

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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## 8,600 US troops cut as part of Taliban deal

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The United States has reduced its troop presence in Afghanistan to 8,600, fulfilling its obligation as part of a February deal with the Taliban, the general who oversees American forces in that region said Thursday.

Marine Gen. Kenneth McKenzie gave no indication of when, or at what pace, U.S. forces would be further reduced. He noted that the February deal requires the U.S. to fully withdraw its forces by next May, but he called that an “aspirational” commitment that would depend on certain actions by the Taliban.

President Donald Trump has been eager for a full U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, asserting that American forces

are merely policing a civil conflict and should be brought home. The war began in October 2001.

Without directly mentioning the 8,600 figure, McKenzie said, “We’re at that number now,” in accordance with the February agreement. The deal said the U.S. would drop to 8,600 within 135 days, which is mid-July. It represents a reduction from about 12,000 troops at the time of the agreement.

“We have met our part of the agreement,” the head of U.S. Central Command said, speaking at an Aspen Strategy Group webinar.

McKenzie said a full U.S. withdrawal would happen if conditions are right.

“Conditions would have to be met that satisfy us that attacks against our homeland are not

going to be generated from Afghanistan,” he said. “That’s not the Taliban. That is, of course, al-Qaida and ISIS,” referring to the extremist group that used haven in Afghanistan during the Taliban’s previous rule to plan the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks on the United States, as well as the Islamic State’s Afghanistan affiliate.

As part of the February deal, the Taliban agreed they would not allow any extremist group to use Afghan territory to plan or carry out attacks on the United States.

“The jury is still very much out on that” Taliban commitment, McKenzie said, “and so we will watch the Taliban.”

He added, “They have not yet completely made that case. There remains an opportunity for them to do it, but time is

now beginning to grow short.”

McKenzie spoke cautiously of trends in Iraq, where several thousand U.S. troops are training and advising Iraqi forces and contending with periodic hostility from Iranian-backed militia groups. Although he praised recent efforts by the Iraqi government to deal with Iranian influences in the country, he cited “a beginning of a spike in unprovoked rocket attacks on Iraqi bases that host U.S. forces.”

He said he thinks Iran and its proxies in Iraq are conducting these recent attacks “because they have been unable to prevail in the political arena in Iraq.”

He spoke after Iraqi authorities reported that four rockets exploded inside Baghdad’s fortified Green Zone near the American Embassy.

## Esper to create boards to study racial diversity issues

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Mark Esper announced Thursday that he would create two new groups charged with studying racial diversity challenges in the military in an effort to make the Pentagon a leader in a national conversation on systemic racism.

The defense secretary will build an internal board to conduct a fast-paced probe of diversity and racial issues across the force but focused largely on the military’s officer corps, Esper announced in a video to the force posted Thursday morning. He will also begin a process to build an external advisory committee meant to provide “long-term and sustainable” guidance to Pentagon

leadership on race-related issues.

“We are not immune to the forces of bias and prejudice — whether visible or invisible, conscious or unconscious,” Esper said in the video. “We know this bias burdens many of our service members, and has direct and indirect impact on the experiences of our minority members, the cultural and ethnic diversity of the force, and representation in our officer ranks. These things have no place in our military. They have no place in our country.”

The internal board, dubbed the Defense Board of Diversity and Inclusion in the Military, is charged with reporting to the defense secretary in December with “concrete, actionable recommendations” to increase racial diversity in the military and ensure individuals are

treated equally.

The external board, to be called the Defense Advisory Committee on Diversity and Inclusion in the Armed Services, will take a longer term approach to solving racial diversity issues in the force. Pentagon officials said it would be modeled after the long-standing Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services, a board of civilians that the Pentagon created to provide direct recommendations to the defense secretary to ensure women were properly integrated into the force and treated fairly. According to the Pentagon, the 20-person board has submitted more than 1,000 recommendations since its 1951 founding, of which defense secretaries have fully or partially adopted about 98%.

It was not immediately clear who would serve on either of

the new boards or when they would first meet. Pentagon spokespersons did not immediately respond to questions Thursday.

Esper said he had also directed top military and civilian Pentagon leaders to provide to him by the end of June ideas the Defense Department can implement immediately to root out racial biases. He asked others in the military to present him with their own ideas and vowed to visit with troops in the field in the coming months to discuss concerns they have about race within the ranks.

“I am convinced that there are a number of great ideas already out there right now — large and small — that can help us make important strides in ensuring the armed forces look more like the broader society we serve,” he said.

