

Congress overrides Trump's NDAA veto

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Congress on Friday overrode President Donald Trump's veto of a defense policy bill, a first by lawmakers since he took office nearly four years ago, ensuring that the measure becomes law.

In an extraordinary New Year's Day session, the Republican-controlled Senate easily turned aside the veto, dismissing Trump's objections to the \$740 billion bill and handing him a rebuke just weeks before he leaves the White House.

Trump lashed out on Twitter, saying the Senate missed an opportunity to eliminate protections for social media platforms that he said give "unlimited power to Big Tech companies. Pathetic!!!"

Trump also slammed lawmakers for rejecting his call to increase COVID-19 relief payments to \$2,000: "Not fair, or smart!"

The 81-13 vote in the Senate on the widely popular defense bill followed an earlier 322-87 override vote in the House. The bill affirms a 3% pay raise for U.S. troops and guides defense policy, cementing decisions about troop levels, new weapons systems and military readiness, personnel policy and other military goals.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif.,

said the "sweeping and overwhelmingly bipartisan votes" in the House and Senate "delivered a resounding rebuke to President Trump's reckless assault on America's military and national security."

Trump's veto of the National Defense Authorization Act, or NDAA, "would have hurt the health, financial security and safety of our service members, their families, our veterans and our allies and partners worldwide," Pelosi said.

"Instead of keeping Americans safe, the president continues to use his final moments in office to sow chaos and undermine our security," she said.

The defense bill, which now has the force of law, "looks after our brave men and women who volunteer to wear the uniform," said Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky. "But it's also a tremendous opportunity to direct our national security priorities to reflect the resolve of the American people and the evolving threats to their safety, at home and abroad. It's our chance to ensure we keep pace with competitors like Russia and China."

The Senate override was delayed after Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., objected to moving ahead until McConnell allowed a vote on the Trump-backed plan to boost COVID relief payments to \$2,000.

McConnell did not allow that vote; instead he used his parliamentary power to set a vote limiting debate on the defense measure, overcoming a filibuster threat by Sanders and Senate Democratic leader Chuck Schumer of New York.

Without a bipartisan agreement, a vote on the bill could have been delayed until Saturday night. Lawmakers, however, agreed to an immediate roll call Friday once the filibuster threat was stopped.

Trump vetoed the defense measure last week, saying it failed to limit Twitter and other social media companies he claimed were biased against him during his failed reelection campaign. Trump also opposed language that allows for the renaming of military bases that honor Confederate leaders.

Sen. Jim Inhofe, R-Okla., chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee and a close Trump ally, hailed the override vote.

"Today, the Senate sent a strong message of support to our troops," Inhofe said. "Not only does this bill give our service members and their families the resources they need, but it also makes our nation more secure — pushing back against China and Russia (and) strengthening our cyber defenses."

US tops 20M cases, most of any country

New York Daily News

The total number of confirmed COVID-19 cases in the United States topped 20 million on Friday, the most of any country according to Johns Hopkins University.

That's 24% of the planet's official cases, a sobering figure considering the U.S. is home to less than 5% of the world's population.

India has the second-largest number of confirmed cases with 10.3 million, Johns Hopkins said.

Brazil has reported 7.7 million, Russia has reported 3.2 million and France has logged 2.7 million, the university's tracking dashboard said.

COVID-19 deaths also are up in the U.S., totaling 346,687 as of Friday, or 19% of the world's cumulative coronavirus death toll.

The new data comes as health officials around the globe race to get newly approved vaccines into the arms of front-line medical personnel, nursing home residents, vulnerable patients, first responders and other essential workers.

In the U.S., the federal government missed its goal of vaccinating 20 million people by year's end as the distribution over the last three weeks hit logistical challenges.

Much of the responsibility has fallen on the shoulders of already overstretched state health departments, overcrowded hospitals

and understaffed nursing homes, experts have said.

President-elect Joe Biden criticized the Trump administration Tuesday for the vaccine rollout and vowed to accelerate the current speed once he's sworn in this month.

"The Trump administration's plan to distribute vaccines is falling behind, far behind," Biden said during his remarks from Wilmington, Del.

He said Congress would have to fund the plan to ramp up the current pace, but he also plans to use his power under the Defense Production Act to order private industry to accelerate production of the materials needed for the vaccines.

Judge dismisses suit to overturn election

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A federal judge on Friday dismissed a last-gasp lawsuit led by a House Republican that aimed to give Vice President Mike Pence the power to overturn the results of the presidential election won by Joe Biden when Congress formally counts the Electoral College votes next week.

Pence, as president of the Senate, will oversee the session Wednesday and declare the winner of the White House race.

The Electoral College this month cemented Biden's 306-232 victory, and multiple legal efforts by President Donald Trump's campaign to challenge the results have failed.

The suit named Pence, who has a largely ceremonial role in next week's proceedings, as the defendant and asked the court

to throw out the 1887 law that spells out how Congress handles the vote counting.

It asserted that the vice president "may exercise the exclusive authority and sole discretion in determining which electoral votes to count for a given State."

