considering whether women should be required to register for the Selective Service.

The National Commission on Military, National and Public Service, established by Congress in 2016, has released an interim report about its work to find ways to increase participation in military and public service.

One option is having women register in the Selective Service System.

All men between ages 18 to 25 must be registered as part of the pool to draw from if there is another draft. In 1981, the Supreme Court ruled that women did not have to be registered

due to the services not allowing women in combat roles.

The interim report gives insight into some of the policy recommendations the commission is considering for its final report, which will be presented to Congress, the president and the public in March 2020.

For now, the commission will not say whether it will recommend that women register; the chairman said the group has not come to a decision and is seeking more input from the public.

"I can tell you that over the course of the last year as we've traveled around the country, people have very definitive opinions on this issue," Dr. Joe Heck, chairman of the commission, said as the report was released Wednesday at the Newseum in Washington.

"It's a visceral response. It's

either, 'Yes they should have to register, it's a matter of equality,' or 'No, they should not have to register because women hold a special role in American society,'" he said.

Heck is a retired brigadier general and surgeon in the U.S. Army Reserve and served as a U.S. representative and senator from Nevada.

The commission is also considering whether to include the education and skills — such as cyber — of those who are registered, as well as identifying, evaluating and protecting conscientious objectors who would be prepared to serve in other ways.

Completely getting rid of the system is being discussed as well.

"So the commission is actually looking at whether we still need it. ... If we do need it,

whether it should be changed to meet the needs of the future," said Debra Wada, the commission's vice chair for military service.

The report found that many Americans do not understand the Selective Service System; the process is passive with most men registering when they get a driver's license or apply for federal student aid. Not registering comes with penalties, including not receiving federal student aid and not being eligible for government jobs.

Military service is also not considered an option by about 4 in 10 Americans due in part to limited interactions with the military or veterans, according to the report. Of Americans ages 17 to 24, 71 percent do not meet the current standards to serve in the armed forces. Last year, the Army did not meet its recruiting goals.

Navy denies claims filed over Lejeune water

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Navy has denied 4,400 claims from people impacted by contaminated drinking water at Camp Lejeune, N.C., closing the door on financial compensation from the department for their illnesses.

“I am perfectly cognizant of the fact this will be disappointing to the claimants,” Secretary of the Navy Richard Spencer said during his announcement Thursday at the Pentagon. “However, it will be a disservice to the claimants to continue to hold the claims without a decision or a way forward.”

This decision does not impact the health-care benefits provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs to the impacted

families. Those benefits were awarded by Congress in 2012.

A study released in April found that the industrial chemicals that contaminated drinking water in wells on Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune were linked to an increased risk for bladder cancer, kidney cancer and kidney disease for people who lived or worked there from the 1950s to 1985.

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry has also determined that the contaminated water likely caused an increased risk of adverse birth outcomes and other health effects.

The Navy has 4,400 tort claims filed against them related to the contaminated water, some going as far back as December 1999, Spencer said. The number does not represent the

number of people seeking compensation because some claims are filed by groups.

The claims total \$963 billion, including one claim for \$900 billion.

The Department of Navy only has to pay claims if congressionally imposed conditions on the waiver of sovereign immunity of the Federal Tort Claims Act apply, which they did not, according to Spencer.

“Individual court decisions during the last decade and the recent decision of the multi-district litigation court ... have found that those conditions did not apply,” he said.

Also affecting the decision to deny the claims was the Feres doctrine, which prevents military members from suing the government for negligence.

“The court decision has made

it clear there is no legal basis nor ability for the Department of Navy to pay these claims,” he said.

Spencer did not know why this decision had not been made years earlier. “It was on my desk when I arrived. We had the facts and figures there.” He made his decision to deny the claims earlier this week.

“To be very frank, we wanted to come to closure on this and allow the claimants to proceed down other paths that may be available,” he said. “There was no benefit to the claimants nor to the United States Navy to sit on this.”

As for other legal options that claimants could pursue, Spencer suggested they could go to Congress and see whether they could get more than health care benefits.

Army declares extended basic training a success

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Extending basic training by eight weeks was a success for the infantry, and the Army plans to test longer training programs for future armor and cavalry soldiers as well, Army Secretary Mark Esper said Thursday.

Esper has signed off on the Army’s extension of infantry One Station Unit Training from 14 to 22 weeks after some 400 soldiers last month completed the service’s test run of the extended basic training program,

he told reporters at the Pentagon. In the fall, the Army will also extend One Station Unit Training for armor and cavalry recruits. Training for combat engineer and artillery recruits is also likely to be extended on a trial basis after those pilot programs are completed, the Army secretary said.

The protracted infantry training pilot program was an overwhelming success, Esper said. Recruits who went through the 22-week program posted higher fitness scores on average than their peers in the 14-week program. Additionally, their drop-

out rate was less than 6 percent, compared to a typical attrition rate of about 12 percent in the shorter training program, according to the Army.

