

Navy secretary pick backs proposed budget

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden's pick for Navy secretary told senators on Tuesday that he supports the emphasis on new technologies in the Defense Department's 2022 budget proposal to help challenge the expanding Chinese military.

Carlos Del Toro, a Navy veteran and a CEO for an engineering and consulting firm, told the Senate Armed Services Committee that "we can no longer take U.S. naval superiority for granted" as China continues its rapid military growth.

"I always do believe that it's incredibly important to make the right investments and modernization," he said during his first confirmation hearing. "We can't be fighting the wars of yesterday — we have to fight the new wars of tomorrow. That includes cybersecurity and space and many other challenges that are presented."

Del Toro, who joined the Navy at 17 and served for 26 years, said he was pleased with the proposed 2022 Navy budget, saying it "recognize(d) this challenge and invests billions of dollars toward improving readiness and for future capabilities."

"Access to contested waters requires more robust capabilities and capacity," Del Toro said. "This demands new thinking about how we invest our defense dollars."

But some lawmakers have criticized the proposed 2022 budget for its poor funding for shipbuilding in favor of research and development of new capabilities such as hypersonic missiles, which China has already developed and travel at five times the speed of sound.

With more than 350 ships, China has surpassed the United States and now has the world's largest naval fleet. The U.S. has about 296 ships, according to the Navy.

In the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act, an annual law that sets policy and spending for the Pentagon, Congress mandated the Navy attain a fleet of 355 ships as soon as possible. However, the 2022 budget proposal cut four littoral combat ships and pledged to build just eight ships — an amount top Navy leaders have said will not be enough to reach the 355-ship goal.

Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo., said during the hearing that he had "real concern" about the budget proposal's funding pri-

orities "in terms of our ability to both maintain our readiness and ... pursue the modernization that we're going to need to outpace the growing Chinese threat."

Del Toro said the 355-ship goal would remain, but he told Hawley that it will take more than just "numbers of platforms" to maintain the Navy's "capability and lethality."

"We have to invest in missile technology, hypersonics, computing power — all the cybersecurity, all those other technologies that are going to advance our ability to deter China in the Indo-Pacific," he said. "If confirmed, I'm going to be exclusively focused on the China threat and exclusively focused on moving our maritime strategy forward in order to protect Taiwan and all of our national security interests in the Indo Pacific theater."

China, which views the self-governed Taiwan as one of its provinces, considers reunification a top priority, and the U.S. has said it would protect the island if Beijing attempted to take it by force.

Del Toro said the U.S. "should be clear about our foreign affairs intentions and our support of Taiwan in every possible way."

US virus cases rising again, doubling over 3 weeks

Associated Press

The COVID-19 curve in the United States is rising again after months of decline, with the number of new cases per day doubling over the past three weeks, driven by the fast-spreading delta variant, lagging vaccination rates and Fourth of July gatherings.

Confirmed infections climbed to an average of about 23,600 a day on Monday, up from 11,300 on June 23, according to Johns Hopkins University data. And all but two states — Maine and South Dakota — reported that case numbers have gone up over the past two weeks.

"It is certainly no coincidence that we are looking at exactly the time that we would expect cases to be occurring after the July Fourth weekend," said Dr. Bill Powderly, co-director of the infectious-

disease division at Washington University's School of Medicine in St. Louis.

At the same time, parts of the country are running up against deep vaccine resistance, while the highly contagious mutant version of the coronavirus that was first detected in India is accounting for an ever-larger share of infections.

Nationally, 55.6% of all Americans have received at least one COVID-19 shot, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The five states with the biggest two-week jump in cases per capita all had lower vaccination rates: Missouri, 45.9%; Arkansas, 43%; Nevada, 50.9%; Louisiana, 39.2%; and Utah, 49.5%.

Even with the latest surge, cases in the U.S. are nowhere near their peak of a quarter-million per day in January. And deaths are running at under 260 per day

on average after topping out at more than 3,400 over the winter — a testament to how effectively the vaccine can prevent serious illness and death in those who happen to become infected.

Still, amid the rise, health authorities in places such as Los Angeles County and St. Louis are begging even immunized people to resume wearing masks in public. And Chicago officials announced Tuesday that unvaccinated travelers from Missouri and Arkansas must either quarantine for 10 days or have a negative COVID-19 test.

Meanwhile, the Health Department in Mississippi, which ranks dead last nationally for vaccinations, began blocking posts about COVID-19 on its Facebook page because of a "rise of misinformation" about the virus and the vaccine.

Bush criticizes withdrawal from Afghanistan

Associated Press

BERLIN — Former President George W. Bush criticized the Western withdrawal from Afghanistan in an interview with a German broadcaster released Wednesday, saying he fears that Afghan women and girls will “suffer unspeakable harm.”

Asked in an interview with German international broadcaster Deutsche Welle whether the withdrawal is a mistake, Bush replied: “You know, I think it is, yeah, because I think the consequences are going to be unbelievably bad.”

