

DOD OKs up to 25K troops for capital

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon has authorized up to 25,000 service members to protect the nation's capital ahead of the 59th presidential inauguration, the National Guard announced Friday.

National Guard troops are deploying from all 50 states, three territories, as well as Washington, D.C., according to a National Guard Bureau news release.

The announcement comes a day after Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy authorized up to 21,000 National Guard members to come to Washington to support federal agencies with security for the inauguration Wednesday.

Last week, supporters of President Donald Trump marched on the U.S. Capitol following his speech outside the White House that reiterated claims of a stolen election. A mob of Trump supporters attacked police and broke into the Capitol Building and vandalized it, and sent con-

gressional lawmakers into lockdown. The riot delayed Congress from the official certification of President-elect Joe Biden's election victory, but lawmakers returned hours later and approved the election results.

The hourslong siege of the Capitol resulted in at least five deaths, including a Capitol police officer who was injured during the melee.

The buildup of troops in the city is due to fears of further violence ahead of Biden's inauguration.

By the end of Friday, the National Guard anticipated there will be 10,000 troops in Washington, according to a Guard official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the matter. Army Gen. Daniel Hokanson, the chief of the National Guard Bureau, said Monday that they were expecting to reach that number by Saturday.

The D.C. National Guard, which is overseeing the service members while they are deployed to Washington, would only say the

troop level is still 7,000.

McCarthy has also approved some of those troops to carry service firearms such as M4 carbines and M9 pistols for self-protection.

Troops have been given instructions on rules of engagement should there be protests in the city. However, officials on Friday did not reveal what those instructions are.

Matt Miller, the U.S. Secret Service agent in charge of the Washington field office, said Guard members are being given cards stating the rules of the federal agency to which they are assigned.

"I know for instance that there is a detail of National Guard Bureau personnel up at the United States Capitol. They are complying with, and will comport with, the United States Capitol Police's use of force model. Most of the use of force models throughout the federal and local law enforcement community are very, very similar," he said.

Iranian Guard holds anti-ship missile drill

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard conducted a drill Saturday launching anti-warship ballistic missiles at a simulated target in the Indian Ocean, state television reported, amid heightened tensions over Tehran's nuclear program and a U.S. pressure campaign against the Islamic Republic.

Footage showed two missiles smash into a target that Iranian state television described as "hypothetical hostile enemy ships" at a distance of 1,120 miles. The report did not specify the type of missiles used.

In the first phase of the drill Friday, the Guard's aerospace division launched surface-to-surface ballistic missiles and drones against "hypothetical enemy bases." Iranian state television described the drill as taking place in the country's vast central desert, the latest in a series of snap exercises called amid the escalating tensions over its nuclear program. Footage also showed

four unmanned, triangle-shaped drones flying in a tight formation, smashing into targets and exploding.

Tensions between Washington and Tehran have increased amid a series of incidents stemming from President Donald Trump's unilateral withdrawal from Iran's nuclear deal with world powers. Amid Trump's final days as president, Tehran has recently seized a South Korean oil tanker and begun enriching uranium closer to weapons-grade levels, while the U.S. has sent B-52 bombers, the USS Nimitz aircraft carrier and a nuclear submarine into the region.

In recent weeks, Iran has increased its military drills as the country tries to pressure President-elect Joe Biden over the nuclear accord, which he has said America could reenter.

Iran fired cruise missiles Thursday as part of a naval drill in the Gulf of Oman, state media reported, under surveillance of what appeared to be a U.S. nuclear submarine.

Iran's navy did not identify the submarine at the time, but on Saturday, a news website affiliated with state television said the vessel was American. Helicopter footage of the exercise released Thursday by Iran's navy showed what resembled an Ohio-class guided-missile submarine, the USS Georgia, which the U.S. Navy last month said had been sent to the Persian Gulf.

Iran has missile capability of up to 1,250 miles, far enough to reach archenemy Israel and U.S. military bases in the region. Last January, after the U.S. killed a top Iranian general in Baghdad, Tehran retaliated by firing a barrage of ballistic missiles at two Iraqi bases housing U.S. troops, resulting in brain concussion injuries to dozens of them.

Trump in 2018 unilaterally withdrew the U.S. from Iran's nuclear deal, in which Tehran had agreed to limit its uranium enrichment in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions. Trump cited Iran's ballistic missile program among other issues in withdrawing from the accord.

Feds rescind Capitol murder plot claim

Associated Press

PHOENIX — Federal prosecutors who initially said there was “strong evidence” the pro-Trump mob that stormed the U.S. Capitol last week aimed to “capture and assassinate elected officials” backed away from the allegation after the head of the investigation cautioned Friday that the probe is still in its early stages and there was no “direct evidence” of such intentions.

The accusation came in a court filing by prosecutors late Thursday in Phoenix in the case against Jacob Chansley, the Arizona man who took part in the insurrection while sporting face paint, no shirt and a furry hat with horns.