In dismissing the lawsuit filed by Rep. Louie Gohmert, R-Texas, and a group of Republican electors from Arizona, Texas U.S. District Judge Jeremy Kernodle, a Trump appointee, wrote that the plaintiffs "allege an injury that is not fairly traceable" to Pence, "and is unlikely to be redressed by the requested relief."

The Justice Department represented Pence in a case that aimed to find a way to keep his boss, President Donald Trump, in power.

In a court filing in Texas on Thursday, the department said the plaintiffs "have

sued the wrong defendant" — if, in fact, any of those suing actually have "a judicially cognizable claim."

The department said, in effect, that the suit objects to long-standing procedures laid out in law, "not any actions that Vice President Pence has taken," so he should not be the target of the suit.

"A suit to establish that the Vice President has discretion over the count, filed against the Vice President, is a walking legal contradiction," the department argued.

Trump, the first president to lose a re-election bid in almost 30 years, has attributed his defeat to widespread voter fraud.

But a range of nonpartisan election officials and Republicans has confirmed there was no fraud in the November contest that would change the results of the election.

DOD puts F-35's full-rate production on hold

Bloomberg

The Pentagon has put a decision on approving full-rate production of Lockheed Martin Corp.'s F-35 on indefinite hold, as officials remain unable to say when the fighter jet will be ready for combat testing that's been delayed repeatedly since 2017.

The most recent of many milestones for a full production decision on the \$398 billion program — "no later than March" — has been scrapped by Ellen Lord, the Defense Department's undersecretary for acquisition and sustainment.

"Technical challenges and the impact of COVID-19" have delayed preparation of the simulation facility where the sophisticated testing of the costliest U.S. weapons system will be conducted, Jessica Maxwell, Lord's spokeswoman, said in a statement. She said a new date would be "based on an independent technical review."

That means it will be months into President-elect Joe Biden's

administration before his new team at the Pentagon has all the information it will need to make a decision on the F-35's full-rate production, the most lucrative phase for Bethesda, Md.-based Lockheed.

Whenever the testing occurs, it will take an additional two to three months to transfer and analyze the data and then draft a final report for delivery to Pentagon leaders and Congress. The report is mandated by law before a decision.

More than 600 of the F-35 program's potential 3,200 aircraft already have been delivered, and the fighter is in use by the military in nine nations, including the U.S. Air Force and Marine Corps. But it still hasn't demonstrated its effectiveness against the most challenging Russian and Chinese air defense systems and aircraft. That will be measured in a sophisticated on-ground simulator at Patuxent River Naval Air Station in Maryland.

Iran plans to resume 20% uranium enrichment

Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Iran said Saturday it plans to enrich uranium up to 20% at its underground Fordo nuclear facility "as soon as possible," pushing its program a technical step away from weapons-grade levels as it increases pressure on the West over the tattered atomic deal.

The move comes amid heightened tensions between Iran and the U.S. in the waning days of the administration of President Donald Trump, who unilaterally withdrew America from Tehran's nuclear deal in 2018.

That set in motion an escalating series of incidents capped by a U.S. drone strike that killed a top Iranian general in Baghdad a year ago, an anniversary Sunday that has American officials now worried about possible retaliation by Iran.

Iran's decision to begin enriching to 20% a decade ago nearly brought an Israeli strike targeting its nuclear facilities,

tensions that only abated with the 2015 atomic deal. A resumption of 20% enrichment could see that brinksmanship return.

Even Ali Akbar Salehi, the U.S.-educated head of the civilian Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, offered a military analogy to describe his agency's readiness to take the next step.

"We are like soldiers and our fingers are on the triggers," Salehi told Iranian state television. "The commander should command and we shoot. We are ready for this and will produce (20% enriched uranium) as soon as possible."

Iran's decision comes after its parliament passed a bill, later approved by a constitutional watchdog, aimed at hiking enrichment to pressure Europe into providing sanctions relief.

It also serves as pressure ahead of the inauguration of U.S. President-elect Joe Biden, who has said he is willing to re-enter the nuclear deal.

Chicago ends '20 with 769 homicides

Associated Press

CHICAGO — The number of homicides and shootings in Chicago spiked dramatically in 2020, ending with more bloodshed than in all but one year in more than two decades, statistics released by police on Friday revealed.

After three years of falling homicide totals, 2020 ended with 769 homicides — 274 more than the previous year and the most since the 784 homicides in 2016.

The latest shooting victim figures told the same story, with the year ending with 4,033 shooting victims compared with 2,598 the year before. And it never let up, as is illustrated by the fact that in December,

there were 50 homicides — 19 more than occurred in December 2019.

None of these numbers come as a surprise, as the year unfolded with news reports about violence that often included the word “deadliest,” such as after Memorial Day weekend, the deadliest in five years. Then a few days later, May 31, ended with more homicides — 18 — than in any single day in memory.

Chicago was not alone. During that weekend in particular, which came after the death of George Floyd after being forcibly detained by Minneapolis police, cities across the United States witnessed spasms of violence.