The war in Afghanistan began under Bush after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States. Washington gave Taliban leader

Mullah Omar an ultimatum: hand over al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden and dismantle militant training camps or prepare to be attacked. Omar refused, and a U.S.-led coalition launched an invasion in October.

The withdrawal of U.S. and NATO troops set in motion earlier this year by President Joe Biden is now nearing completion. Taliban fighters have been surging through district after district, taking control of large swaths of the country.

In the DW interview, which marked outgoing German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s final official visit to the U.S., Bush said Merkel had supported the deployment in Afghanistan in part “because she saw the pro-

gress that could be made for young girls and women in Afghanistan.”

During the Taliban’s rule in the late 1990s, women were largely confined to their homes and girls had no access to education. Despite protestations from the U.S. and Europe, the Taliban enforced its extreme version of Islamic Shariah law.

“I’m sad,” Bush said. “Laura (Bush) and I spent a lot of time with Afghan women, and they’re scared. And I think about all the interpreters and people that helped not only U.S. troops but NATO troops, and it seems like they’re just going to be left behind to be slaughtered by these very brutal people. And it breaks my heart.”

Sailors, Marines won’t lose leave earned in pandemic

By MATTHEW M. BURKE

Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — The Navy is allowing sailors and Marines on Okinawa to keep excess use-or-lose leave they accrued during the coronavirus pandemic, according to a recent Navy memo.

Members of the sea service with at least 180 days on Okinawa during the current fiscal year are now entitled to keep up to 120 days of leave when the fiscal year ends on Sept. 30.

The change was announced by Catherine Kessmeier, acting assistant secretary of the Navy for manpower and reserve affairs, in a memo Friday.

All active-duty service members earn 30 days of annual leave. Any unused leave in excess of 60 days is lost when the fiscal year ends.

But travel bans, restricted movements and local states of emergency brought on by the coronavirus pandemic meant many sailors and Marines on Okinawa accrued plenty of unused leave over the past year. Many service members’ overseas tours were extended, or they were prevented from making stateside visits.

“The Department of the Navy’s adherence to the Government of Japan’s Coronavirus Disease-2019 travel restrictions has significantly limited the ability of

sailors and Marines permanently assigned to Okinawa, Japan, to take leave during the national emergency,” Kessmeier wrote.

Kessmeier altered the leave policy by designating service on Okinawa as “other duty” for purposes of special leave accrual, the memo said.

The newly accrued leave must appear on leave and earnings statements at the end of September. Sailors and Marines have until the end of fiscal 2024 to use their excess leave, the memo said.

The U.S. fiscal year begins on Oct. 1 and ends on Sept. 30 of the following calendar year.

Austin touts AI tech as key to help prevent future wars

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Artificial intelligence will be key to preventing future conflicts as China increases its efforts to develop the technology, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said Tuesday during a summit on emerging technologies.

Austin, who was speaking at a summit hosted by the National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence, said the Defense Department must focus on incorporating AI into all aspects of warfare, especially as “China’s leaders have made clear they intend to be globally dominant in AI by the year 2030.”

“Beijing already talks about using AI for a range of missions, from surveillance to cyberattacks to autonomous weapons,” the defense secretary said.

The Pentagon’s proposed budget for 2022 asked for \$112 billion in research, development, testing and evaluation — the department’s largest-ever request for such priorities.

In the request, “AI is one of the department’s top tech modernization priorities,” Austin said. “Over the next five years, the department will invest nearly \$1.5 billion in the center’s efforts to accelerate our adoption of AI.”

He said the department is focusing on AI development because it will be key to deter adversaries in “the future fight.”

“Tech advances like AI are changing the face and the pace of warfare, but we believe that we can responsibly use AI as a force multiplier — one that helps us to make decisions faster and more rigorously, to integrate across all domains and to replace old ways of doing business,” Austin said.

In Austin’s speech, he highlighted some of the 600 AI efforts already underway in the Defense Department, including the algorithm-driven Pathfinder project that helps synthesize information to support joint warfighting.

Biden blasts 'un-American' voting rules

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — President Joe Biden declared preserving voting rights an urgent national “test of our time” on Tuesday but offered few concrete proposals to meet it.

Biden, who has proclaimed protecting ballot access the central cause of his presidency, has faced sharp criticism from allies for not doing more, though political headwinds and stubborn Senate math have limited his ability to act. Despite his ringing words Tuesday, he avoided any mention of trying to alter the Senate filibuster rule that stands in the path of federal legislation.

Speaking at the National Con-

stitution Center in Philadelphia, Biden called state efforts to curtail voting accessibility “un-American” and “un-democratic” and launched a broadside against his predecessor, Donald Trump, who baselessly alleged misconduct in the 2020 election after his defeat. Biden called passage of congressional proposals to override new state voting restrictions and to restore parts of the Voting Rights Act that were curbed in recent years by the Supreme Court “a national imperative.”

Yet instead of raising the possibility of fighting the filibuster, he appeared to tacitly acknowledge the fading hopes for the bills, saying he would launch a

nationwide campaign to arm voters with information on rule changes and restrictions ahead of the 2022 midterm elections.