“Strong evidence, including Chansley’s own words and actions at the Capitol, supports that the intent of the Capitol rioters was to capture and assassinate elected officials in the United States Government,” a prosecutor wrote in a memo urging the judge to keep Chansley behind bars. But at a hearing for Chansley later in the day in Phoenix, another prosecutor, Todd Allison, struck the line from the memo.

Allison said the statement may very well end up being appropriate at Chansley’s trial, but said prosecutors didn’t want to mislead the court and don’t have to rely on the stricken statement to argue that he should remain in jail. Ultimately, a judge on

Friday ordered Chansley to be jailed until his trial.

Earlier on Friday, Michael Sherwin, acting U.S. attorney for the District of Columbia, backed away from the assassination claims, saying they have “no direct evidence at this point of kill, capture teams.”

Sherwin said there appears to have been confusion among some prosecutors in part because of the complexity of the investigation and number of people involved.

Prosecutors raised a similar prospect Thursday in the case of a former Air Force officer who they alleged carried plastic zip-tie handcuffs because he intended “to take hostages.”

Trump trial pending, McConnell labels it ‘vote of conscience’

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump’s impeachment trial is likely to start after Joe Biden’s inauguration, and the Republican leader, Mitch McConnell, is telling senators their decision on whether to convict the outgoing president over the Capitol riot will be a “vote of conscience.”

The timing for the trial, the first of a president no longer in office, has not yet been set. But House Speaker Nancy Pelosi made it clear Friday that Democrats intend to move swiftly on President-elect Joe Biden’s \$1.9 trillion COVID aid and economic recovery package to speed up vaccinations and send Americans relief. Biden is set to take the oath of office Wednesday.

Pelosi called the recovery package a “matter of complete urgency.”

The uncertainty of the scheduling, despite the House’s swift impeachment of Trump just a week after the deadly Jan. 6 siege, reflects the fact that Democrats do not want the Senate trial proceedings to dominate the opening days of the Biden administration.

With security on alert over the threat of more potential violence heading into the inauguration, the Senate is also moving quickly to prepare for confirming Biden’s nominee for National Intelligence Direc-

tor, Avril Haines. A committee hearing is set for the day before the inauguration, signaling a confirmation vote to install her in the position could come swiftly once the new president is in office.

Many Democrats have pushed for an immediate impeachment trial to hold Trump accountable and prevent him from holding future office, and the proceedings could still begin by Inauguration Day.

But others have urged a slower pace as the Senate considers Biden’s Cabinet nominees and the newly Democratic-led Congress considers priorities like the coronavirus plan.

Biden’s incoming White House press secretary, Jen Psaki said Friday the Senate can do both.

“The Senate can do its constitutional duty while continuing to conduct the business of the people,” she said.

Psaki noted that during Trump’s first impeachment trial last year, the Senate continued to hold hearings each day. “There is some precedent,” she said.

Trump is the only president to be twice impeached, and the first to be prosecuted as he leaves the White House, an ever-more-extraordinary end to the defeated president’s tenure.

He was first impeached by the House in 2019 over his dealings with Ukraine, but the Senate voted in 2020 to acquit.

Miller ready to leave job as defense secretary

By CAITLIN M. KENNEY

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON— Acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller, with only a few days left in the job, appears glad his short run as the Pentagon’s top leader is almost over.

“I cannot wait to leave this job, believe me,” Miller said Thursday to reporters as they were returning from a visit to U.S. Northern Command at Peterson Air Force Base, Colo.

Miller has been the acting defense secretary since Mark Esper was fired by President Donald Trump on Nov. 9. Since then, he’s conducted several domestic trips such as the recent one to NORTHCOM, as well as international travel to the Middle East, Europe, and Africa to visit with defense officials and service members.

Miller’s tenure will end Wednesday after President-elect Joe Biden’s inauguration. David Norquist, the deputy defense secretary, is expected to step in as the acting defense secretary at the request of the Biden administration, according to news reports Thursday.

Norquist is expected to oversee day-to-day operations until Lloyd Austin, Biden’s nominee to be the next defense secretary, is confirmed by the Senate. His confirmation hearing is scheduled for Tuesday.

Familiar names picked for State Department

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President-elect Joe Biden on Saturday filled out his State Department team with a group of former career diplomats and veterans of the Obama administration, signaling his desire to return to a more traditional foreign policy after four years of uncertainty and unpredictability under President Donald Trump.

Biden will nominate Wendy Sherman as deputy secretary of state and Victoria Nuland as undersecretary of state for political affairs — the second- and third-highest ranking posts, respectively. They were among the officials chosen to serve under the incoming secretary of state, Antony Blinken.

The team “embodies my core belief that

America is strongest when it works with our allies,” Biden said in a statement. He said he was confident “they will use their diplomatic experience and skill to restore America’s global and moral leadership. America is back.”

Among the others are:

■ Longtime Biden Senate aide Brian McKeon, to be deputy secretary of state for management.

■ Former senior diplomats Bonnie Jenkins and Uzra Zeya, to be undersecretary of state for arms control and undersecretary of state of democracy and human rights, respectively.

■ Derek Chollet, a familiar Democratic foreign policy hand, to be State Department counselor.