The year ended in Detroit, Washington, D.C., New York, Milwaukee and other cities with more killings than the year before. The same held true in smaller cities, including Grand Rapids, Mich., and Rockford, Ill..

Chicago, the nation's third-largest city, saw hundreds more homicides than either New York or Los Angeles.

Law enforcement officials and experts around the U.S. have pointed to social and economic upheaval caused by the COVID-19 virus, public sentiment toward police following Floyd's death and a historic shortage of jobs and resources in poorer communities as contributing factors.

Fed employees get 1% raise in Trump order

The Washington Post

Almost all federal employees will receive a 1% raise under an order President Donald Trump issued late Thursday that ends months of back-and-forth over pay for the 2.1 million executive branch workers.

The executive order finalizes Trump's original proposal early in 2020 for a 1% boost for employees under the General Schedule pay system, which applies to most white-collar federal employees.

The increase, to take effect Sunday with the start of the first biweekly federal pay period of the year, will be paid across the board to General Schedule employees, in contrast with the previous raises paid under the Trump administration, which varied some-

what by locality.

While a separate pay system, also locality-based, applies to blue-collar employees, for many years their increases have been capped at the local General Schedule amount. The budget bill that Trump signed into law Sunday continued that policy for 2021.

That measure took no position regarding a raise, in effect backing the 1% amount in Trump's budget proposal in February. Under the complex federal pay law, if no number is enacted into law by the end of a year, the White House's proposed raise takes effect automatically.

However, the outcome was uncertain because the administration in the meantime

had advocated for a freeze, citing “budgetary constraints and the recent, pandemic-related impacts on non-Federal labor markets.”

The raise will not apply to senior political appointees nor to U.S. Postal Service employees, whose pay is determined in bargaining.

A separate cost-of-living adjustment of 1.3% will be paid to most federal retirees effective this month, the same increase going to Social Security beneficiaries and military retirees. That increase was determined in October based on an inflation measure.

The executive order also finalizes a 3% raise for active-duty military personnel contained in the recently enacted budget bill, effective Jan. 1.

Biden's Treasury pick made over \$7M in speaking fees

Associated Press

REHOBOTH BEACH, Del. — President-elect Joe Biden's choice to be treasury secretary, Janet Yellen, collected more than \$7 million in speaking fees over the past two years from major financial firms and tech giants including Citigroup, Goldman Sachs and Google, according to disclosure forms filed as part of her nomination.

Yellen's was among three financial disclosures turned in by Biden transition officials that were made public on Thursday by the Office of Government Ethics. In a separate filing, Yellen listed firms and banks where she had received speaking fees and said she intended to “seek written authorization”

from ethics officials to “participate personally and substantially” in matters involving them.

Yellen was the Federal Reserve chair from 2014 to 2018. She took in the speaking fees in 2019 and 2020.

Her selection by Biden to lead the Treasury Department has been cheered by progressive Democrats, who support Yellen's work as a labor economist who has long prioritized combating economic inequality. Since her nomination was announced, Yellen has pledged to work to fight systemic racism and climate change.

But receiving steep payments from Wall Street bankers and other powerful corpora-

tions could become an issue as her nomination works its way through a closely divided Senate. Hillary Clinton faced criticism from the left-wing of the Democratic Party while running for president in 2016 for having received lucrative speaking fees at Wall Street firms.

Also released Thursday were disclosure forms from Biden's choice to be secretary of state, Antony Blinken, who detailed his work at a consulting firm he co-founded, WestExec Advisors, LLC. They show that Blinken was paid more than \$1.1 million and has entered into an agreement to sell his equity interest in the firm, where he advised clients including Bank of America and Facebook.

Kansas City area has worst virus month

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY — December was the deadliest month of the coronavirus pandemic in the Kansas City area, where an average of 11 people died each day from COVID-19.

The Kansas City metropolitan area recorded 342 COVID-19 deaths through Dec. 30, the Kansas City Star reported. All told, 1,353 area residents have died from the virus since the onset of the pandemic. The metro area includes Kansas City and Jackson, Clay and Platte counties in Missouri and Johnson and Wyandotte counties in Kansas.

In Missouri, the virus has claimed 5,519 lives, including 28 new deaths reported Thursday by the state Department of Health and Senior Services. The state also cited 3,714 new confirmed cases, bringing the total to 392,570 since the pandemic began.

Hospitalization numbers have improved over the past couple of weeks, but experts worry another surge could follow holiday gatherings. The health department said inpatient bed capacity statewide was at 29%, and intensive care unit bed capacity was at 25%.

Utah

SALT LAKE CITY — Less than a quarter of the 127,375 doses of the COVID-19 vaccines reportedly received in Utah have been used to vaccinate health care providers and long-term care facility residents and staff as of the end of the year, Deseret News reported.

“The initial rollout of the vaccine has been slow, slower than anticipated, slower than we wanted,” said Rich Lakin, immunization program director with the Utah Department of Health. “We hope to be at a much faster pace in the next 15 days.”

Utah is already starting to speed up the process, health department spokesperson Tom Hudachko said Thursday.