“We have to prepare now,” the president said.

Biden’s sharp rhetoric drew praise from progressive groups in his party but did little to assuage the mounting pressure on him to throw his weight behind replacing the filibuster.

“The president believes that we have to make the filibuster work the way it used to,” said White House deputy press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre, who added Biden has not changed his opposition to eliminating it altogether.

Some GOP-led states have

worked to roll back the vote-by-mail expansion that was put in place in the past presidential election due to COVID-19 fears. Others have tried to strengthen voter identification requirements and curtail hours and locations for early voting and ballot drop-offs.

Democrats on Capitol Hill have tried to respond with a sweeping federal voting and elections bill that Senate Republicans have united to block. Most Republicans have similarly dismissed a separate bill, the John Lewis Voting Rights Advancement Act, which would restore sections of the Voting Rights Act that the Supreme Court has weakened.

Senate Dems unveil new \$3.5T budget agreement

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Senate Democrats say they have reached a budget agreement that envisions spending an enormous \$3.5 trillion over the coming decade, paving the way for their drive to pour federal resources into climate change, health care and family service programs sought by President Joe Biden.

The accord announced Tuesday night marks a major step in the party’s push to meet Biden’s goal of bolstering an economy that was ravaged by the coronavirus pandemic and setting it on course for long-term growth. It includes a Medicare expansion of vision, hearing and dental benefits for older Americans, a goal of progressives.

But Democrats behind the agreement face possible objections from rival moderate and progressive factions, and will have to work hard to convert their plans into legislation they can push through the closely divided Congress over what could be unanimous Republican opposition.

Biden will attend a closed-door lunch at the Capitol on Wednesday with Senate Democrats to focus on “getting this wonderful plan” enacted, Schumer said.

All told, the ambitious proposal reflects Biden’s vision for making the most substantive potential investments in the nation in years, some say on par with the New Deal of the 1930s. Together with a slimmer, \$1 trillion bipartisan effort of traditional road, highway and public works also being negotiated, they represent close to the president’s initial \$4 trillion-plus effort that could reach almost every corner of the country.

The Democrats’ goal is to push a budget resolution reflecting Tuesday’s agreement through the House and the Senate before lawmakers leave for their August recess. The resolution sets only broad spending and revenue parameters, leaving the actual funding and specific decisions about which programs are affected — and by how much — for later legislation.

Feds charge 4 in Iran plot to kidnap US-based activist

Associated Press

NEW YORK — An Iranian intelligence officer and three alleged members of an Iranian intelligence network have been charged in Manhattan with plotting to kidnap a prominent Iranian opposition activist and writer in exile and take her back to Tehran, authorities said Tuesday.

An indictment in Manhattan federal court alleges that the plot was part of a wider plan to lure three individuals in Canada and a fifth person in the United Kingdom to Iran. Victims were also targeted in the United Arab Emirates, authorities said.

The identities of the alleged victims were not released, but Brooklyn-based Masih Alinejad confirmed that authorities had told her she was among the targeted victims.

“I knew that this is the nature of the Islamic Republic, you know, kidnapping people, arresting people, torturing people, killing people. But I couldn’t believe it that this is going to happen to me in United States of

America,” Alinejad told The Associated Press.

According to the indictment, Alireza Shavaroghi Farahani, 50, an Iranian intelligence official who resides in Iran, and three other defendants tried since at least June 2020 to kidnap Alinejad. If caught and convicted, the four could face life in prison.

Farahani and the network he led on multiple occasions in 2020 and 2021 lied about his intentions as he hired private investigators to surveil, photograph and video record Alinejad and her household members, the indictment alleged. It said the surveillance included a live high-definition video feed of the activist’s home.

The indictment alleged that the government of Iran in 2018 tried to lure her to a third country so a capture would be possible, even offering money to her relatives.

The others charged in the kidnapping plot were identified as Mahmoud Khazain, 42, Kiya Sadeghi, 35, and Omid Noori, 45, all from Iran.

Western fires threaten tribal lands

Associated Press

BLY, Ore. — Fierce wildfires in the northwest are threatening American Indian tribal lands that already are struggling to conserve water and preserve traditional hunting grounds in the face of a Western drought.

Blazes in Oregon and Washington were among some 60 large, active wildfires that have destroyed homes and burned through close to a million acres in a dozen mostly Western states, according to the National Interagency Fire Center.

In north-central Washington, hundreds of people in the town of Nespelem on the Colville Indian Agency were ordered to

leave because of “imminent and life-threatening” danger as the largest of five wildfires caused by dozens of Monday night lightning strikes tore through grass, sagebrush and timber.

Seven homes burned but four were vacant and the entire town evacuated safely before the fire arrived, said Andrew Joseph Jr., chairman of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation that includes more than 9,000 descendants of a dozen tribes.

The confederation declared a state of emergency Tuesday and closed the reservation to the public and to industrial activity.

The declaration said fore-

casts called for possible triple-digit temperatures and 25-mph winds on Wednesday into Thursday.