■ Former U.N. official Salman Ahmed, as director of policy planning.

■ Suzy George, who was a senior aide to former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, will be Blinken’s chief of staff.

■ Ned Price, a former Obama administration National Security Council staffer and career CIA official who resigned in protest in the early days of the Trump administration, will serve as the public face of the department, taking on the role of spokesman.

■ Jalina Porter, communications director for Rep. Cedric Richmond, D-La., who is leaving Congress to work in the White House, will be Price’s deputy.

Price and Porter intend to return to the practice of holding daily State Department press briefings, officials said.

Governors say states deceived about vaccine amounts

Associated Press

Governors bitterly accused the Trump administration Friday of deceiving the states about the amount of COVID-19 vaccine they can expect to receive as they ramp up vaccinations for senior citizens and others. But the government attributed the anger to confusion and misguided expectations on the part of the states.

Meanwhile, the race between the vaccine and the virus may be about to heat up: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warned that the new, more infectious variant first seen in Britain will probably become the dominant version in the U.S. by March.

The CDC said the variant is about 50% more contagious than the virus that is causing the bulk of cases in this country.

“We want to sound the alarm,” said Dr. Jay Butler, CDC deputy director for infectious diseases.

The clash over the pace of the government’s COVID-19 vaccine allotments threatens to escalate tensions between the Trump administration and some states over who is responsible for the relatively slow start to the vaccination drive against the scourge that has killed over 390,000 Americans.

Oregon had announced earlier this week that it would expand vaccine eligibility to roughly 760,000 residents 65 and older, as well as teachers and child care providers, because of what it said were promises that the state’s vaccine allotment would be increased. But Democratic Gov. Kate Brown

said those plans are now in disarray because of “deception on a national scale” by the administration.

Via Twitter, Brown said she was told by Gen. Gustave F. Perna, who leads Operation Warp Speed, that states will not be receiving increased shipments of vaccine from the national stockpile next week “because there is no federal reserve of doses.”

As a result of what she called “a cruel joke,” Brown said the state will now postpone vaccination of senior citizens to Feb. 8, instead of Jan. 23, and initially limit it to people 80 and older.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, a Democrat, said he was among several governors deceived by federal officials about availability of a strategic supply of doses.

NRA announces bankruptcy filing and move to Texas

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — The National Rifle Association announced Friday it has filed for bankruptcy protection and will seek to incorporate the nation’s most politically influential gun-rights group in Texas instead of New York, where a state lawsuit is trying to put the organization out of business.

The announcement came months after New York Attorney General Letitia James sued the NRA, seeking its dissolution over claims that top executives illegally diverted tens of millions of dollars for lavish personal trips, no-show contracts for asso-

ciates and other questionable expenditures.

The coronavirus pandemic has also upended the NRA, which last year laid off dozens of employees. The group canceled its national convention and scuttled fundraising. The NRA’s bankruptcy filing listed between \$100 million and \$500 million in assets and between \$100 million and \$500 million in liabilities.

Still, the NRA claimed in announcing the move that the organization was “in its strongest financial condition in years.”

The NRA filed for Chapter 11 bankrupt-

cy in federal court in Dallas and said it planned to incorporate in Texas, where records show it formed a limited liability corporation, Sea Girt LLC, in November 2020. Sea Girt LLC made a separate bankruptcy filing Friday, listing few assets and fewer than \$100,000 in liabilities.

In its filing, the NRA said its longtime leader, Executive Vice President Wayne LaPierre, made the decision to file for bankruptcy protection in consultation with a committee of three NRA officials formed in September to oversee its legal strategies.

California opens mass vaccine sites

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — California counties are opening mass vaccination centers they say can help curb the coronavirus surge that is killing more than 500 people a day in the state — but only if they can get the vaccine.

A center that can handle as many as 12,000 shots a day opened Friday at Dodger Stadium in Los Angeles but California Gov. Gavin Newsom and others said they had no idea when, if or how many doses will arrive from the federal government.

Newsom said that he and other governors were told earlier this week that a reserve supply of 50 million doses would be distributed. California has received more than 3.5 million doses of the vaccine and has administered over 1 million doses, while anticipating hundreds of thousands more.

Michael Pratt, a spokesman for the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, said there has been no reduction in doses shipped to states.

But around the state, counties said they were struggling to make vaccination plans and said mass inoculations of people 65 and older, who represent most COVID-19 deaths, will have to wait, despite Newsom this week adding them to the eligibility list.

Arizona

WINDOW ROCK — Health officials on the Navajo Nation reported 121 new cases of the coronavirus Friday and 16 more deaths, as the reservation went into another weekend lockdown.

The latest figures increased the number of cases to 26,073 and 908 known deaths.

The Navajo Nation extends into Arizona, New Mexico and Utah. Residents of the vast reservation are required to stay home from Friday evening until

early Monday morning, except for essential workers and in the case of an emergency.

Delaware

WILMINGTON — Delawareans have filed thousands of coronavirus-related complaints to the Delaware Division of Public Health.

But the News Journal reported Friday that only a handful of those complaints have resulted in citations.