More than 6,000 doses were reportedly administered in Utah on Thursday, double the daily increases earlier in the week.

New York

NEW YORK — The New York City Sheriff's Department shut down a series of illegal New Year's Eve parties for violating coronavirus restrictions, operating without a liquor license and other infractions, authorities announced Friday.

Among them: More than 300 people gathered Thursday night for karaoke and danc-

ing at an illegal bottle club on 58th Street in Queens, the department said on Twitter.

Five people were charged with offenses including violating emergency orders that ban indoor gatherings, providing alcohol without a liquor license and obstructed egress.

Illinois

CHICAGO — The one-day death toll from the coronavirus pandemic climbed by 157 in Illinois and another 7,201 confirmed and probable COVID-19 cases have been reported, the state's health department announced Friday.

In a news release the Illinois Department of Public Health said the latest one day totals bring the number of deaths since the pandemic began in 2020 to 16,647 and the number of cases climbing to 970,590.

With the last totals of 2020 counted, Illinois had for the year more COVID-19-related deaths than all but five states in the nation.

Louisiana

BATON ROUGE — With the announcement that Louisiana soon will allow people aged 70 and older to get the coronavirus vaccine, residents clamoring for the immunizations have hurried to pharmacies trying to receive a shot, even though those vaccinations don't begin until Monday and will require a scheduled appointment.

The Louisiana Department of Health said Friday it has received multiple reports of people who meet the new, expanded criteria showing up at pharmacies, overwhelming pharmacies' phone lines and even calling some hospitals trying to get vaccinated days before doses are available.

Health department spokeswoman Aly Neel stressed that only a limited supply of 10,000 Moderna vaccine doses will be available next week for those newly eligible.

Iowa

DES MOINES — A federal judge has rejected an argument by Tyson Foods that it is not liable in the death of a worker in Iowa because it was following federal guidance when it kept meatpacking plants open during the coronavirus pandemic.

Tyson was sued in August by the family of Isidro Fernandez, who worked at the company's plant in Waterloo, after he died April 26 from complications of COVID-19.

More than 1,000 Tyson workers tested positive for the virus in May and at least six died. The families of Fernandez and at least three other employees who died claim in

lawsuits that the company was negligent in how it reacted to the pandemic.

Vermont

STAMFORD — The Vermont town of Stamford has voted to overturn in its community Gov. Phil Scott's emergency orders issued with the intention of protecting the state during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The select board of the town of about 800 people along the Massachusetts border voted 3-2 Tuesday to “terminate” the governor's restrictions.

The three board members in favor of the idea cite a section of Vermont law that they believe allows them to reject the governor's order.

Select board member Daniel Potvin said during the meeting that quarantine requirements, restrictions on large family or public gatherings, and face mask requirements “violate the constitution” in part because they were imposed without normal due process of law.

Arizona

PHOENIX — Arizona health care leaders say hospitals may soon have to make tough decisions about the treatment of COVID-19 patients amid surging cases that are crowding intensive care units.

The state's largest hospital chain, Phoenix-based Banner Health, suspended elective surgeries starting Friday to free up room for treating COVID-19 patients as new records for infections and hospitalizations are being set regularly.

Some of its hospitals are among those sending away ambulance transports or halting transfers from other hospitals, while still accepting walk-in patients needing emergency care.

Florida

KEY WEST — A local curfew muted the New Year's celebration in Key West, forcing the festivities to end well before midnight.

The New Year's Eve Shoe Drop took place a little early in the back courtyard at Bourbon Street Pub. At 9 p.m. sharp, partygoers watched the 23rd annual “drop” of a female impersonator in a large replica of a woman's red high heel shoe as organizers decreed it was midnight somewhere in the world.

The complex sold tickets to the private event to limit revelers, who were seated to maintain social distancing, the organizers said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Fake teen doctor arrested again for fraud, theft

FL WEST PALM BEACH — A 23-year-old Florida man who posed as a doctor and spent time in prison as a teenager, was arrested again on charges of fraud and grand theft, police said.

According to police, Malachi Love-Robinson asked clients to send money to his personal bank account rather than to the shipping company he worked for. He is accused of taking over \$10,000 that belonged to the company.

Patients told investigators Love-Robinson claimed he held several degrees, including a Ph.D. and an M.D.

Scientists find slope with tsunami potential

AK ANCHORAGE — Alaska scientists have found a second slope that has the potential to create a landslide or a destructive tsunami to its surrounding area.

The slope in the Prince William Sound area is next to a previously discovered slope that Alaska Department of Natural Resources Division of Geological and Geophysical Surveys Geohydrologist Ronald Daanen said is much larger, KTUU-TV reported.

But Daanen said the smaller slope could create a tsunami just as big.

3 youths arrested in connection with abandoned mall fire

KS TOPEKA — An 18-year-old and two juveniles have been taken into custody in connection with a fire at an abandoned Topeka mall that authorities believe was intentionally set.

The fire at White Lakes Mall caused an estimated \$100,000 in damage.

