

DOD chief to address sex assault issues

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, in his first directive since taking office, has given his senior leaders two weeks to send him reports on sexual assault prevention programs in the military, and an assessment of what has worked and what hasn't.

Austin's memo, which went out Saturday, fulfills a commitment he made to senators last week during confirmation hearings. He had vowed to immediately address the problems of sexual assault and harassment in the ranks.

"This is a leadership issue," Austin said in his two-page memo. "We will lead."

Senator after senator demanded to know what Austin planned to do about the problem, which defense and military leaders have grappled with for years. Reports of sexual assaults have steadily gone up since 2006, according to department reports, including a 13% jump in 2018 and a

3% increase in 2019. The 2020 data is not yet available.

The 2018 increase fueled congressional anger over the issue, and lawmakers have repeatedly called for action, including changes in the Code of Military Justice.

"You do agree that we can't keep doing the same thing that we've been doing for the past decade?" Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., said during Austin's confirmation hearing. "Do I have your commitment to be relentless on this issue until we can end the scourge of sexual violence in the military?"

Austin agreed, telling senators, "This starts with me and you can count on me getting after this on Day One."

Technically, the directive came on Day Two.

Austin arrived at the Pentagon on Friday shortly after noon, but he spent his first hours as defense chief in meetings with key leaders as he began the transition

to his new job.

He was in the Pentagon again Saturday, making calls to defense counterparts around the world, and he signed the memo.

In his hearing and in the memo, Austin acknowledged that the military has long struggled with the problem, but must do better.

The directive calls for each leader to submit a summary of the sexual assault and harassment measures they have taken in the last year that show promise, and an assessment of those that didn't. And he asked for relevant data for the past decade, including efforts to support victims.

"Include in your report the consideration of novel approaches to any of these areas," he said, adding that "we must not be afraid to get creative."

And Austin said he plans to host a meeting on the matter with senior leaders in the coming days.

Austin reviews security with Japan, S. Korea

BY AARON KIDD

Stars and Stripes

TOKYO — New Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has made his first official phone calls to counterparts in Japan and South Korea, according to a pair of Pentagon statements issued over the weekend.

The discussions took place Saturday, the day after the retired four-star Army general was sworn in as the United States' 28th defense chief and the first Black man to serve in that role.

While neither statement mentioned China or North Korea by name, both said Austin addressed a broad range of defense and security issues in the Indo-Pacific region, including in the South and East China Seas, which Beijing views as its territory. The U.S. considers those areas to be international waters, and the Navy and Air Force frequently carry out freedom-of-navigation operations there.

In his conversation with Japanese Defense Minister Nobuo Kishi, Austin discussed the importance of "ensuring the readiness" of the approximately 54,000 U.S.

troops in Japan during the coronavirus pandemic. He also affirmed that the U.S. military would respond to any attack on the Senkakus — uninhabited islets in the East China Sea that are controlled by Japan but claimed by China and Taiwan.

Japan frequently urges China to halt incursions into Japanese waters around the Senkakus and to stop harassing fishing boats there. Last year, Chinese vessels made a record 333 trips near the islets, according to the Japan Coast Guard.

The defense secretaries also discussed the need to continue construction at Camp Schwab in rural, northern Okinawa, so that aircraft, including a fleet of MV-22 Osprey tiltrotors, stationed at Marine Corps Air Station Futenma can be moved there.

Schwab was chosen in 1997 as the site to replace MCAS Futenma, which is in a more populated area in the south, and eliminate residents' safety concerns.

The Japanese government supports relocating MCAS Futenma to Schwab, but Okinawa Gov. Denny Tamaki recently wrote to President Joe Biden and Vice President Ka-

mala Harris asking that they reconsider the plan.

In his call with South Korea's defense minister, Austin and Suh Wook reaffirmed their nations' "ironclad" alliance and "exchanged views on the security environment on the Korean Peninsula and in the region," the Pentagon said.

That statement, which was less detailed than the one about Austin's call with Kishi, also said the U.S. and South Korean defense ministers "noted the need to maintain the readiness of Alliance combined forces."

The U.S. military has had to cancel or reduce in scope many joint exercises with South Korea since former President Donald Trump met with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un and began diplomatic efforts to persuade the North to give up its nuclear weapons.

In the fall, the commander of U.S. Forces Korea, Army Gen. Robert Abrams, said the U.S. military has had to send air crews off the peninsula for live-fire training due to local disputes with South Koreans over noise and other complaints.

Philippines, China to link 2 former US bases

By SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

China and the Philippines have agreed to build a railway linking a pair of former American military facilities on the island of Luzon that are still used by visiting U.S. forces.

Chinese Ambassador to the Philippines Huang Xilian trumpeted the \$940 million deal to link Subic Bay and Clark Air Base — which comprised America's largest overseas military community before they closed following the 1991 eruption of nearby Mount Pinatubo — in a Facebook post Saturday.

China's state-run Xinhua news agency reported the same day that negotiations between the two countries over a loan to finance the project would soon begin.

"Once completed, the railway will build a resilient linkage between ports, railways and airports along the Subic-Clark corridor, which will improve the logistic efficiency, trim the transportation cost and support the potential demand for freight services and economic activities in the region," the Chinese Embassy said according to the agency.