# Dems move to block troop plan for Europe

By JOHN VANDIVER

*Stars and Stripes*

STUTTGART, Germany — Democratic lawmakers have introduced legislation that would block President Donald Trump's push to withdraw nearly 10,000 troops from Germany, warning that such a move would have catastrophic security consequences for the U.S. and benefit America's adversaries.

"President Trump's disastrous decision to withdraw thousands of troops from and reduce the total force cap in Germany endangers our national security," the chairman of the House Foreign Relations Committee, Rep. Eliot Engel, D-N.Y., said in a statement Thursday, when he and Sen. Bob Menendez, D-N.J., proposed the legislation.

Menendez, the ranking Democrat on the Senate For-

eign Relations Committee, said Russian President Vladimir Putin would benefit from the proposed drawdown.

"The current U.S. troop presence in Germany is in the U.S. national security interest. Full stop," he said in a statement. "This drawdown weakens America and Europe. And Vladimir Putin understands and appreciates that better than anyone."

The Russian Foreign Ministry last week welcomed the plan to withdraw more than a quarter of U.S. troops from Germany, saying it would help bolster security in Europe.

The legislation proposed by the Democrats would deny funding for force level reductions in Europe unless the cuts were requested by a host nation government. It would also require that 180 days' notice be given for planned drawdowns in Europe, and that the secre-

taries of defense and state testify before Congress within 14 days of a proposed troop cut being announced.

On Monday, Trump confirmed that he wants to reduce the number of troops in Germany by 9,500, and tied the proposed cut to his dissatisfaction with Berlin over the amount of money it spends on defense.

Trump has repeatedly complained that Germany is falling short of its commitment to NATO to spend at least 2% of GDP on its military.

Both Republicans and Democrats have aired concerns over the proposed troop cuts in Germany.

Before Russia's 2014 incursion into Ukraine and the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, it was routine for both Democratic and Republican lawmakers to complain about the number of troops in Europe and call for forces to

return to the United States.

But Russia's move on Ukraine changed that, and in recent years, efforts to strengthen the U.S. military presence in Europe have enjoyed bipartisan support.

It isn't clear when Trump intends to execute his directive or which military units would be affected.

Proponents of current force levels argue that a large reduction would hinder operations beyond Germany, since troops based there support efforts in places like the Baltics, Middle East and Africa.

The Pentagon, which appears to have been blindsided by Trump's decision, has been mum on the issue.

U.S. European Command also has declined to comment, referring questions to the National Security Council in Washington.

## Trump troop reduction in Germany fits disruptive pattern

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — In vowing to pull thousands of American troops from Germany, President Donald Trump is following a pattern of disruptive, sometimes punitive, moves against allies that have dismayed his fellow Republicans and cast doubt across the globe about the future of partnering with the United States.

Trump has consistently promised to bring American troops home, dismissing the conventional view that a far-flung U.S. military presence, while costly, pays off in the long run by ensuring stability for global trade.

"President Trump has had America's alliances in his sights for a very long time," said Mira Rapp-Hooper, a senior fellow on Asia policy at the Council on Foreign Relations and author of "Shields of the Republic: The Triumph and Peril of America's Alliances." She recalled newspaper ads Trump bought in 1987 to urge Washington to stop paying to defend countries like Japan that can afford to protect themselves.

He also has argued for a faster withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan. Addressing newly minted officers graduating

from West Point last Saturday, Trump said, "We are ending the era of endless wars. In its place is a renewed, clear-eyed focus on defending America's vital interests. It is not the duty of U.S. troops to solve ancient conflicts in faraway lands that many people have never even heard of."

Germany, long the centerpiece of American defense strategy in Europe, has lately been the focus of Trump's ire. His former national security adviser, John Bolton, writes in his new book that Trump wanted U.S. troops out of not just Germany but also as many other countries as possible.

On Monday, in announcing that he would reduce the U.S. troop level in Germany to 25,000 from the current 34,500, Trump asserted that the Germans had long short-changed the United States on trade and defense, declaring that "until they pay" more for their own defense, he will reduce U.S. troops.

Twenty-two Republicans on the House Armed Services Committee fired back with a letter to Trump saying a reduced U.S. commitment to Europe's defense would encourage Russian aggression and opportunism.

Removing thousands of U.S. troops from Germany could be a lengthy process, and if Democrat Joe Biden is elected in November, he might reverse Trump's decision. The former vice president has said he would act to strengthen U.S. alliances.

While Trump has repeatedly blasted Germany and others in NATO for spending too little on defense, he has taken a friendlier approach to Poland, which has lobbied for a bigger U.S. troop presence as a bulwark against potential Russian aggression.