The mall was built on the site of the former White Lakes Country Club and opened in 1964. It once was anchored by an 85,000-square-foot Sears store and a 52,300-square-foot J.C. Penney store.

Neighbors keep eye out for fierce rodent

NY NEW YORK — Residents of a Queens neighborhood are dealing with a squirrelly threat.

Denizens of the New York City borough's Rego Park neighborhood said an aggressive squirrel has jumped on them and bitten them in the past several weeks, WCBS-TV reported.

Micheline Frederick pointed to a bruise on her wrist where she said the squirrel landed on her and then sank its teeth into her fingers and hand.

"We're wrestling in the snow and there's blood everywhere," Frederick said.

"This was an MMA cage match! And I lost!" she added.

Man rescues injured bald eagle during bird count

KY LOUISVILLE — A Kentucky man participating in an annual bird-watching hike helped rescue an injured bald eagle, The Courier Journal reported.

Eric Nally was participating in the Christmas Bird Count at the Bernheim Arboretum and Research Forest when he spotted the eagle in a creek, he said.

Nally thought the bird was dead and feared it had been shot, but when he climbed down to the creek bed for a closer look, the bird turned its head to look at him.

The bald eagle was found to be suffering from lead poisoning and had internal damage to its abdomen.

Man threatens church after mask request

MO JENNINGS — A former church employee was charged with threatening to "shoot up" the church after he was asked to wear a mask, according to St. Louis County authorities.

Timothy Percy Taylor, 29, was fired from Radiant Life in Christ Church in Jennings after he became upset when a co-worker asked him to wear a mask inside the build-

ing, KSDK-TV reported.

The co-worker told police Taylor threatened to "pop" the employee and "shoot up the whole church," according to court documents.

When Taylor was arrested across the street from the church, he had three loaded firearms in his possession, according to the charging documents.

Driver, passenger abandoned rolling truck on highway

CA MENIFEE — Police are searching for a man they said drove a stolen pickup through a fence and onto a Southern California highway in the wrong direction, where he and a passenger leaped from the moving vehicle and allowed it to roll until it struck an oncoming van.

The driver of the van, a 55-year-old woman, was hospitalized with major injuries following the crash in Riverside County, California Highway Patrol Officer Mike Lassig said.

The Dodge Ram pickup was initially pursued by Hemet police when the driver turned off the headlights and crashed through a barb-wire fence and onto the freeway's northbound lanes traveling south, Lassig said.

Man jailed after using extinguisher to dry off

FL TALLAHASSEE — A Florida man who wasn't on fire was arrested after police said he sprayed himself with a fire extinguisher in an attempt to dry himself off.

Florida State University police found David Mann, 54, on the top floor of a parking garage with an extinguisher and covered in powder, the Tallahassee Democrat reported.

Mann told police he had been drinking and fell asleep and then fell in water when he woke up. He said he was using the extinguisher to try to dry himself off, police said.

He was charged with interfering with firefighter equipment, a third-degree felony punishable by up to five years in prison.

— From The Associated Press

STARS AND STRIPES®

Single source convenience, reliably independent. Visit www.stripes.com.

Reporting
World, National
and Military News

CFP title game: It's Tide vs. Buckeyes

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Top-ranked Alabama has two Heisman Trophy finalists and is in the College Football Playoff championship game for a record fifth time. Ohio State is back for the first time since winning the inaugural title in the CFP era.

After the SEC champion Crimson Tide rolled past Notre Dame 31-14 in a Rose Bowl played deep in the heart of Texas, the No. 3 Buckeyes of the Big Ten beat Clemson 49-28 in the other CFP semifinal at the Sugar Bowl on Friday night. The Tigers were trying, like Alabama, to get to the title game for the fifth time in the seven seasons of the four-team playoff.

So it's a matchup of storied programs playing Jan. 11 in suburban Miami to determine the champion of this most unusual season played in the middle of a pandemic.

They haven't met since the first year of the CFP at the end of the 2014 regular season. Alabama was the top seed in that first four-team playoff, but Ohio State beat the Tide 42-35 in the semifinal Sugar Bowl. The

Buckeyes went on to win the national title over Oregon that year, but had since lost twice to Clemson in the semifinals.

While this season's CFP has provided a third consecutive title-game matchup of undefeated teams, this one is a little different.

Alabama has played 12 games, getting through a conference-only regular season before holding off Florida 52-46 in the SEC championship game and then winning the relocated Rose Bowl. That semifinal was moved from Pasadena because of COVID-19 restrictions in California that would have kept family — or any fans — from attending the game.

Ohio State's overwhelming win in the Sugar Bowl was only its seventh game this season.

"We're a great program. We have a lot of pride. Ohio State Buckeyes means something," coach Ryan Day said. "I don't know how many games we had to play to get here. All we had to do is play and we had to win once. That's really what mattered."

The Buckeyes had three regular-season games canceled be-

cause of virus issues after the Big Ten didn't start its season until late October. The league altered its rules to let them represent the East Division in the conference championship game after only five regular-season games, instead of the six that had been initially mandated.