The 44-mile railway is the most expensive government-to-government project involving the two countries and the flagship of Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte's "Build, Build, Build" program, Huang said in his post.

A Dec. 29 notice awarding the contract to the China Harbor Engineering Co., is posted on the Philippines Department of Transportation website.

The firm, which is a subsidiary of the state-owned China Communications Construction Co., was accused of transferring funds to a Sri Lankan politician's election campaign while engaging in a number of construction projects there in 2018, according to the New York Times.

Construction on the Subic-Clark project is estimated to last 42 months, Huang said.

The railway would have limited impact on U.S. forces visiting the facilities, although it

could become an issue if the United States seeks a greater presence in the region, Ian Chong, an associate professor of political science at the National University of Singapore, said in an email Wednesday.

Philippine officials recently said that a Chinese firm is not in the running to assume control of the shipyard, the Philippine Daily Inquirer reported Oct. 3.

"[Subic is] not going to be a U.S. naval base like it was, but it would be a U.S./Australian company doing business to support both the U.S. and Philippine navies as well as countries in the region," Austal's customer affairs and business development director, Lawrence Ryder, told Stars and Stripes in a telephone interview last spring.

A Philippines expert at the University of Hawaii, Patricio Abinales, described the Clark-Subic rail announcement as a nice advertisement, but all words.

"I do not think this will pull through," he said.

Groups urge Biden to review Marine island airfield plans

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
AND AYA ICHIHASHI
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Okinawans called on President Joe Biden this week to reconsider construction of a new Marine Corps airfield on the island, while others in Japan hope he'll push for an accounting of Japanese citizens kidnapped by North Korea.

The relocation of Marine Corps Air Station Futenma out of an urban area to a site under construction farther north at Camp Schwab in the Henoko district is a sticking point with many Okinawans.

Most voters in a February 2019 referendum, 72%, opposed the plan. Just over half the prefecture's 1.15 million registered voters turned out.

"We have showed over and over how we feel about the new base at Henoko, and even the public vote showed over 70% of the people of Okinawa don't want the Henoko new base," Takashi Kishimoto, director of the Okinawa Heiwa Undo Center, or Okinawa

Peace Movement Center, told Stars and Stripes by phone Friday.

As president of a democratic country, Biden should honor the Okinawan people's wishes, Kishimoto said.

Camp Schwab, in a relatively rural section of Okinawa, was chosen in 1997 as the site to replace MCAS Futenma and eliminate safety concerns in Ginowan city, where Futenma is located.

Work began in April 2017 to reclaim a part of Oura Bay for a new runway. But cost overruns and delays have pushed the completion date past 2014 to 2030 and the cost from \$2.2 billion to at least \$8.7 billion. The Japanese government supports the plan, but Okinawa Gov. Denny Tamaki is a staunch opponent of the Marines' relocation within the prefecture.

Tamaki wrote on Jan. 13 to Biden, who was inaugurated Wednesday, and his vice president, Kamala Harris, asking that they review the plan, according to a copy of the letter provided to Stars and Stripes by his office.

Marine on Okinawa honored for helping suicidal camp peer

By MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — An Okinawa-based Marine who helped rescue a comrade threatening suicide in 2018 has received a medal for his lifesaving actions.

Sgt. Brandon Antoine, a 3rd Marine Division radio operator, was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal during a ceremony at Camp Courtney on Jan. 13, according to a Marine statement released last week. Division commander Maj. Gen. James Bierman presided over the ceremony.

The New Orleans native was awakened by a commotion early on the morning of June 16, 2018, according to a copy of his citation. He rushed outside Camp Courtney's Barracks 4433 and saw an intoxicated Marine threatening to take his own life by jumping off a fourth-floor air duct.

Antoine ran up four flights of stairs and helped Marines pry open a locked bathroom door, according to the citation. He then instructed two Marines to hold his legs and waist as he leaned out from the window. He hung upside-down 45 feet above the ground for over 10 minutes.

Police, Guard virus cases on rise after Capitol riot

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Since the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol, 38 U.S. Capitol Police employees have tested positive for coronavirus, the head of the officers' union said Saturday. Cases are also climbing among members of the District of Columbia National Guard stationed around the Capitol.

The head of the labor committee for the Capitol Police officers' Fraternal Order of Police chapter, Gus Papathanasiou, said he had been told by the police chief's office that 38 employees tested positive for the virus. He said there was no breakdown on how many were officers at the Capitol on Jan. 6, but he noted that most civilian employees in the department telework and would not have been there during the riot.

There were about 1,400 Capitol Police officers on duty.

A Defense Department official, speaking on the condition of anonymity because of

the sensitivity of the issue, said Friday that coronavirus cases among the thousands of National Guard members who have been stationed at the Capitol in the past two weeks continue to climb, pushing some of them into isolation in hotel rooms in the region. The District National Guard was aware of at least 170 cases as of Friday, with more positive results expected.

Since Jan. 6, 82 members of the District police have tested positive for the virus, according to statistics posted by the department.

But the department has not been "able to ascertain if officers who have tested positive for COVID-19 contracted it as a result of working during the insurrection at the Capitol on January 6," Officer Hugh Carew said Saturday. He noted that District police officers have continued to work around the city since that day and so might have contracted the virus elsewhere.