“And their tactical performance was exceptional,” Esper said of the soldiers in the pilot program at Fort Benning in Georgia. “I was very impressed by the results that we found.”

He anticipated the pilot programs for armor and cavalry recruits, which will also be conducted at Fort Benning, will be equally successful.

The changes mark the first major overhaul of the Army’s

initial entrance training programs since the 1970s, according to the service.

Part of the thought process is the extended training provides recruits more time to adjust physically and mentally to Army life, meaning soldiers will be better prepared for battle as soon as they join their first units, Army officials have said.

Among other things, the new program provides recruits more time with their instructors and extends the amount of time soldiers spend training on weapons.

Air Force Academy vows steps to stop sports team hazing

The Gazette (Colorado Springs, Colo.)

The Air Force Academy’s athletic program will get an ombudsman to deal with complaints and a new system for cadets to anonymously report concerns after an independent

review of the program that stemmed from two hazing incidents since late 2016.

Cases are pending against a pair of cadets on the academy’s swimming team after freshmen complained about a hazing ritual that included eating to the point of sickness and a rite that

involved naked upperclassmen and threatened — but phony — demands for oral sex. Another incident involved the school’s men’s lacrosse team. Details of that case haven’t been released, but the team’s head coach left the school in the wake of an investigation.

The review by North Carolina consulting firm Collegiate Sports Associates found the academy had strong programs in place to instill military values and prevent sexual assault. But confused lines of communication and a rigid command structure allowed misconduct.

Trump associate Stone arrested

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Shouting “FBI, open the door,” authorities arrested Roger Stone, a confidant of President Donald Trump, before dawn Friday in a criminal case that revealed that senior members of the Trump campaign sought to benefit from the release of hacked emails damaging to Hillary Clinton.

The seven-count indictment against Stone, a self-proclaimed “dirty trickster” with a long history with Trump, is the first criminal case in months from special counsel Robert Mueller. Stone appeared at court in shackles later in the morning and was released on a \$250,000 bond. He did not enter a plea.

The indictment provides the most detail to date about how Trump campaign associates in the summer of 2016 actively sought the disclosure of emails the U.S. says were hacked by Russia, then provided to the anti-secrecy website WikiLeaks. It alleges that unidentified senior Trump campaign

officials contacted Stone to ask when stolen emails relating to Clinton might be disclosed.

Prosecutors did not charge Stone with conspiring with WikiLeaks or with the Russian officers Mueller says hacked the emails. Instead it mirrors other Mueller cases in alleging cover-ups and deception, accusing Stone of lying to lawmakers about WikiLeaks, tampering with witnesses and obstructing a congressional probe into whether the Trump campaign coordinated with Russia to tip the election.

Some of those false statements were made to the House Intelligence Committee, prosecutors allege.

In referring to Trump campaign officials and their desire to leverage hacked emails, the case brings Mueller’s investigation into the president’s inner circle but it does not accuse the president of any wrongdoing or reveal whether he had advance knowledge of the WikiLeaks trove.

CNN aired video of the raid at Stone’s Fort Lauderdale, Fla.,

home, showing agents in body armor using large weapons and night-vision equipment, running up to the home and banging on the door.

“FBI open the door!” one shouts. “FBI, warrant!” Stone could then be seen in the doorway in his sleepwear before he was led away. Though not uncommon for the FBI to make early-morning arrests of targets under indictment, it’s the first time Mueller has used that tactic.

Hours later, Stone appeared in court in a blue polo shirt and jeans. In releasing him on bond, a magistrate judge restricted Stone’s travel to South Florida, Washington and New York City and ordered him to avoid contact with witnesses.

Stone is the sixth Trump aide or adviser charged by Mueller and the 34th person overall. The nearly 2-year-old probe has exposed multiple contacts between Trump associates and Russia during the campaign and transition period and revealed efforts by several to conceal those communications.

Greece votes to recognize North Macedonia

Associated Press

ATHENS, Greece — Greek lawmakers ratified an agreement Friday to end a nearly three-decadel long dispute over neighboring Macedonia’s name, a landmark vote intended to clear the small country that will be renamed North Macedonia on the path to NATO membership.

The deal passed with 153 votes in the 300-member Greek Parliament, two more than needed. It had faced fierce opposition and cost Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras his parliamentary majority after a right-wing partner in the governing coalition quit in protest.

Tsipras’ left-wing Syriza party holds 145 seats in parliament; independent lawmakers provided the votes needed for ratification.

Under the deal, Macedonia will change its name to North Macedonia, and Greece will drop its objections to the country joining NATO and, eventually, the European Union.

Friday’s vote came after three days of acrimonious parliamentary debate and numerous street protests, some of which turned violent.

Scores of protesters who braved torrential rain and driving wind outside parliament chanted “traitors” as the lawmakers voted inside.