This will be the fifth meeting overall between the Tide and Buckeyes, whose only win in the series was that CFP semifinal six seasons ago. Their first game was the Sugar Bowl on Jan. 2, 1978, a 35-6 Alabama win in a matchup of legendary coaches Bear Bryant and Woody Hayes.

Alabama will be going for its sixth national title in coach Nick Saban's 14th seasons, and third in the CFP era. The early lines had the Tide favored by a touchdown over Ohio State.

"I don't know how it's going to end, but I do know one thing: we're going to go out there and play our butts off, play our hardest," Ohio State quarterback Justin Fields said after throwing six for TDs in the Sugar Bowl.

DeVonta Smith caught three

of fellow Heisman Trophy finalist Mac Jones' four touchdown passes in Alabama's win in the Rose Bowl played at the home of the NFL's Dallas Cowboys. Smith caught seven passes for 130 yards, while Jones completed 25 of 30 passes for 297 yards.

"Smitty has done as much for our team as any player could do for any team," Saban said.

The Heisman Trophy will be presented in a virtual ceremony on Tuesday night.

"Whatever happens, happens," Smith said. "I mean, I'm looking forward to the next game."

Smith has 105 catches for 1,641 yards and 20 touchdowns, matching the SEC single-season record and extending his Alabama career mark to 43 TDs. Jones has completed 77% of his passes (275-for-357) for 4,036 yards and 36 TDs.

In his seven games, Fields has completed 73.4% of his passes (141-for-192) for 1,906 yards and 21 touchdowns. Chris Olave, who had two TDs in the Sugar Bowl, has 42 catches for 660 yards and seven TDs, and Garrett Wilson 41 catches for 683 yards and six TDs.

No. 11 Georgia hands No. 6 Cincinnati its first loss

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Jack Podlesny told Georgia coaches before Friday's Peach Bowl that he felt confident attempting field goals from as long as 55 yards — a full 4 yards past his career best.

Podlesny made good on his claim, kicking a 53-yard field goal with three seconds remaining, and No. 11 Georgia handed No. 6 Cincinnati its only loss of the season with a dramatic 24-21 victory in the Peach Bowl.

Podlesny dropped to one knee following the career-long kick as his teammates surged onto the field. Asked what he was thinking while he was kneeling,

Podlesny said he wanted to "try to remember why I'm here. ... God is good and it's amazing to be here."

Georgia trailed 21-10 in the fourth quarter, but its defense clamped down on Desmond Ridder and Cincinnati and JT Daniels helped rally the Bulldogs with his arm. Daniels, a Southern California transfer, passed for 392 yards while improving to a perfect 4-0 in four starts for Georgia.

Podlesny's winning kick tied a Peach Bowl record for longest field goal and gave Georgia a 22-21 lead. Azeez Ojulari sacked Ridder for a safety on the final

play. It was Ojulari's third sack. Georgia tied a school record with eight sacks.

Citrus Bowl

No. 15 Northwestern 35, Auburn 19: At Orlando, Fla., Peyton Ramsey threw three touchdown passes and ran for a score, and the 15th-ranked Wildcats clamped down defensively to beat the Tigers.

Ramsey, a graduate transfer, totaled 291 yards passing and 50 yards rushing for Northwestern (7-2), which won its fourth straight bowl game. Ramaud Chiaokhiao-Brown, John Raine and Riley Lees had touchdown

catches for the Wildcats, who bounced back from an ugly loss to Ohio State on Dec. 19 in the Big Ten championship game.

It was the final game for 73-year-old Northwestern defensive coordinator Mike Hankwitz, who is retiring after a 51-year coaching career that included 400 victories at nine schools. He was the defensive coordinator for Colorado's 1990 national championship team and spent the last 13 seasons as Northwestern's coordinator.

Bo Nix threw for 292 yards for Auburn (6-5) but was often frustrated by Northwestern's defense.

Buckeyes win rematch with Clemson

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Numbers have fueled Ohio State all year.

There was 29-23, the score of last season's painful playoff loss to Clemson.

Six, the number of games the Buckeyes played in this pandemic-altered season, which a lot of people thought was too few for them to deserve a return trip to the College Football Playoff.

Then there was No. 11, where Clemson coach Dabo Swinney placed Ohio State on his ballot in the final regular-season coaches' poll.

In a rematch with Swinney's Tigers in the Sugar Bowl, Justin Fields and the Buckeyes had Clemson's number.

Fields threw six touchdown passes to outshine Trevor Lawrence, and No. 3 Ohio State buried the second-ranked Tigers 49-28 in the Sugar Bowl semifinal Friday night.

"Everybody doubting us just

pushed us a little more," Fields said.

The Buckeyes (7-0) head to the CFP title game for the first time since the inaugural playoff to face No. 1 Alabama on Jan. 11 at Hard Rock Stadium in South Florida. Ohio State beat the Crimson Tide in the semifinals on the way to the 2014 national championship.

Buckeyes coach Ryan Day called it a statement game for the program.