UK variant causes fear in Denmark

The Washington Post

Like a speeding car whose brake lines have been cut, the coronavirus variant first spotted in Britain is spreading at an alarming rate and isn't responding to established ways of slowing the pandemic, according to Danish scientists who have one of the world's best views into the new, more contagious strain.

Cases involving the variant are increasing 70 percent a week in Denmark, despite a strict lockdown, according to Denmark's State Serum Institute, a government agency that tracks diseases and advises health policy.

"We're losing some of the tools that we have to control the epidemic," said Tyra Grove Krause, scientific director of the institute, which last week began sequencing every positive coronavirus test to check for mutations. By contrast, the United States is sequencing 0.3 percent of cases, ranking it 43rd in the world and leaving it largely blind to the variant's spread.

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson on Friday suggested for the first time that the variant may be more deadly than the original virus. Because it can spread more easily, it can also quickly overwhelm medical systems, turning previously survivable bouts with the virus into perilous ones if hospitals are full and medical care is limited.

Danish public health officials say that if it weren't for their extensive monitoring, they would be feeling a false sense of confidence right now. Overall, new daily confirmed cases of the coronavirus in Denmark have been dropping for a month.

"Without this variant, we would be in really good shape," said Camilla Holten Møller, the co-leader of the State Serum Institute group modeling the spread of the virus.

"If you just look at the reproduction number, you just wouldn't see that it was in growth underneath at all," she said.

But the British variant is spreading so quickly that Danish authorities project it will be the dominant strain of the virus in their country as early as mid-February.

That would put Denmark ahead of the U.S., where the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention warned Friday that the U.K. variant, known as B.1.1.7, could be prevalent by March.

2 in 5 Americans live where coronavirus strains ICUs

Associated Press

Straining under record numbers of COVID-19 patients, hundreds of the nation's intensive care units are running out of space and supplies and competing to hire temporary traveling nurses at soaring rates. Many of the facilities are clustered in the South and West.

An Associated Press analysis of federal hospital data shows that since November, the share of U.S. hospitals nearing the breaking point has doubled. More than 40 percent of Americans now live in areas running out of ICU space, with only 15 percent of beds still available.

Intensive care units are the final defense for the sickest of the sick, patients who are nearly suffocating or facing organ failure. Nurses who work in the most stressed ICUs, changing IV bags and monitoring patients on breathing machines, are exhausted.

According to data through Thursday from the COVID Tracking Project, hospitalizations are still high in the West and the South, with over 80,000 current COVID-19 hospital patients in those regions. Encouragingly, hospitalizations appear to have either plateaued or

are trending downward across all regions. It's unclear whether the easing will continue with more contagious versions of the virus arising and snags in the rollout of vaccines.

In New Mexico, one surging hospital system brought in 300 temporary nurses from outside the state, at a cost of millions of dollars, to deal with overflowing ICU patients.

"It's been horrid," said Dr. Jason Mitchell, chief medical officer for Presbyterian Healthcare Services in Albuquerque. He's comforted that the hospital never activated its plan for rationing lifesaving care, which would have required a triage team to rank patients with numerical scores based on who was least likely to survive.

"It's a relief that we never had to actually do it," Mitchell said.

But the biggest problem is competing with other hospitals for traveling nurses.

Houston Methodist Hospital recently paid \$8,000 retention bonuses to keep staff nurses from signing up with agencies that would send them to other hot spots. Pay for traveling nurses can reach \$6,000 per week, an enticement that can benefit a nurse but can seem like poaching to the hospital executives who watch nurses leave.

Extremists in US evolved over decades

Associated Press

The takeover in 2016 by right-wing extremists of a federal bird sanctuary in Oregon. A standoff in 1992 between white separatists and federal agents in Ruby Ridge, Idaho. The 1995 bombing of a federal building in Oklahoma City that killed 168 people.

Right-wing extremism has previously played out for the most part in isolated pockets of America and in its smaller cities. The deadly assault by rioters on the U.S. Capitol, in contrast, targeted the very heart of government.

And it brought together, in large numbers, members of disparate groups, creating an opportunity for extremists to establish links with each other.

That, an expert says, potentially sets the stage for more violent actions.

"The events themselves, and participation in them, has a radicalizing effect. And they also have an inspirational effect. The battle of Capitol Hill is now part of the my-

thology," said Brian Michael Jenkins, a terrorism expert and senior adviser to the president of the Rand Corp. think tank.

Mary McCord, a former acting U.S. assistant attorney general for national security, said the climate for the insurrection had been building throughout the Trump presidency.

She cited the 2017 "Unite the Right" white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Va., that killed one person, aggressive demonstrations at statehouses by armed protesters railing against COVID-19 public health safety orders and mass shootings by people motivated by hate.

"All have led to this moment," McCord, now a visiting law professor at Georgetown University Law Center, said in an email.

The Southern Poverty Law Center, which monitors U.S. extremists, has recorded a 55% increase in the number of white nationalist hate groups since 2017.

Among those who participated in the Jan.