This is the kind of antagonism toward allies that bothered Trump's first defense secretary, Jim Mattis, so much that he quit. At the time of his resignation in December 2018, Mattis was upset by Trump's sudden decision — later amended — to remove all American troops from Syria, abandoning their Kurdish partners. But that was only the latest instance of what Mattis saw as Trump's disrespect for allies.

Trump more recently has created a rift with South Korea over sharing the cost of hosting the approximately 28,000 troops based there.



# McKenzie says Iraq improving but still needs help with ISIS

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY  
*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — The Iraqi army is now good enough to fight the remaining Islamic State fighters, but American forces will probably have a continued presence in the country to support counterterrorism operations for the foreseeable future, Marine Gen. Kenneth McKenzie, the commander of U.S. Central Command, said Thursday.

"[The Iraqi army] needs to be good enough to fight and finish ISIS. It needs to be good enough to contribute to the stability and security of Iraq... And in my judgment [Iraq] is making huge strides toward there," he said during a webinar that was part of the Aspen Security Forum, an annual event hosting expert discussions on national security and foreign policy issues.

ISIS fighters continue to be a threat to Iraq even after the collapse last March of their territorial control on land in Iraq and Syria, McKenzie said. But the Iraqi army has 250,000 soldiers and while it does not need to be capable of fighting a major Western military, it is "good enough to fight effectively against ISIS," he added.

Because of that progress, the United States has been able to reduce some of its forces in

**'They don't want it (withdrawal) because they know that we still provide very, very good support for them as they continue operations against ISIS.'**

Gen. Kenneth McKenzie  
U.S. Marine Corps

Iraq that are there to provide support to the military, according to McKenzie. The United States has about 5,200 troops in the country as part of an international coalition to fight against ISIS, The Washington Post reported. There is also a "significant counterterrorism component" of the Iraqi army that U.S. forces work with in addition to their support of its main army, according to McKenzie.

The governments of Iraq and America started negotiations June 12 about the future of American troops in the country. After an American drone strike in Iraq killed Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the commander of Iran's elite Quds Force of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in January, the Iraqi parliament voted to have U.S. troops withdraw from Iraq. The United States now stations its troops at fewer Iraqi bases, The Washington Post reported.

McKenzie also said he has

begun to see a spike in rocket attacks in the country against American forces by Iranian proxies, but the Iraqi army has been "very aggressive" in responding to these attacks.

"It's my belief that Iran and its proxies are beginning to turn to [rocket attacks] because they see they've been unable to prevail in the political realm in Iraq," he said.

While the United States supports having a smaller force in the country, the CENTCOM commander does not believe American troops will be completely withdrawn from Iraq.

"I don't know what that number is going to be, but there is no appetite on the part of the Iraqis for a precipitous withdrawal of U.S. forces. They don't want it because they know that we still provide very, very good support for them as they continue operations against ISIS," McKenzie said.

## Roosevelt to head to Bremerton for overhaul

*Associated Press*

BREMERTON, Wash. — The Navy announced Wednesday that the USS Theodore Roosevelt aircraft carrier will come to Bremerton for an overhaul in 2021.

The Roosevelt made world-wide headlines earlier this year after being sidelined in Guam because of a coronavirus outbreak aboard the carrier. It is one of the country's 11 aircraft carriers.

The Roosevelt's overhaul, known as a scheduled "docking planned incremental availability," is expected to cost hundreds of millions of dollars, the Kitsap Sun reported.

The Puget Sound Naval Shipyard is home to one of two dry docks that can accommodate the world's biggest warships. Naval Air Forces have said the Roosevelt's home will be switched from San Diego to Bremerton in summer 2021.

The USS Carl Vinson is the most recent carrier to have work done at Puget Sound Naval Shipyard dry dock 6, officials said. The Vinson project cost \$367 million, and the ship is scheduled to have its home port switched back to San Diego Aug. 1.

The Roosevelt came to Guam March 27 after its captain, Brett Crozier, called for it to dock as COVID-19 spread on board. More than 1,000 of the 5,000 crew members were infected with COVID-19, and one sailor died.

Crozier was later fired and tested positive for COVID-19.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks.

Bremerton's other homeported aircraft carrier, the USS Nimitz, is currently on deployment in the Pacific Ocean.

## Marine dies after stabbed at Camp Lejeune

*Stars and Stripes*

The Marine involved in a shooting-stabbing incident June 13 at Camp Lejeune, N.C., has died, the 2nd Marine Division said Thursday.