"I think this performance, not only by Justin, but this team, hopefully will go down in Ohio State history as a landmark game," Day said. "Because we want to go on to win the national championship. But there was a lot of tough days, a lot of tough days over the last six months."

In a matchup of quarterback prodigies from Georgia, Fields might have given the Jacksonville Jaguars something to think about with that first pick in the

NFL Draft. Lawrence is the presumptive No. 1, but Fields outplayed him on this night, going 22-for-28 for 385 yards. He set a Sugar Bowl record for TD passes and did it playing more than half the game after taking a vicious shot to the side that forced him to miss a play and spend time in the medical tent.

Lawrence was 33-for-48 for 400 yards and three total touchdowns in what is expected to be the junior's final college game.

"We were confident and prepared," he said. "This was just one of those nights."

Lawrence's final pass was intercepted, but Clemson (10-2) finished 34-2 in his starts and won a national title when he was a freshman.

The third meeting between Clemson and Ohio State in the playoff, and fourth bowl matchup since the 2013 season — all Clemson wins — was a game the Buckeyes had been pointing to-

ward ever since that 29-23 loss in the Fiesta Bowl last year.

That score was everywhere the Buckeyes turned in the Woody Hayes Athletic Center in Columbus the past year.

A chance for revenge was nearly derailed when the Big Ten canceled fall football in August because of the pandemic. An abbreviated Big Ten season caused more headaches, with the Buckeyes having three games canceled because of COVID-19 issues, including their own outbreak.

The playoff committee still liked Ohio State enough to put the Buckeyes in the final four, despite much griping from various parts of the country, including Clemson.

Clemson took a 14-7 lead in the first quarter with Lawrence and Travis Etienne running for scores.

From there it was all Buckeyes.

No. 1 Alabama rolls into CFP championship game

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — A truly untraditional Rose Bowl setting, a very common result for Alabama in the College Football Playoff.

With Heisman Trophy finalists DeVonta Smith and Mac Jones, the top-ranked Crimson Tide rolled into their fifth CFP championship game in six seasons.

Smith caught three of Jones' four touchdown passes and Najee Harris ran for 125 yards with a high-hurdling highlight in a 31-14 victory over No. 4 Notre Dame in a CFP semifinal Rose Bowl played inside about 1,400 miles from Pasadena, Calif.

"I don't think there's anything quite like the Rose Bowl, the tradition, the setting, the mountains. It's just a phenomenal experience," coach Nick

Saban said. "Wish our players had gotten that opportunity."

But Saban and the Tide (12-0, No. 1 CFP) will take yet another win in the home of the NFL's Dallas Cowboys, which the coach called one of college football's finest venues, and advancing again in the playoff.

The Tide earned a spot in the Jan. 11 championship game in suburban Miami, against No. 3 Ohio State, which beat Clemson 49-28 in the other CFP semifinal at the Sugar Bowl on Friday night.

Alabama missed the CFP last year for the only time since the four-time playoff debuted at the end of the 2014 season. The Buckeyes were the initial CFP champions, after beating the top-seeded Tide 42-35 in a semifinal that year.

Notre Dame (10-2, No. 4 CFP), in football's final four for

only the second time, has lost seven consecutive New Year's Six games since 2000.

Alabama scored TDs on its first three possessions, including a 97-yard drive on which Harris leaped over 6-foot cornerback Nick McCloud just after crossing the line of scrimmage, landed on both feet and then sprinted for a 53-yard gain before getting run out of bounds.

"I don't know why I'm surprised every time he does it. I've seen it for three years, but still, 'Geez!,'" tight end Miller Forristall said.

"I actually try to teach him not to do it, and it didn't work," Saban said, laughing. "Anyway, for a big guy, it's pretty amazing that he can do that. He's kind of got a great feel when a guy's going to try to cut him. ... When he sees that head go

down, he'll go over the top of them in a heartbeat."

Jones, who completed 25 of 30 passes for 297 yards, threw a 12-yard TD to tight end Jahleel Billingsley on the next play.

That came between drives when Smith, with 16 TD catches his last seven games, turned short passes into scores of 26 and 34 yards. Smith finished with seven catches for 130 yards, later adding a nifty toe-tapping 7-yarder in the front corner of the end zone right on the pylon.

CFP officials moved the Rose Bowl because of COVID-19 restrictions in California that would have kept family — or any fans — from attending the game at its normal home. There was a limited capacity crowd of 18,373 at AT&T Stadium, the home of the Dallas Cowboys.

Washington gets 2nd shot at division title

Associated Press

The last time Washington faced Philadelphia, the quarterbacks were Dwayne Haskins and Carson Wentz, and the Eagles were the team with playoff expectations.

"It feels like five years ago," Washington offensive coordinator Scott Turner said.

Week 1 was 3½ months ago, but everything has changed for the longtime division rivals going into the regular-season finale. Haskins has been released; Wentz was benched for Jalen Hurts; Philadelphia is eliminated from playoff contention; and Washington stands on the verge of winning the NFC East — if it can beat the Eagles on the road Sunday night.