6 assault on the U.S. Capitol were members of the Oath Keepers; the Proud Boys neo-fascist group; followers of QAnon, which spreads unfounded conspiracy theories; racists and anti-Semites; and others with nearly blind devotion to then-President Donald Trump.

"January 6th was kind of a Woodstock of the angry right," Jenkins said in an interview. "The mere fact those groups were coming together, mingling, sharing this anger, displaying this passion — it is going to have effects."

Jenkins said that the next phase for the extremist groups and people who saw Trump as a savior could transform into a broader national movement in which factions coordinate and combine their assets.

Or the widespread condemnation of the insurrection could cause the movement to shrink, leaving more determined elements to strike out on their own and launch attacks.

Trump shuns ex-presidents club — the feeling is mutual

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — It's a club Donald Trump was never really interested in joining and certainly not so soon: the cadre of former commanders in chief who revere the presidency enough to put aside often bitter political differences and even join together in a common cause.

Members of the ex-presidents club pose together for pictures. They smile and pat each other on the back while milling around historic events, or sit somberly side by side at VIP funerals. They take on special projects together. They rarely criticize one another and tend to offer even fewer harsh words about their White House successors.

Like so many other presidential traditions, however, this is one Trump seems likely to flout. Now that he's left office, it's hard to see him embracing the stately, exclusive club.

"He kind of laughed at the very notion that he would be accepted in the presidents club,"

said Kate Andersen Brower, who interviewed Trump in 2019 for her book "Team of Five: The Presidents' Club in the Age of Trump." "He was like, 'I don't think I'll be accepted.'"

It's equally clear that the club's other members don't much want him — at least for now.

Former Presidents Barack Obama, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton recorded a three-minute video from Arlington National Cemetery after President Joe Biden's inauguration, praising peaceful presidential succession as a core of American democracy. The segment included no mention of Trump by name, but stood as a stark rebuke of his behavior since losing November's election.

Jeffrey Engel, founding director of the Center for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University in Dallas, said Trump isn't a good fit for the ex-presidents club "because he's temperamentally different."

US vouches for Taiwan following Chinese flyby

Associated Press

BEIJING — The U.S. has reaffirmed its support for Taiwan following China's dispatch of warplanes near the island in an apparent attempt to intimidate its democratic government and test the resolve of the new American presidential administration.

The U.S. State Department on Saturday said it was concerned by China's "pattern of ongoing attempts to intimidate its neighbors, including Taiwan."

"We urge Beijing to cease its military, diplomatic, and economic pressure against Taiwan and instead engage in meaningful dialogue with Taiwan's democratically elected representatives," Ned Price, a spokesman for the department, said in the statement.

Taiwan's Defense Ministry said China on Saturday sent eight bombers capable of carrying nuclear weapons and four fighter jets into its air defense identification zone just south-

west of the island. The ministry said China on Sunday sent another 16 military aircraft of various types into the same area.

The ministry said Taiwan responded by scrambling fighters, broadcasting warnings by radio and "deploying air defense missile systems to monitor the activity."

There was no immediate Chinese comment on Sunday.

The overflights were part of a long-standing pattern of incursions aimed at pressuring the government of President Tsai Ing-wen into caving to Beijing's demand that she recognize Taiwan as a part of Chinese territory.

They come on the heels of President Joe Biden's inauguration, emphasizing the island's enduring position in the panoply of divisive issues between the sides that also include human rights, trade disputes and, most recently, questions about China's initial response to the coronavirus pandemic.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Lawmaker proposes 'Bigfoot' hunting season

OK OKLAHOMA CITY — A mythical, ape-like creature that has captured the imagination of adventurers for decades has now become the target of a state lawmaker in Oklahoma.

A Republican House member has introduced a bill that would create a Bigfoot hunting season. Rep. Justin Humphrey's district includes the heavily forested Ouachita Mountains in southeast Oklahoma, where a Bigfoot festival is held each year near the Arkansas border. He says issuing a state hunting license and tag could help boost tourism.

Humphrey says his bill would only allow trapping and that he also hopes to secure \$25,000 to be offered as a bounty.

Cop investigated after man jumps off highway

CT HARTFORD — A man wanted for alleged robbery in Connecticut jumped off a highway in Hartford and fell 70 feet while fleeing police — an incident that prompted an investigation into the use of force by West Hartford officers.

State police said the man was taken to a hospital after jumping off an elevated portion of Interstate 84. Hartford prosecutors asked state police to investigate a "potential use of force incident," state police said.

The pursuit began in West Hartford when local officers observed a vehicle they said was wanted in connection with past crimes. State police said officers followed the vehicle and used spiked sticks to try to stop it.

The female driver and a male passenger got out of the vehicle. The woman, Maia Marieliz, was taken into custody, while the man ran and jumped over a concrete barrier, state police said.

TSA agent convicted for inappropriate scam

CA LOS ANGELES — A former Transportation Security Admin-

istration agent who was accused of tricking a traveler into showing her breasts as she went through security at Los Angeles International Airport pleaded no contest to false imprisonment, authorities said.

The woman told investigators that Johnathon Lomeli told her he had to look inside her bra to ensure she wasn't hiding anything, had her hold her pants away from her waist for a check, and then said he would take her to a private room for further security screening, prosecutors said.