In Oregon, the lightning-sparked Bootleg Fire that had destroyed at least 20 homes was raging through lands near the California border on Wednesday. At least 2,000 homes were threatened by the fire.

Mark Enty, a spokesman for the Northwest Incident Management Team 10 that is working to contain the fire, said that since he arrived to the area last week the Bootleg Fire has doubled in size each day.

“That’s sort of like having a new fire every day,” Enty said.

The blaze had spread over 315 square miles.

Firefighters for the third day in a row had to back off occasionally for their safety.

Crews were facing above-normal temperatures and bone-dry humidity coupled with afternoon gusts that were expected to create dangerous fire conditions, officials said.

In California, progress was reported on the state’s largest fire so far this year. The Beckwourth Complex, a combined pair of lightning-ignited blazes, was almost 50% contained after blackening more than 145 square miles near the Nevada state line.

Texas Dems urge quick moves on US voting bills

Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Texas Democrats who hurriedly took off to Washington to block sweeping new election laws urged Congress on Tuesday to quickly pass legislation protecting voting rights, while Republican Gov. Greg Abbott threatened them with arrest the moment they return.

Speaking to reporters outside the Capitol, the Democrats were realistic about the limits of their gambit, noting they can hold up the GOP-backed proposals at home for only so long and arguing that only federal legislation would prevent some of the new restrictions from becoming law.

In Austin, House Republicans authorized state troopers to find and corral missing legislators, while a depleted but still-working state Senate passed new voting restrictions in a show of GOP resolve.

“We can’t hold this tide back forever. We’re buying some time. We need Congress and all of our federal leaders to use

that time wisely,” Democratic state Rep. Chris Turner said, gathered with his fellow quorum-breakers outside the U.S. Capitol.

The Democrats’ dramatic exodus was in part aimed at rallying their voters on what they see as a priority issue ahead of the 2022 midterms, and at pressuring President Joe Biden to act as federal voting legislation has stalled for months in the Senate.

Back in Texas, Republicans in the unusually skeletal state Capitol authorized finding and bringing back more than 50 lawmakers “under warrant of arrest if necessary.”

However, because state troopers have no jurisdiction beyond Texas, the move has little practical effect in the short term.

In the state Senate, where nine Democrats didn’t show up — not enough to also deny quorum — Republicans passed their version of a voting bill even though that is now as far as it can go.

Cuba confirms death in protests

Associated Press

HAVANA — Cuban authorities confirmed Tuesday that one person has died during demonstrations that have shaken the island in recent days by protesting over food shortages, high prices and other grievances against the government.

The Interior Ministry said in a statement that Diubis Laurencio Tejeda, 36, died Monday during a clash between protesters and police in the Arroyo Naranjo municipality on the outskirts of Havana.

It said an unspecified number of people were arrested and there were some people injured, including some officers.

The statement accused demonstrators of vandalizing houses, setting fires and damaging power lines.

It also alleged they attacked police and civilians with knives, stones and other objects.

Demonstrations that erupted Sunday have seen thousands of Cubans in the streets voicing grievances against shortages of goods, rising prices and power cuts, and some protesters have called for a change of govern-

ment.

Havana still had a heavy police presence Tuesday, with officers particularly guarding key points such as the Malecon coastal promenade and the Capitol. Internet and cellphone data service continued to be disrupted.

There were no reports of new protests, which the government has sought to blame on Cuban Americans using social media to instigate unrest in Cuba.

The demonstrations in several cities and towns were some of the biggest displays of antigovernment sentiment seen in years in tightly controlled Cuba, which is facing a surge of coronavirus cases as it struggles with its worst economic crisis in decades as a consequence of U.S. sanctions imposed by the Trump administration.

The rare outpouring of dissent led former President Raul Castro to join with other top leaders Monday to discuss the situation.

The demonstrations were extremely unusual on an island where little dissent against the government is tolerated.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Report: Bug zapper caused vision issues

NC DURHAM — A bug zapper that had the wrong kind of light bulb caused vision problems for five people at a veterans medical facility in North Carolina, a spokesperson said.

Yves-Marie Daley from the Durham VA Health Care System said the bulb emitted light that was too strong, impacting the vision of three employees, a resident and a contractor who had a meeting near the device, *The News & Observer* reported.

The people affected are healing and their vision is improving, according to Daley.

She didn't specify the date of the incident or the severity of the vision loss.

Deputy helps hoof wayward cows home

MI MASON — A sheriff's deputy hoofed it for 3 miles along a two-lane Michigan road to help guide eight wayward cows back to a farm.

The Ingham County sheriff's office transport unit responded to a report of cattle blocking a road near Mason, WLNS-TV reported.

The deputy and two other men spent about two hours rounding up and herding the bovine back home. Part of the trek was recorded by a dashcam in a sheriff's office vehicle.

Hospital: Patient got someone else's kidney

OH CLEVELAND — An Ohio hospital has acknowledged that a patient received a new kidney meant for someone else.

Officials at University Hospitals in Cleveland apologized for the mistake and said two employees have been placed on administrative leave.