Greece has long argued that use of the term Macedonia implied territorial claims on its own northern province of the same name. The issue has been a contentious one for decades and has whipped up nationalist and patriotic sentiment in both countries.

Opposition was particularly fierce in the northern Greek region of Macedonia, which borders the former Yugoslav republic that claimed the same name after declaring independence in 1991. Critics claimed the deal signs away their identity and a cultural heritage dating back to Alexander the Great more than 2,300 years ago.

Asylum-seekers must now wait in Mexico

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — The Trump administration on Friday started forcing some asylum-seekers to wait in Mexico while their cases wind through U.S. courts, an official said, launching what could become one of the more significant changes to the immigration system in years.

The changes were expected to be introduced at San Diego’s San Ysidro border crossing, according to a U.S. official familiar with the plan who spoke on condition of anonymity Thursday because it was not yet publicly announced. San Ysidro is the nation’s busiest crossing and the choice of asylum-seekers who arrived in Tijuana, Mexico, in November in a caravan of more than 6,000 mostly Central American migrants.

The policy, which is expected to face a legal challenge, may

be expanded to other crossings. It does not apply to children traveling alone or to asylum-seekers from Mexico.

The details were finalized during bilateral talks in Mexico City over the last few days. It calls for U.S. authorities to bus asylum-seekers back and forth to the border for court hearings in downtown San Diego, including an initial appearance within 45 days.

The Trump administration will make no arrangements for them to consult with attorneys, who may visit clients in Tijuana or speak with them by phone.

U.S. officials will begin processing only about 20 asylum claims a day at the San Diego crossing but plan to ramp up to exceed the number of claims processed now, which is up to 100 a day, the official said.

The policy could severely strain Mexican border cities.

U.S. border authorities fielded 92,959 “credible fear” claims — an initial screening to have asylum considered — during a recent 12-month period, up 67 percent from a year earlier.

While illegal crossings from Mexico are near historically low levels, the U.S. has witnessed a surge in asylum claims, especially from Central American families. Due largely to a court-imposed 20-day limit on detaining children, families are typically released with a notice to appear in immigration court. With a backlog of more than 800,000 cases, it can take years to settle cases.

It’s not clear if Central Americans will be deterred from seeking asylum in the U.S. if they have to wait in Tijuana, a booming city with plenty of jobs.

Some US diplomats leaving Venezuela

Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela — Some U.S. diplomats in Venezuela headed for the Caracas airport early Friday amid a political power struggle between President Nicolas Maduro and an opposition leader who has declared himself interim president.

A letter by a U.S. Embassy security officer requesting a police escort for a caravan of 10 vehicles was leaked earlier in the day and published on social media by a journalist for state-owned TV network Telesur. Its authenticity was confirmed by a U.S. official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive security arrangements.

A defiant Maduro called home all Venezuelan diplomats from the U.S. and closed its embassy in Washington on Thursday, a day after ordering all U.S. diplomats out of the country by the weekend. That followed President Donald Trump's decision to support the claim to power by opposition leader Juan Guaido.

Washington has refused to comply with Maduro's order but has ordered its nonessential staff to leave the tumultuous country, citing security concerns. The Trump administration said Maduro's order isn't legal because the U.S. no longer recognizes him as Venezuela's legitimate leader.

"They believe they have a colonial hold in Venezuela, where they decide what they want to do," Maduro said in an address broadcast live on state TV. "You must fulfill my order from the government of Venezuela."

The diplomats were likely to leave Caracas around midday on one of two daily flights to Miami by American Airlines, the last remaining U.S. carrier to serve Venezuela after Delta and United Airlines pulled out in 2017 amid a political crisis that has forced millions to flee the country.

Backed by Venezuela's military, Maduro has refused to show any hint he's ready to cede power, setting up a potentially explosive struggle.

Guaido, 35, was expected to show up for a news conference later Friday in Caracas

US backing of opposition leader gains allies but triggers painful memories

Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON — The United States has a long history of intervening in Latin America, usually with disastrous consequences and the added burden of alienating other countries.

But the Trump administration's recognition this week of an opposition leader as president of Venezuela is gathering broad support internationally and on both sides of the U.S. political divide.

President Donald Trump on Wednesday declared President Nicolas Maduro illegitimate and recognized his main opposition foe, Juan Guaido, as rightful president as tens of thousands of Venezuelans filled streets to protest the Maduro government and the socialist policies that have destroyed the economy.

Trump's decision was seconded by most of the largest countries in the hemisphere, from Argentina to Canada — but notably not Mexico. Several countries warned of U.S. interventions in the Cold War and before, and accused the United States of attempting to stage a coup.

The "now-defunct" Maduro regime "is morally bankrupt, criminally incompetent and undemocratic to the core," Secretary of State Mike Pompeo told a special session of the Organization of American States in Washington on Thursday. Pompeo hoped to expand the multilateral coalition dedicated to Maduro's ouster, but the hemisphere's principal political body proved sharply divided.