But when they were alone on an elevator, Lomeli told the woman he could perform the screening there and ordered her to lift her shirt and show her breasts, then looked down her pants, she said.

University adds 5 names to enslaved memorial

VA CHARLOTTESVILLE — The names of five family members were added to a memorial to enslaved workers at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville.

The Daily Progress reported that the names were officially added at a private dedication.

The University of Virginia's Memorial to Enslaved Laborers acknowledges and honors an estimated 4,000 people who built and worked at the university. It was designed by Thomas Jefferson, the nation's third president.

The names that were added were Davy Hern, Fanny Gillette Hern, Bonnycastle Hern, Lily Hern and Ben Snowden. The name of a sixth family member, Thirmston Hern, is already part of the memorial.

Former officer charged with selling testosterone

NC CLAYTON — A former North Carolina police officer who was once honored as his department's "officer of the year" has been charged with making and selling a steroid that promotes muscle growth, according to court documents.

Former Clayton Police Officer Owen Phillips, 40, was indicted by a grand jury on

charges of possession with intent to manufacture, sell and deliver testosterone; sale and delivery of testosterone; and manufacture of testosterone, the documents stated.

Phillips was named the Clayton Police Department's Officer of the Year in 2015 and the Town of Clayton's Employee of the Year in 2017, according to the town's website.

Sheriff: Naked man stole and crashed police car

FL JACKSONVILLE — A naked Florida man stole what news footage showed to be a marked police vehicle and crashed it in a wooded area, officials said.

Joshua Shenker, 22, was arrested after the crash on charges including theft of a motor vehicle, aggravated battery on a law enforcement officer, depriving an officer of means of communication or protection and resisting an officer without violence, according to a Jacksonville Sheriff's Office report.

Officers responded to reports of a naked man running along Interstate 10 in western Jacksonville. Shenker was lying in the roadway when an officer stopped on the opposite side of the route, the report said. Shenker then ran across the highway lanes toward the officer, officials said.

Rare black rhinoceros born in captivity at zoo

KS GARDEN CITY — A rare black rhinoceros has been born in captivity at the Lee Richardson Zoo in Garden City.

The male rhino was born to 10-year-old Johari and her 7-year-old mate Jabari, the zoo said in a news release. The pair were moved from zoos in Cleveland and Atlanta in 2016 as part of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums' Eastern Black Rhinoceros Species Survival Plan.

Mother and baby will be kept indoors for bonding and until weather conditions are appropriate for them to venture outside, the release said.

— From The Associated Press

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Poirier stops McGregor in second round

Associated Press

ABU DHABI, United Arab Emirates — Dustin Poirier stopped Conor McGregor with a flurry of punches midway through the second round Sunday, avenging his loss to the Irish superstar with a knockout victory at UFC 257.

Poirier (26-7) caught McGregor with a series of shots to the head before buckling his knees with two left hands. Poirier then sent McGregor to the canvas with a short right hand and finished it at 2:32 of the second, setting off stunned excitement among the few thousand screaming fans allowed inside the Etihad Arena on Yas Island.

"I think this is a title fight," Poirier said of their lightweight bout. "I'm the champion."

In his first fight in a year, McGregor (22-5) had a strong first round before he was stopped by punches for the first time in his mixed martial arts career. McGregor, whose previous four losses all came by submission, stayed on the canvas for several

moments afterward, gathering himself after his second loss in his three MMA fights since 2016.

McGregor and Poirier met for the first time in September 2014 as featherweights, and McGregor won by knockout in just 106 seconds during his incredible early-career success. McGregor became the featherweight champion 15 months later, while Poirier rebuilt his career with just one loss in his next 11 fights.

With a second chance to derail McGregor while boosting his own hopes of regaining the lightweight title, Poirier didn't miss.

"We're 1-1, so maybe we have to do it again," Poirier said.

In the co-main event at UFC 257, three-time Bellator lightweight champion Michael Chandler made a stunning debut with a violent knockout of New Zealand's Dan Hooker midway through the first round.

Chandler could be the next matchup for Poirier in a fight for the lightweight title ap-

parently vacated by long-reigning 155-pound champ Khabib Nurmagomedov, who announced his retirement after his final victory last fall. Nurmagomedov has beaten both McGregor and Poirier in the past 2½ years.

UFC President Dana White so far has been unable to persuade Nurmagomedov to go back on his vow to his mother to quit the sport after his father's death, not even for a wildly lucrative rematch with McGregor, who repeatedly vowed to fight on after this loss to Poirier.

Marina Rodriguez opened the pay-per-view portion of UFC 257 by upsetting fellow Brazilian strawweight contender Amanda Ribas. Rodriguez got a second-round stoppage with a flurry of punches and a knee in the opening minute.

UFC 257 concluded a run of three shows in eight days with a few thousand fans allowed inside the promotion's coronavirus bubble in the Middle East.

Character concerns complicate Hall of Fame votes

Associated Press

Like many baseball writers, C. Trent Roscrans viewed the Hall of Fame vote as a labor of love. The ballot would arrive around the end of November, and it would keep him occupied for much of December. He'd write down his research on players in a notebook and feel butterflies when putting his ballot in the mail.

Then it was time for his most recent vote, and the whole process felt quite different.