The state's complaint system allows people to call or email about a business that fails to be in compliance with COVID-19 regulations.

The agency has received more than 4,000 complaints. It also has conducted about 1,800 site visits since early June.

Administrative action has been taken against just over 20 of those cases, according to the department's Enforcement Actions webpage.

"Our first intent is usually to provide education and outreach," said Jamie Mack, Chief of DPH's Health Systems Protection sector. "We would rather provide the correct information rather than coming in as a harsh enforcer."

New Hampshire

CONCORD — Gov. Chris Sununu is extending New Hampshire's mask mandate, citing the state's high coronavirus case rates, hospitalizations and fatalities.

The mandate took effect Nov. 20 and was set to expire Friday.

"Our health care system is still under an immense amount of pressure," Sununu said in a statement. "To loosen or eliminate the tools we have utilized with success so far is the wrong approach to fighting this pandemic. The light at the end of the tunnel is within sight, but we must remain vigilant and we cannot let up now."

The renewed mandate expires March 26.

North Dakota

BISMARCK — Gov. Doug Burgum on Friday said he will drop a statewide mask requirement as well as limits on the number of people who gather in restaurants, bars and event venues, citing a dramatic drop in active COVID-19 cases and hospitalizations due to the coronavirus.

The Republican governor said he will allow an executive order to expire on Monday, as scheduled.

"The fight is far from over but we can certainly see the light of the end of the tunnel from here," he said.

Rhode Island

PROVIDENCE — More than 2,000 Rhode Islanders have now died of coronavirus-related complications, the state Department of Health said Friday.

With nine additional fatalities from the disease, the death toll is now 2,005.

"The tragic loss of life is unfathomable and unforgivable and the grief is immeasurable," Democratic U.S. Sen. Jack Reed said in an emailed statement. "We mourn every one of these individuals who COVID-19 has taken from us and we must redouble efforts to save lives and protect communities."

South Carolina

COLUMBIA — South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster asked hospitals Friday to cut down on elective procedures, citing staffing shortages stemming from the coronavirus pandemic.

In a letter to the South Carolina Hospital Association, McMaster wrote that a rise in COVID-19 patients, virus testing operations and increased public demand for vaccinations were all contributing factors.

Scaling back the procedures would help increase the speed of vaccine administration and

also "help improve the public's confidence and participation in our state's COVID-19 response," McMaster wrote.

Texas

HOUSTON — A federal judge on Friday asked officials to review how more than 1,900 inmates in Texas' largest county jail could be released to relieve overcrowding at a facility where officials worry about a potential COVID-19 outbreak.

Earlier this week, attorneys for Harris County Sheriff Ed Gonzalez raised concerns about the county jail, which has a population that's ballooned to more than 9,000 inmates, leaving little room to quarantine individuals who test positive for the virus or to separate new inmates when they first arrive to ensure they are not sick.

As of Thursday, the county jail had 9,087 inmates, including nearly 7,900 awaiting trial or other resolutions to their cases. Most of them were facing felony charges.

Wisconsin

JANESVILLE — Wisconsin's Department of Health Services says it's investigating plans by the Janesville school district to vaccinate its teachers and staff next week, even though the state hasn't yet moved to the next phase of coronavirus vaccinations.

But Gov. Tony Evers acknowledged that it's likely too late to stop the district since officials have already announced the effort publicly.

The school district announced Thursday that it would not hold classes Jan. 22 so that staff can receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

But the state is still in what is referred to as 'phase 1a' of the vaccine rollout, which includes inoculating frontline health care workers, residents and staff at long-term care facilities and first responders.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Sheriff: Man attacked relative to kill 'demon'

LA LAKE CHARLES—A Louisiana man charged with attempted murder told investigators he was trying to kill “a demon” when he used a knife to repeatedly slash a relative, authorities said.

The Calcasieu Parish Sheriff's Office said deputies responding to a call found Patrick T. Amos, 19, covered in blood and he told them he had just killed a family member.

Deputies found the victim suffering from multiple lacerations made by a knife, but still alive. The relative was taken to a hospital and was in stable condition, the sheriff's office said in a news release.

Amos later told detectives he had been using methamphetamine and “was being tormented by a demon that was inside the family member, and he attempted to kill it with a large knife.”

Man pleads guilty after drone hits helicopter

CA LOS ANGELES — A Hollywood man pleaded guilty to unsafely operating a drone that hit a Los Angeles police helicopter and forced it to make an emergency landing.

Andrew Hernandez, 22, of Hollywood, entered a plea to a misdemeanor that carries a maximum sentence of a year in federal prison.

In a plea agreement, Hernandez acknowledged that he launched the drone last September out of curiosity as the helicopter flew towards a reported emergency at a pharmacy near

his home, according to a statement from the U.S. attorney's office.

The pilot tried to evade the drone, but it struck and damaged the aircraft.

Skier dies after crashing into tree on mountain

CO BOULDER— Authorities say a skier died after he fell and slid into a tree at Eldora Mountain in northern Colorado.