While powerhouses Brazil and Colombia, both led by right-wing governments, and Canada were solidly on board, a half-dozen Caribbean countries called for dialogue and a political solution.

Advocating regime change — or sponsoring it — has long been a feature of U.S. foreign policy in Latin America. From the 1954 CIA

coup in Guatemala that ousted a democratically elected leftist president to the 1989 U.S. military invasion of Panama to capture Gen. Manuel Noriega, U.S. presidents have toppled leaders — and installed new ones sympathetic to U.S. priorities — repeatedly.

The coalition of countries against Maduro has grown in part because several million Venezuelans have fled to neighboring states over the last few years, creating a refugee crisis.

U.S. concerns are more about strategy than human rights, however. Venezuela sits on vast oil reserves yet to be tapped. It also has served as an entry point for Russia, China and Iran to expand influence in the Western hemisphere.

Russia, especially, helped keep Maduro in power by granting him multibillion-dollar loans, investments in oil and gold mining, and by arm deals. Last year, Russia dispatched a pair of warplanes in what it described as a permanent military presence in the Americas.

Mexico was the biggest disappointment to Washington. Its previous government backed the anti-Maduro campaign, but voters last year elected a leftist president, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, and he vowed to return Mexico to an inward-looking foreign policy.

The international community's attempt to build an alternative government in Venezuela could turn very ugly.

"The international community means well, but it can't simply wish a new government into existence," said Benjamin Gedan, an expert on South America at the nonpartisan Wilson Center think tank in Washington.

Venezuela's military may yet decide to intervene. The most corrupt generals are likely to stick with Maduro, but lower-level officers and the rank and file might be willing to defect. Guaido has already offered amnesty to army officers.

amid speculation he could be arrested. The lawmaker's whereabouts have been a mystery since he was symbolically sworn in Wednesday before tens of thousands of cheering supporters, promising to uphold the constitution and rid Venezuela of Maduro's dictatorship.

Speaking from an undisclosed location, Guaido told Univision he would consider granting amnesty to Maduro and his allies if they helped return Venezuela to democracy.

"Amnesty is on the table," said Guaido, who just weeks earlier was named head of the opposition-controlled congress. "Those guarantees are for all those who are willing to side with the constitution to recover the constitutional order."

Besides the U.S., Canada, much of Latin America and many countries in Europe threw their support behind Guaido. Trump promised to use the "full weight" of U.S. eco-

nomics and diplomatic power to push for the restoration of Venezuela's democracy.

Maduro has been increasingly accused of undemocratic behavior by his opponents and has presided over skyrocketing inflation, a collapsing economy and widespread shortages of basic goods.

Russia, China, Iran, Syria, Cuba and Turkey have voiced their backing for Maduro's government.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Bobcat kittens get permanent home at zoo

WWHEELING — Two bobcat kittens found abandoned have been given a permanent home at the Oglebay Good Zoo.

The zoo in Wheeling said in a news release the two female kittens named Bobbi and Gina were found in rural Marshall County. They now are in the nursery at the zoo's veterinary and quarantine hospital.

The zoo said it's offering guests the chance to visit the kittens.

Lottery winner to use money to feed others

NC RALEIGH— A chef who cooked for President Donald Trump and former President Barack Obama said he will use his winnings in a North Carolina lottery game to feed the hungry in the Dominican Republic.

A news release from the North Carolina Education Lottery on Wednesday said Roberto Mendoza of Charlotte said he followed his mother's intuition and bought a Hit \$500 ticket at a local convenience store.

Mendoza, who won \$250,000 in the scratch-off game, said he would use the \$176,876 he took home after taxes to finish building a cafeteria in the Dominican Republic. He said he told himself when he was a teen that if he was ever in a position to give back, he would do everything he could to ensure no one else has to go hungry.

Police looking for driver who hit officer

WI MILWAUKEE— A Milwaukee police officer struck by a hit-and-run driver

had recovered from a similar situation two years ago.

Officer Alberto Figueroa, 26, was conducting a traffic stop and was out of his squad car when he was struck on Milwaukee's north side Monday night. The officer was revived by the people he had pulled over. Police are still looking for the driver who hit Figueroa.

His girlfriend, Emily Lenz, said Figueroa has multiple broken bones and internal injuries.

Figueroa was also struck by a vehicle while working at Summerfest as a motorcycle officer two years ago. His leg was badly broken in that crash.

First-graders disciplined for having butter knife

AL BIRMINGHAM— A first-grader was caught with a butter knife at an Alabama school, and officials said another first-grader encouraged her to bring it.

Birmingham City Schools spokeswoman Adrienne Mitchell tells Al.com that the girls are facing disciplinary action over the Wednesday discovery of the butter knife. Mitchell didn't say whether school officials investigating the girls' actions had determined what the girls planned to do with the knife.