The kidney given to the wrong patient is compatible and the person is expected to recover, officials said.

The other patient's surgery has been delayed. Officials said the hospital is reviewing how the error occurred to prevent similar mistakes going forward.

Rare historic canoe found in mountain river

SC COLUMBIA — Conservationists pulled a historic canoe from a river at the Georgia-South Carolina line and plan to put it on display.

Volunteers with the Chattooga Conservancy hauled the weathered wooden canoe out of the South Carolina side of the Chattooga River after a group of canoeists headed downstream discovered the craft last fall, *The State* newspaper in Columbia reported.

Archaeologists at the University of South Carolina said the boat could be 200 to 250 years old, a discovery that could shed light on life in the late 1700s.

Record of annual manatee deaths broken

FL STUART — More manatees have died already this year than in any other year in Florida's recorded history, primarily from starvation due to the loss of seagrass beds, state officials said.

The Florida Fish & Wildlife Conservation Commission reported that 841 manatee deaths were recorded through July 2, breaking the previous record of

830 that died in 2013 because of an outbreak of toxic red tide.

Some biologists believe water pollution is killing the seagrass beds in the area.

Boat strikes are also a major cause of manatee deaths, killing at least 63 this year.

Nearly 10K winners to split \$3.6M jackpot

NC CHARLOTTE — Nearly 10,000 winners of a North Carolina lottery game will split the \$3.6 million jackpot.

The Charlotte *Observer* reported that the 9,307 players won the Carolina Pick 3 in a drawing last Friday.

All of the winners chose the same numbers: 0-0-0. Each beat odds of 1 in 1,000.

Prizes will vary depending on how much people pay for a ticket. Players who paid 50 cents get \$250 before taxes. Those who paid \$1 get the top prize of \$500.

Schools pick Phoenix to replace former mascot

KS ATCHISON — The Phoenix will be the new mascot for the Atchison public school district, replacing former mascots tied to Native American imagery.

The Atchison School Board chose the new mascot by a 5-1 vote. The board voted in April to replace the former mascots — "Redmen" for the high school and "Braves" for the middle school.

That change came after Atchison United, a group that promotes diversity, pushed for a more racially sensitive mascot.

The image of the Phoenix the school will use has not been chosen but the school colors will re-

main red and yellow.

Ex-teacher indicted for gasoline purchases

TN NASHVILLE — The Tennessee comptroller's office said a former middle school teacher who also was an assistant baseball coach was indicted on charges that he expensed more than \$10,100 in gas for his personal car.

According to the comptroller's investigation, the former Unicoi County Middle School teacher and coach used the department fuel card at least 169 times to gas up his personal car without permission from June 2015 until October 2020. The report said the former teacher was authorized through the coaching position at the Northeast Tennessee school to buy diesel fuel for a school vehicle. The former teacher was indicted July 9 on one count of theft over \$10,000, the report said.

Owner sells salon to longtime employee

CT NEW HAVEN — Salon owner Pio Imperati took a chance and hired hairstylist Kathy Moura right out of technical high school 15 years ago. It has worked out so well that Imperati sold her his venerable New Haven business for \$1.

"She's a good hairdresser, a good barber, she's very nice," Imperati told the *New Haven Register* about the sale of Pio of Italy Hair Studio.

While Moura will pay rent to Imperati, she avoids a charge that can run into the tens of thousands of dollars to purchase a salon for the equipment, supplies and clientele.

— Associated Press

STARS  AND STRIPES®

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

Reporting
World, National
and Military News

British Open returns in bubble format

Associated Press

As tradition goes at the British Open, it might feel as though nothing has changed.

Shane Lowry, a popular champion on Irish soil at Royal Portrush, returned the silver claret upon his arrival Monday at Royal St. George's in England for a ceremonial start to the 149th edition of golf's oldest championship. It's like clockwork, with one exception:

The British Open is one year behind.

Strange as it was for the Masters to be played amid autumn hues of November and for the U.S. Open to be played in September for the first time in nearly a century, the biggest fallout in golf last year from the COVID-19 pandemic was the British Open not being played at all.

Now it's back, though not quite to normal.

It might look that way with the British Open allowing 32,000 spectators a day to roam the expansive links off Sandwich Bay, just up the coast from the English Channel. Major

championship golf hasn't seen a crowd that large since Portrush two summers ago.

"I'm keen to get as many spectators in as possible because I do think that's what creates the atmosphere," said Martin Slumbers, chief executive of the R&A. "And I think actually it's what makes the players play just a little bit better."

Off the course? That might be a different story for them.

The players will be confined to a strict bubble, which for PGA Tour regulars will feel like a step back in time.

Under R&A protocols, players are allowed a core group of only four people. That includes the player and caddie. The other two chosen have to be a coach, a trainer or other physical support staff, a family member or a translator. Family members, such as a spouse, are not exempt from U.K. quarantine laws. The others are.