"That ballot sat out unopened until after Christmas, because I knew what was in it," Roscrans said. "And it wasn't something I enjoyed."

The results of the 2021 vote will be announced Tuesday, and Roscrans wasn't alone in finding the task particularly agonizing this time around. With Curt Schilling's candidacy now front and center — and Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens still on the ballot as well — voters have had to consider how much a player's off-field behavior should affect his Hall of Fame chances.

For years, suspicions of performance-enhancing drug use have played a significant role in the voting. Now, some writers are reassessing other concerns about some of the game's biggest stars — from Schilling's incendiary social media presence to domestic violence allegations against Bonds and others.

Ken Rosenthal, Roscrans' colleague

with The Athletic, began a recent column this way: "I hate my Hall of Fame ballot. It might be my last."

The top returning vote-getter on this year's ballot is Schilling, who a year ago came within 20 votes of being elected by the Baseball Writers' Association of America. His support now seems to have stalled.

As of early Saturday, Schilling had received 75.3% approval on ballots tallied at Ryan Thibodaux's tracker, but that pace probably isn't good enough. A player needs 75% for induction — and in the past, Schilling has fared far worse on private, unreleased ballots that aren't part of Thibodaux's tracker.

Schilling has turned off voters with his post-career behavior. ESPN suspended him from the Little League World Series a few years ago over a tweet in which he compared Muslim extremists to Nazi-era Germans. He was later fired by the network for Facebook comments about transgender people.

On Jan. 6, the day of the attack on the U.S. Capitol, he said the following in a message on his Twitter account:

"You cowards sat on your hands, did nothing while liberal trash looted rioted and burned for air Jordan's and big screens, sit back and watch folks start a confrontation for (expletive) that matters like rights, democracy and the end of govt corruption."

That tweet was a few days after Hall of Fame ballots were due, but Roscrans had already decided not to support Schilling — even though he'd voted for him in the past.

It remains up to the voters to decide how they'll weigh off-field issues when evaluating Hall of Fame candidates. The Hall instructs voters to take into account "the player's record, playing ability, integrity, sportsmanship, character, and contributions to the team(s) on which the player played."

But the Hall is still primarily a baseball honor. Right now, the sport's career leaders in home runs (Bonds) and hits (Pete Rose) are not enshrined. Neither is Clemens, with his seven Cy Young Awards, or Schilling, with his dazzling postseason resume.

If too many of the top players are left out — particularly if it's for nonbaseball reasons — could the Hall lose credibility as a baseball shrine?

Lynn Henning, a former columnist for the Detroit News, understands what makes some of these candidates objectionable — but he doesn't think the Hall of Fame vote is the right forum for holding them accountable.

"I believe there is a separate realm in which we can and must discuss all of those points, but I don't think it should be adjudicated on a Hall of Fame ballot," Henning said.

Durant, Irving help Nets hold off Heat

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Brooklyn's three superstars were just enough to overcome Bam Adebayo's brilliant individual effort.

Kevin Durant scored 31 points, Kyrie Irving took over late and had 28 and the Nets overcame Adebayo's career-high 41 points to beat the Miami Heat 128-124 on Saturday night.

James Harden finished with 12 points, 11 assists and seven rebounds as the Nets won for the first time with their Big Three playing together. They lost consecutive games with dismal defensive efforts in Cleveland and barely got enough stops to hold off a short-handed Heat team that had been limited to 81 points by Toronto a night earlier.

"It's not every day you see this collection of guys playing together in NBA history, so we want to take full advantage of

that," Irving said.

Irving helped pull the Nets through with 12 points in the final 5:48 after the Heat had erased nearly all of an 18-point deficit.

Joe Harris added 23 points and seven three-pointers for Brooklyn, but the Nets needed Irving's 18 points in the final quarter of a game they had largely controlled.

"All three of those guys, they're just so damn skilled. Off the dribble, their shooting ability, their ability to see open players, and that's why they're three of the best in this business," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. "And those are shots that only great players can manufacture."

Lakers 101, Bulls 90: Anthony Davis scored a season-high 37 points against his hometown team, LeBron James added 17 points and 11 rebounds and Los Angeles improved to 9-0 on the

road.

Zach LaVine led Chicago with 21 points and 10 rebounds.

Nuggets 120, Suns 112 (2 OT):

Nikola Jokic had 29 points and 22 rebounds, Jamal Murray hit a difficult three-pointer to force overtime and visiting Denver outlasted Phoenix.

The Suns played without All-Star guard Devin Booker for the first time this season. Averaging a team-high 22.9 points, he hurt his left hamstring Friday.

76ers 114, Pistons 110: Joel Embiid had 33 points and 14 rebounds, and his two free throws with 7.2 seconds left helped visiting Philadelphia seal a victory over Detroit.

Ben Simmons added 20 points, nine rebounds and seven assists for the 76ers, and he made a couple big free throws of his own in the final minute.

Jazz 127, Warriors 108: Donovan Mitchell had 23 points,

seven rebounds and six assists and host Utah routed Golden State for its eighth straight victory.

Stephen Curry made five three-pointers for the Warriors to give him 2,562 in his career—passing Reggie Miller for second place in NBA history.