She said a teacher saw the knife and immediately confiscated it. She said no students were in danger.

Trump shirt at gym leads to online backlash

MO TROY — The owner of an eastern Missouri fitness center is defending herself from an online firestorm that erupted when a member said he was told to

change out of a "2016 Trump for President" shirt while working out.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported that Liz Drew said Wednesday that she received complaints from African-American and Hispanic members and told Jake Talbot she would be appreciative if he didn't wear the shirt in the future at her CDY Gym in the town of Troy.

Talbot said in Facebook video Sunday that Drew told him the shirt was "offensive" and "linked to racism." Drew said that since then, she's received thousands of hateful messages. She said the aim was "keeping politics out of my gym" but lamented "it has done just the opposite."

Glowing ice sculpture lights up man's yard

MI NUNICA — A man's glowing ice sculpture is lighting up his yard in western Michigan.

Todd Pilczuk tells MLive.com he was inspired by YouTube videos of similar creations to make the sculpture outside his home in Nunica using PVC pipe, a sprinkler head and cables connected to the ground.

Pilczuk tells WXMI-TV it took him about two days to make.

LED lights make the sculpture glow different colors at night. He said the ice on the roughly 10-foot-tall structure has grown to more than 15-foot tall since the weekend.

New crayfish species named after professor

WV WEST LIBERTY — A biology professor who studies crayfish now has a new

species named after him.

West Liberty University said in a news release that the blue, burrowing crayfish species is named after professor Zachary Loughman. The statement said the new species is found only in West Virginia.

The statement said a scientific paper about the new species was published in the latest issue of the Journal of Natural History. Among the numerous authors of the paper are two of Loughman's former students.

The paper said Loughman's work has contributed greatly to the understanding of Appalachian crayfish species.

Officials: Wild turkeys are being over-hunted

SC COLUMBIA — State wildlife officials said wild turkeys in the state are being over-hunted.

The State reported wildlife officials said the issue lies with legislation that extended the turkey hunting season four years ago despite the bird's plummeting population.

Legislators said Wednesday that the 2015 law that extended the turkey hunting season by three weeks also included a tougher bag limit in an attempt to help the turkey population. But Natural Resources and the National Wild Turkey Federation said the law had the opposite effect.

Wildlife agency gave legislators a four-year study this month that said the hunting season needs to be pushed back as birds are now being killed in prime mating season.

Sen. Chip Campsen said he plans to introduce legislation to adjust the season.

From wire reports

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Reporting
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and Military News

NBA's Kings taking aim at postseason

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Dave Joergler sized up Sacramento's situation in the summer and decided there was a need for speed.

Never mind that his past doesn't scream run and gun. He was one of the coaches who oversaw the Grizzlies' grit-and-grind era in Memphis, and disagrees that everyone needs to play fast even in this era of exploding offenses in the NBA.

But you don't put the ball in De'Aaron Fox's hands and tell him to walk it up the floor.

So these Kings would have to push the pace.

"It's what best fits us," Joergler said. "About two weeks before the season started, I'd worked on it all summer trying to figure out how can I develop all these guys at the same time, the young guys, and made the priority list, and the list for me was De'Aaron Fox. And I think he can be great. And how do we best use his skills, and that is to play fast and to play open."

Maybe the Kings will keep

right on running until they've ended the longest current playoff drought in the NBA.

They are at least in the race, sitting two games behind the eighth and final playoff spot in the deep Western Conference despite consecutive losses during a six-game road trip.

Sacramento has ridden Fox's speed and Buddy Hield's shooting to a 24-24 record after winning just 27 games last season. The Kings haven't made the postseason since 2006, and perhaps it's asking too much to break through behind starting guards who are in just their second and third seasons as pros.

"Nah, I think that's what this league is now," said veteran Iman Shumpert. "It's becoming a younger league. Younger, faster. You've got to be able to shoot the ball better. That's what the league is changing into. It works in their favor."

Once Joergler handed the keys to Fox, he had to build a lineup and system to complement him. He figured Hield, the former college player of the year the Kings acquired at

the 2017 All-Star break when general manager Vlade Divac traded center DeMarcus Cousins to New Orleans, would get more open looks in transition. Center Willie Cauley-Stein would be an ideal pick-and-roll partner in the halfcourt. They would be surrounded by shooters to space the floor.

It's worked so well that the Kings lead the league in fast-break points per game and are ranked second in pace, defined by a team's number of possessions per 48 minutes.

"It's very rare a team jumps off the video screen like they do, their athleticism does. I think they're one of the most athletic teams in the league," Brooklyn Nets coach Kenny Atkinson said. "They're playing at a pace rarely seen in this league. Their speed is impressive."

And it's fun to watch. The Kings hit 20 three-pointers — Hield made eight — to Golden State's 21 in falling just short against the NBA champion Warriors in a Jan. 5 loss, and they've rang up 140 points in multiple games for the first time in 30 years. Viewership

for their games on NBC Sports California is up 17 percent from the same point last season.