That means Justin Thomas and Jordan Spieth can't share a house as they often do. It means no trips to restaurants or groce-

ry stores, much less a pub. Players are to avoid mixing with the general public, except for those 32,000 fans behind the ropes.

"I feel like a lot of the family restrictions, each player's team restrictions, it's a little too much," U.S. Open champion Jon Rahm said. "But I understand why they want us to stay at home and why they want to keep the players as safe as possible."

"It's the rules they put up, and we just have to deal with it and follow them."

It's a big change for the top players who have spent most of their time in America. COVID-19 testing on the PGA Tour is no longer required for fully vaccinated players, and testing at tournaments will end by the time they get home.

"It seems like us as players, we're jumping through some hurdles and dodging bullets and they're having 32,000 fans a day at the tournament, so I don't know," Rickie Fowler said. "I can't really answer questions clearly with all that going on."

Kevin Na withdrew because of international travel requirements. Three players from Asian countries have withdrawn to concentrate on the Olympics at the end of the month.

"Look, it's one week," PGA champion Phil Mickelson said. "It's a major championship and let's just do what it takes to be able to compete."

There also is plenty of uncertainty when it comes to Royal St. George's, starting with a question that never has a reliable answer: Where exactly is the ball going to bounce?

The fairways have so many humps that shots landing in the middle can bounce left or right. That's what led Greg Norman to say ahead of the 1993 British Open, "I'd swear the Royal Air Force used a couple of the fairways for bombing runs."

And then he shot all rounds in the 60s to win and changed his tune, describing a British Open at Royal St. George's as the "world championship of imagination."

Ohtani gets win for AL in MLB All-Star game

Associated Press

DENVER — A Sho-case for Shohei Ohtani became a grand stage for Vladimir Guerrero Jr., too.

Ohtani unleashed his 100 mph heat while pitching a perfect inning for the win in becoming baseball's first two-way All-Star. Guerrero rocked Coors Field with a 468-foot home run and the American League breezed 5-2 Tuesday night for its eighth straight victory.

Near and far, the sport's entire focus was on Ohtani from the very start in this All-Star Game.

Players on both sides climbed to the dugout rails to watch him, and the Japanese sensation went 0-for-2, grounding out twice as the AL's leadoff man and designated hitter.

Jared Walsh, Ohtani's teammate on the Los Angeles Angels, got a save — with his glove. He made a sliding catch in left field on Kris Bryant's tricky liner with the bases load-

ed to end the eighth inning.

So even with the teams decked out in new uniforms that social media deemed a strike-out instead of a home run, it was a familiar result. Mike Zunino also connected for the AL as it improved to 46-43-2 overall in the series.

Guerrero, at 22, became the youngest MVP in All-Star Game history.

J.T. Realmuto homered for the National League on a mile-high night at Coors, a hitter's park.

A 27-year-old right-hander in his fourth big league season, Ohtani has dazzled. He leads the major leagues with 33 homers and is 4-1 in 13 starts as a pitcher, a two-way performance not seen since Babe Ruth in 1919 and '20, before the Bambino largely gave up the mound for slugging.

"This has been the best experience, most memorable," Ohtani said through translator Ippei Mizuhara. "Obviously, I've never played in the playoffs or World Series, so

once I do that, that's probably going to surpass it. But this has been the most memorable."

Ohtani was a double triple-digit threat in Denver, hitting a 513-foot drive during Monday night's Home Run Derby and throwing a 100.2 mph pitch to Nolan Arenado.

"He was as good as advertised," Arenado said. "His fastball had a little cut and he's a really good player. Just incredible."

Ohtani retired Fernando Tatis Jr., Max Muncy and Arenado, a Colorado fan favorite, in order in the bottom half of the first, throwing 10 of 14 pitches for strikes.

Major League Baseball even made a special rules tweak for Ohtani, allowing him to be replaced as a pitcher and to remain in the game as the DH after he was done pitching. He grounded out twice — Pittsburgh second baseman Adam Frazier ranged to make a nice backhanded pickup that prevented a hit against Max Scherzer starting the night.

US men rebound with win over Argentina

Associated Press

USA Basketball finally made it look easy again.

Kevin Durant and Bradley Beal each scored 17 points and the Americans took control from the outset, beating Argentina 108-80 in Las Vegas on Tuesday to avoid what would have been the first three-game losing streak in this era of NBA players being able to represent USA Basketball on the international stage.

Zach LaVine scored 15 points for the U.S., which lost its first two games in Las Vegas to Nigeria and Australia. The Americans shot 51%, scored 33 first-quarter points to get off and running and beat Argentina for the 10th consecutive time since a loss at the 2004 Athens Olympics.

"It was better," U.S. coach Gregg Popovich said. "Bit by bit, every day, I hope."

Damian Lillard scored 13 points and Bam Adebayo finished with 12 points, five assists and five rebounds for the U.S.

"Just really locked in," Adebayo said.

Luis Scola, set to play in the Olympics for a fifth time, scored 16 points in 19 minutes for Argentina. Nicolas Laprovittola scored 13, Facundo Campazzo had 12 and Gabriel Deck added 10.