Rockets 133, Mavericks 108: Eric Gordon scored a season-high 33 points, DeMarcus Cousins had his best game for Houston with 28 points and 17 rebounds and the Rockets beat host Dallas.

John Wall had seven points and eight assists after missing five games with right knee soreness. It was the first game for Wall since the James Harden trade.

Timberwolves 120, Pelicans 110: Naz Reid scored 20 points and host Minnesota beat New Orleans to snap a four-game losing streak.

Road Warriors: Canadiens too much for Canucks

Associated Press

Montreal improved to 4-0-2, joining the 1968-69 Canadiens as the only teams in NHL history to open a season with six road games and get at least a point in each of them.

"We took it one game at a time, I thought we played well and we got better as the games went on, and obviously building a little bit more chemistry along the way as well on the ice and off the ice," coach Claude Julien said.

Perry was promoted off the taxi squad to replace Joel Armia, who was concussed by a hit from Vancouver's Tyler Myers as the Canadiens trounced the Canucks 7-3 on Thursday. Perry, after 14 seasons in Anaheim and one with Dallas, signed a one-year deal with Montreal before this season.

"It was quick, the first couple

shifts. But once you get in the flow of the game, I've played a few games in this league so it comes back," the 35-year-old Perry said. "I felt good overall. The hands felt good. I played with some pretty good players tonight, so it made it easy on me."

Blue Jackets 5, Lightning 2: Hours after trading disgruntled center Pierre-Luc Dubois, host Columbus got three first-period goals and beat Tampa Bay.

Nick Foligno, Mikhail Grigorenko, Vladislav Gavrikov, Zach Werenski and Eric Robinson scored, and Elvis Merzlikins had 30 saves as the Blue Jackets played their most explosive game of the season. Fifteen different Columbus players recorded points.

Victor Hedman and Ondrej Palat scored for the Lightning, who lost for the first time in

their first four games. Andrei Vasilevsky made 22 saves.

Bruins 6, Flyers 1: Brad Marchand and Patrice Bergeron had two goals apiece and Boston, which hadn't led by two goals in any of its first four games this season, scored five times in a row to pull away and beat visiting Philadelphia.

Charlie Coyle and Craig Smith each had a goal and an assist in the second period to break open a 1-1 tie. Marchand scored twice in the third, and Bergeron finished it off with his second goal of the night to help the Bruins earn their second straight victory over the Flyers.

Blues 4, Kings 2: Torey Krug scored his first goal with host St. Louis and David Perron added a goal and an assist.

Adrian Kempe and Dustin Brown scored for Los Angeles, which was playing in its first

road game of the season. Vince Dunn and Jaden Schwartz scored the other goals for the blues.

Jordan Binnington has started all five games for St. Louis and is 3-1-1. He stopped 21 shots.

Kings backup goalie Calvin Petersen made his second start and stopped 25 shots.

Jets 6, Senators 3: Andrew Copp scored twice, and Paul Stastny and Mark Scheifele each had a goal and two assists as host Winnipeg scored four times in the third to rally for the win over Ottawa.

Kye Connor and Nikolaj Ehlers also scored to help the Jets beat the Senators for the third straight time. Blake Wheeler had three assists and Connor Hellebuyck finished with 18 saves. Evgenii Dadonov, Brady Tkachuk and Nick Paul scored for Ottawa.

No. 1 Gonzaga wins 19th straight

Associated Press

SPOKANE, Wash. — Drew Timme scored 22 points and freshman Jalen Suggs came close to a triple-double, helping top-ranked Gonzaga rout Pacific 95-49 on Saturday night for its 19th consecutive victory dating to last season.

Corey Kispert had 16 points, and Joel Ayayi added 12 for Gonzaga (15-0, 6-0 West Coast Conference), which won its 47th consecutive home game — the longest streak in the nation. Suggs finished with nine points, 11 rebounds and eight assists.

No. 2 Baylor 81, Oklahoma State 66: Jared Butler scored 22 points and the visiting Bears overcame a halftime deficit to beat the undermanned Cowboys.

Oklahoma State guard Cade Cunningham, the Big 12 Conference's leading scorer, did not play because of COVID-19 protocols. Key reserve Rondel Walker also sat out, leaving the team with eight players available.

No. 3 Villanova 71, Providence 56: Collin Gillespie and Justin Moore scored 15 points apiece and the host Wildcats beat the Friars for their eighth straight victory.

Caleb Daniels added 12 points and Jermaine Samuels had 10 for Villanova (10-1, 5-0 Big East).

Alyn Breed scored 18 points for Providence (8-7, 4-5).

No. 19 Missouri 73, No. 6 Tennessee 64: Xavier Pinson scored 27 points to lead the Tigers to a road win.

Pinson became the first opponent to score more than 20 points against the Volunteers this season. Dru Smith added 18 for Missouri (10-2, 4-2 Southeastern Conference).

No. 8 Houston 68, Temple 51: Marcus Sasser and Quentin Grimes each scored 15 points and the visiting Cougars rolled to their sixth straight victory.

Houston (13-1, 8-1 American Athletic Conference) also beat the Owls on Dec. 22. Grimes and Sasser hit consecutive early threes to build a 19-point lead. Jake Forrester led Temple (3-4, 2-4) with 15 points, and Khalif Battle had 14.