Of course, playing fast doesn't help the defense, and the Kings' top-10 scoring offense is offset by a bottom-five defense that allows a little more per game for the season than Sacramento averages.

"Yeah, it's hard to serve both, to be a team that gets the other team to play deep into the clock," Joergler said. "I'd rather they just hurry up and shoot it, and I think our guys would too so we could get up and down the floor a little bit."

The Kings have been slowed down on their trip, and Fox was given a night off in Toronto on Tuesday to recharge. Hield, who gave them the lone win so far with a three-pointer in the final second at Detroit, said he can feel that Sacramento is struggling to play at its preferred pace from earlier in the season. But he said that's correctable.

"Do what we've been doing from the beginning," he said. "Just play free and just play for each other, and have fun."

NBA roundup

Curry scores 38 points as Warriors put away Wizards

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Stephen Curry scored 38 points, local product Kevin Durant had 21 and the Golden State Warriors hammered the ball inside to beat the Washington Wizards 126-118 Thursday night for their season-high ninth consecutive victory.

The two-time defending NBA champions put up 70 points in the paint after shooting 1-for-6 from the outside in the first quarter. Curry was at the forefront of Golden State's drive-the-paint strategy as he made just two of his eight three-point attempts and was 12-for-16 inside the arc.

Durant, from nearby Suitland, Md., was 9-for-18 from

the floor.

Center DeMarcus Cousins had 17 points in 24 minutes in his third game with the Warriors since missing almost a full year with a ruptured left Achilles tendon. Cousins was a matchup nightmare in the post against Washington, which went with a small lineup for most of the night.

Trevor Ariza led the Wizards with a season-high 27 points and Bradley Beal had 22 points as their two-game winning streak came to an end.

Thunder 122, Pelicans 116: Russell Westbrook posted his NBA-leading 15th triple-double of the season and host Oklahoma City beat injury-depleted New Orleans.

Westbrook finished with 23 points, 17 rebounds and 16 assists for the 119th triple-double of his career. The Thunder improved to 10-5 this season when he gets one.

Paul George had 23 points and 11 rebounds, and Steven Adams added 20 points and 13 rebounds for Oklahoma City, which won its fourth straight.

Trail Blazers 120, Suns 106: Damian Lillard scored 24 points, CJ McCollum and Jake Layman added 20 apiece and visiting Portland pulled away in the second half to hand short-handed Phoenix its sixth straight loss.

The Trail Blazers beat Phoenix for the ninth straight time. Portland has won four of five

and eight of 11 overall.

Devin Booker scored 27 points for the Suns, but only nine after the first quarter. Kelly Oubre Jr. added 18 on 6-for-18 shooting. Dragan Bender, forced into the starting center role due to injuries, had 17.

Timberwolves 120, Lakers 105: Karl-Anthony Towns had 27 points and 12 rebounds to help visiting Minnesota beat Los Angeles.

Andrew Wiggins added 23 points and Jerryd Bayless scored 16 off the bench for the Timberwolves, who have won three straight.

Rajon Rondo had 15 points, 13 assists and six rebounds, but the Lakers lost their third in a row.

James, Antetokounmpo named captains

Associated Press

LeBron James of the Los Angeles Lakers is a captain and an All-Star starter — again.

Giannis Antetokounmpo of the Milwaukee Bucks will choose his own teammates as the other captain.

And Hornets guard Kemba Walker is about to make his first All-Star start, on his home floor in Charlotte.

While there were perhaps mild surprises, there were no real stunners during Thursday night's unveiling of the starters for the NBA All-Star Game that will be played in Charlotte on Feb. 17. James and Antetokounmpo are captains, their perk for being the leading vote-getters out of the Western and Eastern Conferences, and nine of this year's 10 starters have been chosen to begin All-Star Games in the past.

Walker is the lone exception, and broke into a smile when realizing he was a pick.

"It's kind of surreal," Walker told TNT during the broadcast to announce the starters.

The starting guards from the East are Boston's Kyrie Irving and Walker. The East frontcourt picks were Antetokounmpo, Toronto's Kawhi Leonard and Philadelphia's Joel Embiid. From the West, Stephen Curry and reigning NBA MVP James Harden were the picks at guard, with James, Golden State's Kevin Durant and Oklahoma City's Paul George getting the frontcourt spots.

"I had a lot of doubt coming into my early career about just even being an elite point guard in this league," Walker said. "So for me to become an All-Star for two straight years and then now to become an All-Star starter most definitely proves the doubters wrong. So this is an unbelievable moment in my career."

James, who has been out for a month with a groin injury but is nearing a return, extended his own record by getting picked as a starter for the 15th consecutive year. He was also a captain last year in the first

usage of this captain's-choice format — and just like last year, James will have the No. 1 pick when he and Antetokounmpo get together on Feb. 7 to choose their 12-man teams.