"It's not a big deal," Argentina's Luca Vildoza said. "It's only a loss."

The U.S. played with only eight members of the Olympic team. Jayson Tatum was held out with right knee soreness and will be day-to-day going forward, USA Basketball said. The Americans also will be without Khris Middleton, Jrue Holiday and Devin Booker until at

least this weekend because of the NBA Finals.

The back-to-back losses to start the U.S. team's stay in Las Vegas raised the possibility that the Americans might lose three in a row with NBA players for the first time.

If those thoughts truly existed, they didn't last for long.

"Our biggest thing is we have to realize it's not the NBA and Coach Pop keeps reemphasizing that every single day," Beal said. "It's way more physical. Guys are smarter. These guys have been playing together for five-, 10-plus years. So they have the experience and the chemistry and we're trying to develop that in a short period of time."

It was 15-4 USA before the game was even 3½ minutes old, the lead was as much as 17 later in the opening quarter — the biggest leads for the Americans in the first two games were 10 against Nigeria and 11 against Australia — and the outcome was never really in doubt.

"The USA played great," Argentina coach Sergio Hernandez said. "They played more aggressive defense than they had the last two games."

The Americans held a 58-42 lead at the half when Durant beat the buzzer with an 18-footer, a shot that Draymond Green was celebrating before the ball even swished through the net.

"We're not going to make shots all the time," Durant said in a televised halftime interview. "But if we continue to guard the way we are, it'll start to turn for us on offense. ... When we keep the ball in front and we get stops and rebounds, then we pretty much can

play with a clean slate on the offensive side of the ball."

The U.S. won the rebound battle 40-34, committed only nine turnovers and held Argentina to 31% shooting — 9 for 29 — from three-point range.

"Today we got better," Beal said. "Still a lot we can improve on, but we're moving in the right direction."

Tip-ins

Argentina: Campazzo was shaken up late in the first quarter after taking a hard screen, but was able to eventually return to the game. ... Argentina went 0-3 in Las Vegas, losing 87-84 in its opener against Australia on a buzzer-beating three-pointer by Patty Mills and then falling 94-71 to Nigeria on Monday.

USA: The Americans used all 15 of their available players. ... Kevin Love, who played only 3:01 in the in the Nigeria game and didn't play against Australia, was among the first-quarter subs on Tuesday. ... Even after the losses to Nigeria and Australia, FanDuel Sportsbook had the Americans as 18.5-point favorites entering the game.

Doubling up

The U.S. Olympic women's team begins taking the stage in Las Vegas on Wednesday, starting with the WNBA All-Star Game. The U.S. men and women both play Australia on Friday, before the men close their Las Vegas stay on Sunday against Spain and the women play Nigeria. The American teams will fly together to Tokyo on Monday.

Suns can hack Giannis, but know he'll keep coming

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — Giannis Antetokounmpo pointed to a pair of scratches, one on his forehead and the other on his cheek.

Those NBA Finals battle scars are proof, he figures, that the frustrated Phoenix Suns are indeed fouling him.

"So they're making my pretty face ugly," Antetokounmpo said.

The Suns may be hacking and whacking him, but they sure aren't stopping the Milwaukee Bucks star.

Coming off two straight 40-point performances, Anteto-

kounmpo will try to help the Bucks even the series in Game 4 on Wednesday.

And whether playing with pain in his knee or shaking off hits to his face, Phoenix knows Antetokounmpo is going to keep attacking them.

"He's coming full speed every play, like a running back coming downhill," point guard Chris Paul said.

Antetokounmpo had 41 points and 13 rebounds in Milwaukee's 120-100 victory in Game 3. That followed his 42 points and 12 rebounds in Game 2, making him just the sixth player with consecutive 40-point games in the

NBA Finals.

The Suns have already faced LeBron James and Nikola Jokic during this first run to their first NBA Finals since 1993, so they've had to figure out ways to overcome MVP players.

But Antetokounmpo, with his end-to-end bursts that seem to take just two or three dribbles, is a different type of challenge. Paul said Phoenix coach Monty Williams' instructions are just to try to get in the 6-foot-11 forward's way, but it's difficult to give too much attention because the Bucks have shooters such as Khris Middleton, Jrue Holiday and Brook Lopez set up around

the perimeter.

Paul said the Suns will just stick with their game plan.

"We're going to keep trying to build a wall," he said.

Antetokounmpo is used to that.

He recalls it being about two years ago when teams started to employ that defensive strategy of packing multiple players in his path to the basket.

Antetokounmpo still doesn't enjoy playing against it — "I'm not going to lie; I hate it," he said — but he's come to look at it as a compliment, adding that it's "funny that there's a defense out there called the Giannis Wall."

US women's fencing team arrives in Japan

By JONATHAN SNYDER
Stars and Stripes

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION IWAKUNI, Japan — The U.S. women's Olympic fencing team arrived Tuesday evening at this Marine base in Yamaguchi prefecture for training ahead of the Tokyo Games this month.