Boulder County sheriff's officials say the man, who was in his 50s, crashed on the expert Corona run, and ski patrollers took him down the mountain to an ambulance at the base of the resort. A medical helicopter was requested, but the pilot was unable to land because of gusty winds.

The man, whose name has not been released, was taken to a nearby hospital, where he was pronounced dead.

Man admits carjacking, injuring postal worker

NJ NEWARK — A man has admitted that he carjacked a postal worker last year and held a box cutter against her neck, leaving the woman slightly injured.

Wallace Johnson, 32, of Newark, pleaded guilty to carjacking and assaulting a federal employee, according to federal prosecutors. He faces up to 35 years in prison when he's sentenced May 18.

The June 6 carjacking occurred as the woman was sitting in a parked postal vehicle in Newark. Johnson approached the woman and held the box cutter against her neck while ordering

her out of the car.

Johnson then got in the vehicle and drove away at a high rate of speed, authorities said.

He crashed the car a few minutes later and ran off, but officers found him in a nearby neighborhood.

Person rescued after fall 100 feet onto rock face

NC BREVARD — Rescuers removed a person who fell 100 feet and became stuck on a North Carolina rock face, officials said.

The Transylvania County Rescue Squad said on its Facebook page that its personnel responded to the nose of Looking Glass Rock, made contact with the unidentified person and lowered them to the ground where an ambulance was to carry them to a nearby hospital. There was no word on injuries.

School's graduation rates higher in '20 than '19

NY ALBANY— New York's high school graduation rate improved slightly following the shift to remote learning and the cancellation of Regents exams, the state reported.

The statewide graduation rate for the class of 2020 was 84.8%, up 1.4 percentage points from the previous year, according to Education Department data.

State officials said the graduation rate was improved — but could not say to what extent — by the cancellation of end-of-year Regents exams after the coronavirus pandemic forced schools to pivot to distance learning in March.

2 dogs attack FedEx driver and postal carrier

IA LA PORTE CITY — A delivery driver was hospitalized after being attacked in La Porte City by two dogs that also attacked a postal carrier, police there said.

The attack happened after the dogs — described as a pit bull mix and a bichon — escaped their fenced backyard and ran down a FedEx driver, the Waterloo-Cedar Falls Courier reported.

Police Chief Chris Brecher said the woman suffered significant bites and tears before she was able to escape to her vehicle.

One of the dogs was hit by a car as officials chased the animals and had to be euthanized. The dogs' owner, who returned home after the attacks had occurred, helped officials corral the other dog, which is now being held in quarantine.

12-year-old charged after stabbing her father

ME AUBURN — Police in Maine said a 12-year-old girl has been charged with attempted murder, accused of injuring her father in a stabbing in their home.

Authorities have not identified the girl. She has been taken to Long Creek Youth Development Center while her father, who was also not identified, was in stable condition at a hospital.

Officers called to the Auburn home found the man with stab wounds to the chest and stomach, the Sun Journal reported. The girl also had cuts on her hands, police said.

— From The Associated Press

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All playoff teams have shutdown corners

Associated Press

THOUSAND OAKS, Calif. — When Brandon Staley looks at the defenses on the remaining eight teams in the NFL playoffs, the Los Angeles Rams' defensive coordinator sees several top-notch groups with several qualities in common.

Yet one element stands apart — quite literally at times.

Nearly every team still vying for the Super Bowl has an elite cornerback often capable of shutting down an opponent's top receiver all by himself.

The NFC playoff bracket has three of the conference's four Pro Bowl cornerbacks: Green Bay's Jaire Alexander, Los Angeles' Jalen Ramsey and New Orleans' Marshon Lattimore. There's also Los Angeles' Darious Williams, who quietly had one of the most impressive coverage seasons in the league, and Tampa Bay's underrated duo of Carlton Davis and Jamel Dean.

On the AFC side are Pro Bowlers Tre'Davious White of Buffalo — a second-team All-Pro — and Marlon Humphrey of Balti-

more, along with the Ravens' Marcus Peters and Cleveland's Denzel Ward.

"Those guys are all outstanding players," Staley said. "But, you know, we feel like we have the best guy."

Most of the defensive coordinators left in the postseason feel the same way about their own top cornerback — and with good reason in most cases.

Ramsey's matchup with fellow All-Pro Davante Adams is among the most interesting aspects of the Rams' trip to Green Bay on Saturday, but every postseason game this weekend offers a chance to watch an elite cornerback doing his best to tear up an offense's game plan.

"It changes the math," Staley said. "Traditionally, if you need to help a corner on a premium wideout, then there are going to be individual matchups elsewhere that affect the other players on your defense. When you have a corner like Jalen, it changes the math. And when you have a player that is as versatile as Jalen, where you can

put him several different places within a formation, then it increases his value, and the value that he creates for his teammates."

Indeed, the Rams don't use Ramsey exclusively as a shutdown corner. Staley's scheme has employed Ramsey in multiple roles throughout the season, and his job often changes from play to play.