The Bucks, off to an NBA-best 34-12 start, were predictably thrilled that Antetokounmpo earned one of the captaincies.

"It speaks to how incredible of a player he is, how much excitement he creates for fans and people want to follow him and watch him and I guess vote for him in this case," said Bucks coach Mike Budenholzer, who currently is the front-runner to coach one of the two All-Star teams. "It's just well-deserved."

Reserves will be announced Jan. 31, based on the selections made by NBA coaches. From there, James and Antetokounmpo will choose their rosters on Feb. 7, with conference affiliations irrelevant.

All-Star starters are chosen by a weighted combination of voting from fans, media and NBA players. Among the notable snubs based on who the

fans want to see: Dallas rookie Luka Dončić, second in the West frontcourt voting; Minnesota's Derrick Rose, second in the West guard voting; and Miami guard Dwyane Wade, who fans voted second among East guards in his 16th and final NBA season.

Wade is one of four still-active past All-Star MVPs waiting to see if an All-Star nod is coming. The others are Houston's Chris Paul, Oklahoma City's Russell Westbrook and New Orleans' Anthony Davis.

Antetokounmpo already, and understandably, seems sure that Westbrook will be a reserve pick. Westbrook and Embiid tangled in a 76ers-Thunder game last week, and sent a few pointed words in each other's direction afterward. And mindful of that, Antetokounmpo said he wants to bring the stars together.

"I'm a lover, not a fighter," Antetokounmpo said. "If I can pick Joel Embiid and Russell Westbrook on the same team, I'm going to do it."

College basketball roundup

No. 6 Spartans extend winning streak to 13 games

Associated Press

IOWA CITY, Iowa — Iowa had the crowd rocking and plenty of momentum on its side.

But sixth-ranked Michigan State had the necessary toughness, blowing past the upstart Hawkeyes in a vintage Tom Izzo performance on the road.

Cassius Winston scored 23 points, Nick Ward had 21 points with 10 rebounds and the Spartans beat No. 19 Iowa 82-67 on Thursday night, extending their winning streak to 13 games.

Matt McQuaid added three three-pointers in the second half for the Spartans (18-2, 9-0 Big Ten), who used a 24-2 run just after halftime to secure a school-record 21st consecutive league victory.

"What I've been most im-

pressed with with my team is ... they're responding to things. They don't take things personal," said Izzo, the longtime Michigan State coach. "I was pleased with how we finished the game."

Tyler Cook scored 11 points in the first four minutes of the second half to give Iowa a 50-42 lead. But he was soon matched by the unflappable Winston, who hit three threes in a row to help the Spartans retake the lead, 53-50.

Ward's three-point play pushed the run to 14-0 and put Michigan State ahead 56-50 — mere moments after it appeared Iowa might pull away.

McQuaid's three and three more points from Winston, this time at the foul line, gave the

Spartans a 66-52 edge.

"That kid is a special player," Iowa coach Fran McCaffery said of Winston. "He makes big shots in very important situations. He's really consistent at doing that. ... That's why they are where they are."

Luka Garza scored 20 points and Tyler Cook had 17 for Iowa (16-4, 5-4), which won its previous five games. The Hawkeyes entered leading the nation in free throw attempts and makes, but hit just eight.

No. 4 Gonzaga 98, Santa Clara 39: Josh Perkins had 18 points and eight assists, and every Bulldogs starter scored in double figures as visiting Gonzaga rolled past the Broncos on Thursday.

Zach Norvell Jr. added 16

points and eight rebounds, Rui Hachimura also scored 16, Corey Kispert had 13 and Brandon Clarke scored 12 points to help Gonzaga (19-2, 6-0 West Coast Conference) to its 19th straight win over Santa Clara.

No. 23 Louisville 84, No. 21 N.C. State 77: Christen Cunningham scored 17 points with five critical free throws in the final 2½ minutes, and Malik Williams added a pair from the line to finish with 14 points and help the host Cardinals outlast the Wolfpack.

Back in the Top 25 for the first time since early last season, the Cardinals (14-5, 5-1 Atlantic Coast Conference) needed scoring from everyone down the stretch to earn their fourth consecutive victory.

Djokovic reaches Aussie final

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — With every loud squeak of his blue-hued shoes, Novak Djokovic put himself in perfect position to control a point — and step closer to a record seventh Australian Open championship.

Djokovic was downright flawless right from the outset of his semifinal against an overmatched No. 28 Lucas Pouille and never relented, not for a moment, en route to a 6-0, 6-2, 6-2 victory in less than 1½ hours Friday night.

Of all the ways in which Djokovic dominated, perhaps this was the most impressive: He made a total of an unheard-of five unforced errors. And that's despite risking enough to produce 24 winners.

"Everything worked the way I imagined it before the match," Djokovic said. "And even more so."