Oklahoma 75, No. 9 Kansas 68: De'Vion Harmon scored 22 points and the host Sooners beat the Jayhawks for their second victory of the month over a Top 10 opponent.

Oklahoma (9-4, 5-3 Big 12) has won three of its last four games against Kansas (10-5, 4-4) in Norman and is 8-1 at home this season — including a victory over then-No. 9

West Virginia on Jan. 2.

No. 15 Ohio State 74, No. 10 Wisconsin 62: E.J. Liddell scored 20 points and Buckeyes never trailed in a road win.

Ohio State (12-4, 6-4 Big Ten) has beaten Top 15 teams in each of its last three road games to underscore the conference's lack of a true homecourt advantage this season with no spectators due to the pandemic. The Buckeyes beat then-No. 15 Rutgers on Jan. 9 and then--No. 14 Illinois on Jan. 16. Illinois is now 22nd and Rutgers unranked.

No. 11 Creighton 74, No. 23 UConn 66: Denzel Mahoney scored 20 points and the host Bluejays broke open a close game in the last 10 minutes to beat the Huskies.

Creighton (11-4, 7-3 Big East) shot 58% in the second half to avoid its first three-game losing streak since February 2019. Mahoney made 8 of 14 shots from the field.

No. 13 Virginia 64, Georgia Tech 62: Sam Hauser scored 11 of his 22 points during a 15-2 second-half run and the host Cavaliers survived a scare before rallying to beat the Yellow Jackets.

Kihei Clark scored only two points for Virginia (10-2, 6-0 Atlantic Coast Conference), but they came on a short jumper with 1:09 left that broke a 62-all tie.

No. 14 West Virginia 79, Kansas State 47: Miles McBride scored 18 points to help the Mountaineers win on the road in their first game in two weeks because of COVID-19 protocols.

Jalen Bridges added 12 points and Taz Sherman had 10 for West Virginia (10-4, 3-3 Big 12).

Syracuse 78, No. 16 Virginia Tech 60: Quincy Guerrier had 20 points, Marek Doelzaj added 18 and Alan Griffin had 15 points, 10 rebounds and a career-high seven blocks to help the Orange win at home.

The Hokies closed to 47-44 on a lay-in by David N'Guessan with 13:45 to go, then Syracuse (9-4, 3-3 Atlantic Coast Conference) outscored Virginia Tech 31-9 to build its biggest lead of the game at 78-53.

Maryland 63, No. 17 Minnesota 49: Eric Ayala had 21 points and three steals to help the Terrapins deliver another road upset of a ranked Big Ten opponent, a wire-to-wire victory over the Golden Gophers.

Donta Scott added 15 points and 11 rebounds for Maryland (9-7, 3-6), which limited Minnesota's Liam Robbins to six points on 2-for-6 shooting before the 7-footer fouled out.

No. 18 Alabama 81, Mississippi State

73: Herbert Jones had 17 points and seven assists to help the Crimson Tide win at home.

Alabama (13-3, 8-0 Southeastern Conference) won its ninth straight overall and has won eight consecutive SEC games for the first time since starting league play 8-0 in the 1986-87 season. The Bulldogs (9-7, 4-4) cut an 11-point second-half deficit down to three in the final minute, but John Petty Jr. answered with a three-pointer with 32 seconds left.

Florida State 80, No. 20 Clemson 61: Balsa Koprivica had 13 points and 10 rebounds and the host Seminoles pulled away early to rout the Tigers for their fourth straight victory.

Sardaar Calhoun added a career-best 13 points for Florida State (9-2, 5-1 Atlantic Coast Conference). He made 4 of 5 three-pointers.

Oregon State 75, No. 21 Oregon 64: Ethan Thompson scored 19 points, Warith Alatishe had 14 points and 16 rebounds and the Beavers earned a road win.

Jarod Lucas added 13 points, and Oregon State (8-5, 4-3 Pac-12) had a 42-23 rebounding edge en route to its third straight victory.

Eugene Omoruyi had 15 points and nine rebounds for the Ducks (9-3, 4-2), playing without four projected starters.

Stanford 73, No. 24 UCLA 72 (OT): Oscar da Silva scored off an inbound pass as time expired in overtime to lift the Cardinal to a win in Santa Cruz, Calif., ending the Bruins' unbeaten streak in the Pac-12.

Louisville 70, Duke 65: Carlik Jones scored 19 of his 24 points in the second half and the Cardinals sent the Blue Devils to their third straight loss on Saturday.

Both teams plummeted out of the Top 25 rankings this week — Duke for the first time since Feb. 8, 2016 — but Louisville, which fell just outside the rankings, could find itself back in after snapping a two-game losing streak.

Navy 69, Army 62: Greg Summers had 17 points and 12 rebounds to lead five Midshipmen in double figures as they won their ninth straight game, getting past the visiting Black Knights.

Patrick Dorsey added 13 points for Navy (10-1, 7-0 Patriot League). Cam Davis chipped in 11, Jaylen Walker scored 10 and Richard Njoku had 10.

Lonnie Grayson had 18 points and eight rebounds for Army (8-4, 4-3).