But having the option to remove an opponent's top receiver from its quarterback's targets is an invaluable asset. Just ask Packers defensive coordinator Mike Pettine, who can assign the swaggeringly talented Alexander — a second-team All-Pro — to shut down anybody.

According to Pro Football Focus, Ramsey (0.53) and Alexander (0.64) allowed the fewest yards per snap in the league among cornerbacks with at least 400 coverage snaps.

"Just from a schematic standpoint, it's nice knowing how good we can feel about his matchup and basically elimi-

nating potentially one side of the field," Pettine said. "You just love his approach, his personality. How much he loves it. And he has the mentality that a corner has to have. This is not a guy who lets one bad play turn into several. Hey, if he has a bad play, he shakes it off and it's on to the next one, and that's contagious."

Knowing what an offense isn't going to do — throw at a top cornerback, for instance — is an important piece of information. But Pettine points out another valuable asset provided by most of these top cornerbacks: A confidence that spreads throughout the defense.

"I'm not always the tallest and biggest person out there, but I have that confidence that I'm the best," Alexander said. "My skills and talents showcase that. I bring it out. I bring that inner confidence out on the field by my play, by how I talk, how I've got handshakes with everybody on the team. That comes from confidence. I'm not afraid to display that."

Chiefs aim for quicker start this time around

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — The Kansas City Chiefs have proven that they can overcome just about any deficit in the postseason.

That doesn't mean they want to keep doing it.

Of all the points of emphasis this weekend, when the Chiefs play the Cleveland Browns for a spot in their third straight AFC championship game, perhaps none is as consequential as this: Kansas City wants to start fast on Sunday, something it failed to do in falling behind by double figures in each of their playoff games last season.

"Yeah, our coaches brought it up: 'Let's not put ourselves in that same position we did last year,'" Chiefs wide receiver Ty-

reek Hill said this week. "We just have to come out and have the same energy we've had all year."

It would sure make a smoother road to the Super Bowl than the bumpy track they took last year.

The Chiefs began their journey to Miami by falling behind Houston by 24 points early in the second quarter, thanks in part to a blocked punt returned for a touchdown. But they responded by scoring 41 consecutive points, taking a 28-24 lead into halftime and piling on in the third quarter, eventually coasting to a 51-31 victory at Arrowhead Stadium.

It seemed like déjà vu in the AFC title game the following week, when Tennessee pounded

its way to leads of 10-0 and 17-7 late in the first half. But much like the Chiefs did in the divisional round, Patrick Mahomes and his fleet flotilla of playmakers responded with 28 straight points, cruising in the fourth quarter to a 35-24 victory.

Then came the Super Bowl and probably the toughest deficit, when San Francisco turned a tied game at halftime into a 20-10 lead. It was still that margin when Mahomes hit Travis Kelce for a touchdown with 6:13 left, and the game's MVP followed with a touchdown pass to Damien Williams with 2:44 to take the lead. And when Williams rolled 38 yards for the clinching touchdown, the Chiefs had scored 21 points in a tick over five minutes for a 31-20 victory.

"I mean, you understand what it takes. That's the biggest thing," said Mahomes, who hasn't played in three weeks after the Chiefs clinched the No. 1 seed and a first-round bye against Atlanta in late December. "You know it's not easy. You'll have to put in a lot of work, but you can do it. Play to the best of our ability and it'll handle itself."

For all their success this season, including a franchise-record 14 wins and a fifth straight AFC West title, very little has been a breeze. Mahomes has had to lead three fourth-quarter comebacks, including one against the Falcons, when he found wide receiver Demarcus Robinson with 1:55 left to give Kansas City a 17-14 victory.

Lakers beat Pelicans, win 5th straight

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — LeBron James had 21 points, 11 assists and eight rebounds, and Anthony Davis added 17 points against his former team in the Los Angeles Lakers' fifth consecutive victory, 112-95 over the New Orleans Pelicans on Friday night.

Kentavious Caldwell-Pope hit four three-pointers while scoring 16 points, and Montrezl Harrell also had 16 for the defending NBA champions. The Lakers remained unbeaten in five meetings with the Pelicans since the franchise-altering trade in July 2019 that sent Davis to LA and three starters to New Orleans.

Brandon Ingram scored 17 of his 20 points in the first half against his former team for the Pelicans, who have lost five straight. Zion Williamson had 21 points and 12 rebounds after missing Wednesday's game against the Clippers due to the NBA's health and safety protocols, but New Orleans blew an early 15-point lead on its third stop on a seven-game trip.

Bucks 112, Mavericks 109: Giannis Antetokounmpo overcame poor free-throw shooting to score 31 points, Khris Mid-

dleton hit two late three-pointers and Milwaukee held off visiting Dallas.

The Bucks improved to 9-4, winning their fourth straight and snapping the Mavericks' winning streak at four.

Both teams wasted plenty of opportunities from the foul line. The Bucks were 12 of 25 on free throws, with Antetokounmpo going 1 of 10. Dallas was 6 of 13.

Middleton scored 25 points for the Bucks.

Celtics 124, Magic 97: Jaylen Brown had 21 points and eight assists, Semi Ojeleye added 18 points and host Boston rolled past Orlando in the its return following a virus-related week-long hiatus.