On Sunday, the No. 1-ranked Djokovic will line up against his old rival, No. 2 Rafael Nadal, for the 53rd time on tour, eighth in a Grand Slam final.

Only Nadal, with 17, and Roger Federer, with

20, own more major titles than Djokovic, who is gaining on them: He is seeking his 15th overall and third in a row, following Wimbledon last July and the U.S. Open last September.

Djokovic leads the head-to-head series 27-25 overall, while Nadal holds a 4-3 edge in major finals. The only other time they met with the Australian Open trophy on the line, in 2012, Djokovic edged Nadal 5-7, 6-4, 6-2, 6-7 (5), 7-5 across 5 hours, 53 minutes, making it the lengthiest Grand Slam title match in history.

Given how well both men are playing at the moment, this showdown shapes up as another potential classic, unlike the two semifinals.

Nadal was superb while beating Stefanos Tsitsipas 6-2, 6-4, 6-0 on Thursday night and has yet to drop a set in the tournament.

A day later, Djokovic played as if setting out to say, "Anything you can do, I can do better."

This was Djokovic's 34th Grand Slam semifinal and he's now won his last 10. Pouille, a 24-year-old Frenchman coached by former women's No. 1 Amelie Mauresmo, was making his debut at this stage.

Mariners execs deny allegations

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Seattle Mariners general manager Jerry Dipoto and director of player development Andy McKay on Thursday strongly denied allegations from the team's former high performance director that they disparaged Latino players.

Answering questions about the allegations for the first time since they surfaced in November, Dipoto and McKay reiterated the team's stance that Lorena Martin is fabricating claims against members of the front office. Dipoto said he's embarrassed by what has happened. He denied Martin's claims while taking responsibility for hiring her.

Major League Baseball is investigating the accusations, which included a post on social media that stated Dipoto, McKay and manager Scott Servais had called Latino players "lazy, dumb and stupid."

"I hired her. At the end of the day we believe that, I guess, justice will prevail. There is an ongoing investigation I'm not going to get into," Dipoto said. "I've been at this for 30 years, I know a lot of people in the game. I'm not a sexist, nor am I a racist. The accusations that have been made are untrue. I believe that will wash out as this unfolds."

Martin was on the job for only one season in Seattle, hired away from the Los Angeles Lakers with much fanfare by Dipoto. She was let go after the 2018 season and has filed a wrongful termination lawsuit against the franchise.

Martin alleges she went to team owners John Stanton and Buck Ferguson and CEO Kevin Mather as far back as March to complain about alleged discriminatory treatment. Her lawsuit also said several Latino players complained to Martin about feeling excluded and that Dipoto took midseason steps last year to undermine the progress and mental state of star pitcher Felix Hernandez.

NHL's young scorers leading way as All-Star Game arrives

Associated Press

SAN JOSE, Calif.— It is only fitting that Connor McDavid, Auston Matthews and Nathan MacKinnon are serving as captains for this weekend's NHL All-Star game.

The three high-scoring forwards are 23 or younger. They are part of a youth movement that is taking over the NHL and will be on center stage when the league's best players gather at the Shark Tank for their annual midseason celebration.

"It's a young man's league," said Chicago forward Patrick Kane, now an elder statesman at age 30. "These guys come in and maybe in the past your prime was 26, 27 or 28. Now your prime is maybe 22, 23 or 24. It's definitely become a younger man's game. A lot of teams these days are expecting their young draft picks and younger kids to come in and help the team right away. You'll see more of these young guys

get a chance."

Scoring is on pace for its highest mark in more than two decades heading into the All-Star break, thanks in large part to some skilled youngsters who will be on display this weekend like the three All-Star captains along with the league's leading scorer, 25-year-old Nikita Kucherov of Tampa Bay, and 25-year-old Calgary star Johnny Gaudreau.

None of the league's top six scorers heading into the break has turned 26 and there are more All-Star skaters this weekend 22 and younger (11) than in their 30s (8). In all, 58 percent of the goals in the NHL this season have been scored by players 26 or younger.

"That's just the way the game is trending," Matthews said. "It seems a lot younger now, a lot faster, more speed and more skill. A lot of younger guys are coming in and making an impact immediately. That wasn't the case in years past but it's

kind of changing now. It's pretty fun to see."

The league had long been looking to increase scoring by reducing the size of goalie pads, among other rules changes, and it seems to have finally materialized. Teams head into the break averaging 3.03 goals per game, which is on pace for the highest-scoring season since the 3.14 in 1995-96, when Mario Lemieux and Wayne Gretzky were still among the league's biggest stars.

There's still a long way to go to get back to the level of the go-go 1980s, which featured a single-season team average of 4.01 goals per game in 1981-82 — the highest in the league since the end of World War II.

But there has been an 18 percent increase in scoring since the post-expansion low of 2.57 goals per game for teams in 2003-04, before a lockout canceled the following season and led to rule changes.