An entourage of about 14 people stepped into the lobby of Iwakuni airport, which shares a runway with the base, and were greeted by members of the media while adhering to social distancing measures.

The fencing squad joins the U.S. Olympic softball team for workouts in Iwakuni. The softball team arrived July 5 and has finished up playing exhibition games in front of a limited number of spectators.

Japan has carved out restrictions for Olympic athletes that preclude them from the usual 14-day quarantine expected of most arriving foreigners, but that also prevent them from mingling with most residents of Japan.

Iwakuni Deputy Mayor Tadaishi Sugioka welcomed the fencing team in front of reporters at the airport, giving his first

opening remarks in English.

"While the USA women's softball team is already in training camp, now it's your turn to get more than ready for the Tokyo Games and I know you're going to give it your best performance to achieve the best results," he said. "While you are here in Iwakuni we must follow COVID safe distancing guidelines, but we are always close to you in our hearts."

The Olympians will stay at the Kintai Inn on the air station until Monday.

MCAS Iwakuni commander Col. Lance Lewis also greeted the athletes at the airport.

"On behalf of the city and behalf of the air station, welcome to Japan, you are finally here," he said at the press conference. "When you're here in this city, when you're here aboard Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, you're among family, friends and neighbors. And I know when you go up to Tokyo to compete in the Olympics on your way to the gold medal, your adopted home of Iwakuni is going to be cheering the loudest for you!"

The fencing team will be training every day from 10 a.m.

to noon until Sunday at the Lotus Culture Center Arena inside the Atago Sports Complex, a facility shared by the city and the air station, according to the Iwakuni city Sports Promotion Division.

Tickets to team practice sessions have already sold out.

"For me, personally, this is my third visit here to Iwakuni, and the reason we keep coming back here is because of the city's special atmosphere and the hospitality we receive here," the team's head coach, Andrey Geva, told reporters. "On the behalf of our team, I would like to thank the people of Iwakuni and thank you for your hospitality. It makes our preparation much more enjoyable, and we are happy to be here."

The 2020 fencing team, 24 women and men, is the largest in U.S. Olympic history to qualify for the games and boasts several medal contenders, according to NBC Sports.

Mariel Zagunis, of Portland, Ore., who competes in the saber events, is the only U.S. fencer to win individual gold since 1904, according to NBC. She won gold in individual competition in 2004 and 2008 and bronze in

team competition in 2008 and 2016, according to the Team USA website.

During the press event the city presented gifts with each athlete's name written in Japanese kanji calligraphy. Epee fencer Kelley Hurley, of Houston, expressed her gratitude as she received the gifts on the team's behalf.

Hurley's younger sister, Courtney Hurley, also qualified for the U.S. team as an epee competitor, according to Team USA.

Though athletes and others entering Japan to take part in the Olympics are exempt from a 14-day quarantine rule, they must follow strict testing and social distancing protocols.

"We are professional athletes and coaches, we train every day and in our training routine, we do the PCR testing on a daily basis, and if it's required to do this every day, we will comply with the requirements," Geva said. "This is the last phase of our preparation we want to focus on the Olympics, no touring this time, but it's fine, we are here to prepare."

The games officially begin July 23 with closing ceremonies on Aug. 8.

As NHL offseason begins, clubs make moves

Associated Press

It's hard for Duncan Keith to say goodbye to yesterday.

Pekka Rinne, too. Even more difficult for Zach Parise and Ryan Suter because it wasn't their call.

Moving on from the past is an early theme of the NHL offseason. Chicago traded Keith after 16 seasons that included three Stanley Cup titles. Rinne retired following 13 full seasons goaltending in Nashville, and Minnesota announced buyouts for Parise and Suter nine seasons into their 13-year contracts.

Consider it like summer cleaning before most of the jumbling for the 2021-22 season happens after the Seattle expansion draft next week.

"These things always have to happen,"

Wild general manager Bill Guerin said Tuesday. "You see teams constantly changing. You have to try to get better."

Some of the getting better means getting worse in the short term. That's the gamble the Wild took in buying out Parise and Suter. It's the same for the Blackhawks in trading Keith to Edmonton for defenseman Caleb Jones and a third-round pick.

The Predators hope they have their Rinne replacement in Juuse Saros, who got 35 games to the elder Finn's 21 this past season and was the playoff starter.

"We're really happy we have Juuse," GM David Poile said. "He's played really well behind Pekka, played exceptional this year. I think 'the torch has been passed' is the expression here. But who's not going to miss Pekka?"

Keith will miss Chicago and vice versa after he was one of the most important players of this championship era. But at almost 38 and after going long stretches without seeing his 8-year-old son, Colton, Keith asked for a trade to Western Canada and landed with the Oilers.

"It's a sad day on one end to be leaving Chicago, but also an exciting time to be moving to a new team with new teammates," Keith said Monday night. "I want to be at my best. In Edmonton, it's going to be a competitive environment and I'm going to do everything I can to earn the respect of my new teammates and the coaching staff and the organization."

Parise and Suter will get that chance somewhere once free agency opens July 28.