Jeff Teague had 17 points, and rookie Payton Pritchard added 16 points to help Boston post its fifth straight victory.

Boston returned after having three games postponed due to players testing positive for the coronavirus and others being ruled out because contact tracing showed that they could have been exposed to it.

Thunder 127, Bulls 125 (OT): Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored a career-high 33 points to help Oklahoma City beat visiting Chicago and former coach

Billy Donovan in overtime.

Oklahoma City rallied from 22 points down in the second half. Zach LaVine, who led the Bulls with 35 points, could have won it in overtime but he missed a deep, off-balance 3-pointer in the closing seconds.

Lu Dort scored 21 points for the Thunder. They won for the first time at home this season.

Clippers 139, Kings 100: Kawhi Leonard had 27 points and six assists in three quarters, Paul George scored 26 points and short-handed Los Angeles manhandled host Sacramento.

The Clippers have won 15 consecutive road games against the Kings. Los Angeles hasn't lost in Sacramento since March 19, 2013.

Playing without guards Patrick Beverley (personal reasons) and Lou Williams (sore left hip), the Clippers led by eight at halftime and broke the game open in the third quarter when they outscored the Kings 37-16.

Cavaliers 106, Knicks 103: Andre Drummond tied his career high with 33 points and grabbed 23 rebounds, and Cedi Osman scored 25 points in host Cleveland's victory over New

York.

Drummond had the Cavaliers' first 30-20 game since Carlos Boozer had 32 points and 20 rebounds against Seattle on Jan. 20, 2004. He also had three assists, two blocks and two steals to help Cleveland snap a three-game losing streak.

Julius Randle had 28 points and six assists, rookie Immanuel Quigley scored a season-high 23 points and R.J. Barrett had 20 points for New York. The Knicks have lost five in a row.

Jazz 116, Hawks 92: Donovan Mitchell made six three-pointers on his way to 26 points and Utah used a 21-0 second-half run to power past visiting Atlanta.

Bojan Bogdanovic scored 17 points, Rudy Gobert had 15 points and 13 rebounds, and Jordan Clarkson scored all 16 of his points in the second half to boost the Jazz to their fourth straight victory.

Cam Reddish scored 20 points for Atlanta, and Clint Capela had 16 points and 11 rebounds. Trae Young was held to four points on 1-for-11 shooting with seven assists as the Hawks dropped their fifth game in the last six.

More games postponed as virus struggles continue

Associated Press

Another three NBA games were postponed Friday, including one in Minnesota only a couple of hours before game time, as the league's struggle with increasing coronavirus numbers continued.

Among the revelations Friday: Timberwolves center Karl-Anthony Towns, whose mother and six other relatives have died from COVID-19, said he has tested positive. The Washington Wizards said that they have six players who are positive as well, and another three players out

because contact tracing data suggested they could have been exposed.

"I pray every day that this nightmare of a virus will subside and I beg everyone to take it seriously by taking all of the necessary precautions," Towns wrote on social media.

The Timberwolves' game with the Memphis Grizzlies was called off, as were what would have been Wizards home games Sunday and Monday against the Cleveland Cavaliers.

"The NBA's been pointing to this period for quite some time,

that this was going to be very difficult," Wizards general manager Tommy Sheppard said. "And they weren't kidding."

The current tally of postponements: 13 since the start of the season, 12 of them — involving 16 of the NBA's 30 teams — since Sunday alone. Washington has seen four of its games pushed back, Boston and Phoenix have had three postponements. The Celtics returned to the floor Friday night against Orlando.

Miami — which lost two games at Philadelphia this week with only eight players available

— could get as many as six of its eight COVID-affected players who have missed time this week, largely because of contact tracing, back Saturday for a game against Detroit. All-Star Jimmy Butler will remain out, the Heat said, as will Avery Bradley.

Postponed games, when possible, will be made up in the second half of the season, which will take place from March 11 — the one-year anniversary of last season shutting down because of the pandemic — through May 16.

Konecny's hat trick lifts Flyers past Pens

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Gritty's hat trick was that the mascot had one at all, a comically oversized Flyers cap he flung, frisbee-style, onto the ice. Gritty went big — and so did Travis Konecny in his first career hat trick.

Konecny scored three goals and had an assist and the Philadelphia Flyers survived losing team MVP Sean Couturier to an injury in a 5-2 win over the Pittsburgh Penguins on Friday night.

Ivan Provorov scored and Oskar Lindblom added an empty-netter for the Flyers.

The Flyers swept their rival in the two-game home set, but can only hope they won't lose Couturier for an extended time. Known as "Coots," he needed an MRI on Saturday on one of his shoulders. He absorbed a stiff check on his left shoulder and that could be the one that was injured.

Couturier, who last season became the first Flyers player in 33 years to win the Selke Trophy as the NHL's top defensive forward, left the game after just two shifts and 45 seconds.

"When your No. 1 center goes down, it's always tough to overcome it," Flyers forward Jake Voracek said.