"We understand the situation," running back J.D. McKisic said. "You can just tell guys are laser focused out there (at practice). There's not much talking and when there is, it's about football. Guys are just

ready to play."

Who plays at quarterback is still unclear between 36-year-old starter Alex Smith and December practice squad pickup Taylor Heinicke, who was taking online college classes when he got the call. Top receiver Terry McLaurin is also questionable with an ankle injury that kept him out of Washington's first chance to clinch the division, a 20-13 home loss to Carolina last week.

The challenge remains the same, only against an opponent motivated to play spoiler.

"We've got to have a no hat rule this week," Eagles coach Doug Pederson said. "We can't let opponents put division win hats on at the Linc."

Washington coach Ron Rivera has envisioned putting on NFC East champions garb since October when he benched Haskins — whom he has since released — to hand the No. 1 QB job to Kyle Allen. After Allen got hurt, the job fell to Smith, who

hadn't started an NFL game since 2018 when he broke his right leg.

Smith is 4-1 since taking over, and if he can play after missing the past two games with a strained calf in that leg that has a titanium rod in it, it's a huge advantage for Washington.

"We all depend on each other," Smith said. "Obviously, the quarterback touching the ball every play carries a lot of responsibility. A lot of people depend on you to go out there and make good decisions and be accurate with the football. That's not something that I take lightly at all. For me, it's a great responsibility and a great challenge."

Washington at 7-9 would be the third division champion with a losing record since realignment in 2002. The same goes for the 7-9 Dallas Cowboys or 6-10 New York Giants, who play Sunday afternoon, with the winner only capturing the NFC East if the Eagles ruin Washington's night.

Gibson the key: Rookie running back Antonio Gibson was a revelation for Washington with 11 touchdowns until a turf toe derailed his season. He missed two games before returning against Carolina and is questionable again.

"Hopefully we'll get him rolling and he'll be good to go Sunday and he'll give us everything he's got," Turner said.

Losing feeling: Eagles running back Miles Sanders didn't go through a losing season in high school in Pittsburgh or college at Penn State or his rookie year in the NFL, so this "super disappointed" feeling is a first for him.

"I believe that we're a great football team," said Sanders, one of nine players the Eagles ruled out with injury. "We just have to play smarter and that's all around, pre-snap penalties, situational penalties, everything. But I do believe this is a great team and I do believe better days are coming."

Lakers rally to second win over Spurs in three days

Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO — Anthony Davis had 35 points and 11 rebounds, and LeBron James added 26 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists and the Los Angeles Lakers rallied to beat the San Antonio Spurs 109-103 on Friday night.

The Lakers closed with a 9-0 run for their second victory over the Spurs in three days.

Keldon Johnson had a career-high 26 points and added 10 rebounds, and DeMar DeRozan had 23 points, nine rebounds and seven assists for San Antonio.

Suns 106, Nuggets 103: Chris Paul hit a clutch jumper with 7.3 seconds remaining after a successful coach's challenge on the other end and Phoenix beat host Denver to improve to 5-1 for the first time since 2009-10.

Deandre Ayton had 22 points and 11 rebounds, Devin Booker added 22, and Paul 21 for Phoenix, which won the night before in Utah. The red-hot Suns have won 13 of their last 14 dating to their perfect stint inside the NBA bubble.

Bucks 128, Bills 96: Giannis Antetokounmpo had 29 points, 12 rebounds and eight assists and host Milwaukee used torrid three-point shooting to blast short-handed Chicago.

Chicago played its second straight game without forwards Lauri Markkanen and Chandler Hutchison as well as guards Ryan Arcidiacono and Tomas Satoransky as part of the NBA's health and safety protocols related to COVID-19. Markkanen is the Bulls' second-leading scorer (17.3) and top rebounder (6.8).

Wizards 130, Timberwolves 109: Bradley Beal had 31 points and seven assists and visiting Washington beat Minnesota without Russell Westbrook for its first victory in six games this season.

Westbrook sat out for rest on the second game of a back-to-back, but the Wizards (1-5) didn't look like the same team that lost the night before at home to Chicago.

Malik Beasley scored 21 points for Minnesota. The Timberwolves who have lost three in a row with star center Karl-Anthony Towns missing all three games because of a dislocated left wrist.

Mavericks 93, Heat 83: Luka Doncic had season highs of 27 points and 14 rebounds for his first double-double of the season to lead host Dallas past Miami.

Jazz 106, Clippers 100: Mike Conley made seven three-pointers and scored a season-high 33 points to lead Utah past visiting Los Angeles.

Pistons 96, Celtics 93: Jeremi Grant scored 24 points and host Detroit won for the first time this season, beating Boston.

Grizzlies 108, Hornets 93: Dillon Brooks scored 21 points and undermanned Memphis beat host Charlotte.

Hawks 114, Nets 96: DeAndre Hunter scored 23 points help Atlanta beat host Brooklyn.

Trail Blazers 123, Warriors 98: Damian Lillard joined Hall of Famer Clyde Drexler as the only Portland players to score 15,000 points for the franchise, finishing with 34 as the Trail Blazers spoiled Golden State's home opener.