The Flyers, who won 6-3 on Wednesday, appeared to have an easy time, even with Couturier out. Konecny scored a power-

play goal 7:27 into the game and added a second two minutes later when he crashed the net and pounded in a rebound.

Provorov made it 3-0 on a slap shot from the circle, and that was enough to chase goalie Tristan Jarry. Jarry allowed three goals on only six shots and was benched in favor of Casey DeSmith.

Lightning 5, Blackhawks 2: Steven Stamkos and Ondrej Palat had a goal and an assist each and defending champion Tampa Bay completed a two-game sweep of visiting Chicago.

Yanni Gourde and Blake Coleman also each had a goal and an assist, Alex Killorn also scored and Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 34 shots for Tampa Bay. The Lightning won the opener 5-1 on Wednesday night and are 16-1-2 against the Blackhawks since the 2010-11 season.

Alex DeBrincat and Patrick Kane scored for Chicago.

Avalanche 8, Blues 0: Gabriel Landeskog scored his 199th and 200th goals and host Colorado rebounded from an opening-night loss to rout St. Louis.

Nathan MacKinnon had a goal and two assists, Mikko Rantanen scored his 100th goal and added an assist, and Andre Burakovsky and Nazem Kadri also had a goal and an assist, and Joonas Donskoi and Devon Toews added goals.

Philipp Grubauer faced just 20 shots in his 12th career shutout, and Cale Makar had three assists.

St. Louis won 4-1 on Wednesday night.

Capitals 2, Sabres 1: Vitek Vanecek made 30 saves in his NHL debut, Tom Wilson had a goal and an assist and visiting Washington beat Buffalo to sweep the season-opening series.

Jakub Vrana scored his second goal of the season for the Capitals, 6-4 winners over the Sabres on Thursday night. Rasmus Ristolainen scored for Buffalo, and Linus Ullmark stopped 19 shots.

Senators 5, Maple Leafs 3: Brady Tkachuk had a goal and two assists, Matt Murray made 20 saves in his debut with his new team and host Ottawa beat Toronto in their first game in more than 10 months.

Thomas Chabot, Austin Watson, Derek Stepan and Chris Tierney also scored for Ottawa. John Tavares had a goal and assist for Toronto, Zach Hyman and Alexander Kerfoot also scored and Frederik Andersen stopped 19 shots.

The game was the Senators' first in 310 days after they unknowingly took part in the final contest of the 2019-20 regular season March 11 in Los Angeles against the Kings. The league suspended its schedule the following day because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Trice helps No. 9 Wisconsin put away Rutgers

Associated Press

PISCATAWAY, N.J. — D'Mitrik Trice had 13 points and five assists and turned in a strong second half to lead No. 9 Wisconsin past Rutgers 60-54 on Friday night.

Trice scored eight points and assisted on another basket in a 12-0 run that gave Wisconsin a 54-44 lead with 4:19 to go.

"It was good for him to step up at the right time, which senior point guards — good ones tend to do," Wisconsin head coach Greg Gard said.

The game was a classic Big Ten grinder, with teams locking down defensively. Wisconsin (11-3, 5-2 Big Ten) shot 35% from the field, and Rutgers (7-5, 3-5) shot 37%. The Badgers were 6-for-25 from beyond the arc, and

the Scarlet Knights were 2-for-19.

"It was the typical, at the RAC rock fight," Gard said. "Physical, tough. A lot of grit and determination exhibited tonight."

Aleem Ford added 13 points and six rebounds for Wisconsin. Brad Davidson had 14 points and six rebounds.

Wisconsin, helped by a 13-0 run, led by as many as 10 points in the first half. But Rutgers was able to cut the lead to 33-32.

Jacob Young led Rutgers with a game-high 17 points, while the Scarlet Knights out-rebounded the Badgers 50-35. Rutgers has lost five of six.

"The ball just didn't go in. I thought we got a lot of good looks," Rutgers coach Steve Pikiell said. "We looked like Rutgers

defensively and rebounding-wise and that's a positive."

Big picture

Wisconsin: The Badgers didn't look like a top-10 team in a blow-out loss at No. 7 Michigan earlier in the week, but returned to form against Rutgers. The win may not keep them in the top 10, but it got the Badgers back on track.

Rutgers: The Scarlet Knights are finally at full strength. Highly touted recruit Cliff Omoruyi returned after missing the last five games with a sprained right knee. It's the first time Rutgers has been healthy all season. Now, Rutgers needs to find a win after losing five of six and falling from the Top 25.

Points in the paint

Rutgers scored 42 of its 54

points in the paint, while Wisconsin had just 18 points.

"Everybody has a hard time keeping them out of the paint. That's their point of attack. They get it to the bigs and they try to drive it with all three perimeter guys," Gard said.

Poll implications

Wisconsin was crushed by No. 7 Michigan to start the week, but shouldn't tumble too far with the bounce-back win. Meantime, Rutgers was unranked for the first time this season, and will now have a harder time climbing back into the Top 25.

Up next

Wisconsin: Hosts Northwestern on Wednesday night.

Rutgers: At Penn State on Thursday.