Lance Cpl. William J. Luce, an infantry rifleman with the 2nd Battalion, 8th Marine Regiment, died Monday evening at Camp Lejeune, according to the division.

Following a call to 911 at about 4 a.m. Saturday, Luce was found at a home on the base with multiple stab wounds and taken to the base medical center, according to an initial statement from the base regarding the incident. First responders also found another man dead from an apparent gunshot wound.

The incident remains under investigation by Naval Crimi-

nal Investigative Services. No other information was provided about the men involved in the incident or whether they knew each other.

The other deceased man was the spouse of a Marine, but base officials did not identify him at the request of his next of kin.

Luce enlisted in the Marine Corps in October 2015, according to the division.

# Juneteenth gains prominence amid protests

Associated Press

A traditional day of celebration turned into one of protest Friday, as Americans marked Juneteenth, a holiday that long commemorated the emancipation of enslaved African Americans but that burst into the national conversation this year after widespread demonstrations against police brutality and racism.

In addition to the traditional cookouts and readings of the Emancipation Proclamation — the Civil War-era order that declared all slaves free in Confederate territory — Americans were marching, holding sit-ins or car caravan protests to demand racial justice and police reform.

In Nashville, Tenn., about two dozen black men, most wearing suits, quietly stood arm in arm Friday morning in front of the building that houses the city's criminal courts. Behind them was a statue of Justice Adolpho Birch, the first African

American to serve as chief justice of the Tennessee Supreme Court.

"If you were uncomfortable standing out here in a suit, imagine how you would feel with a knee to your neck," said Philip McGee, one of the demonstrators, referring to George Floyd, a black man who died after a white Minneapolis police officer pressed a knee into his neck for several minutes. The killing has sparked weeks of sustained, nationwide protest.

"We just want to paint a better narrative for every brother out here that you see, and every brother out here that you don't see," McGee said.

Former President Abraham Lincoln first issued the Emancipation Proclamation on Sept. 22, 1862, and it became effective the following Jan. 1. But it wasn't enforced in many places until after the end of the Civil War in April 1865. Word didn't reach the last enslaved black people until June 19 of that year, when Union soldiers brought the

news of freedom to Galveston, Texas.

Most states and the District of Columbia now recognize Juneteenth, which is a blend of the words June and 19th, as a state holiday or day of recognition, like Flag Day. But in the wake of protests of Floyd's killing this year, many more Americans — especially white Americans — are becoming familiar with the holiday and commemorating it.

Events were expected to be held in every major American city on Friday. Numerous events were planned in and around Boston, including a rally organized by Black Lives Matter to call for an end to "mass incarceration and over-policing" of communities of color, and a labor union-organized automobile caravan as part of the nationwide Drive to Justice campaign, which seeks changes in policing and other measures.

In Wisconsin, a Juneteenth flag was raised early Friday morning for the first time over the state Capitol in Madison.

## Atlanta police call out sick to protest murder charges

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Atlanta police officers called out sick to protest the filing of murder charges against an officer who shot a man in the back, while the interim chief acknowledged that members of the force feel abandoned amid protests demanding massive changes to policing.

Interim Chief Rodney Bryant told The Associated Press in an interview that the sick calls began Wednesday night and continued Thursday but said the department had sufficient staff to protect the city. It's not clear how many officers called out.

"Some are angry. Some are fearful. Some are confused on what we do in this space. Some may feel abandoned," Bryant said of the officers. "But we are there to

assure them that we will continue to move forward and get through this."

Prosecutors brought felony murder and other charges against Garrett Rolfe, a white officer who shot Rayshard Brooks after the 27-year-old black man grabbed a Taser during a struggle and ran, firing it at the officer, Fulton County District Attorney Paul Howard said.

Four months before Brooks was killed, Reconnect, a company that focuses on fighting incarceration and addiction, interviewed him about the year he spent in jail. He said the criminal justice system treats the people incarcerated within like "animals."

"Some of the system could, you know, look at us as individuals," Brooks said. "We

do have lives, you know, we're just a mistake we made."

He said having a record hindered the formerly incarcerated from trying to "provide for ourselves as far as getting a job and getting ourselves back on track."

Howard said Brooks was not a deadly threat at the time and that Rolfe kicked the wounded man and offered no medical treatment for over two minutes as Brooks lay dying. Another officer, Devin Brosnan, who the district attorney said stood on Brooks' shoulder as he struggled for his life, was charged with aggravated assault and violation of his oath.

Rolfe and Brosnan both contend their actions were justified and turned themselves in Thursday.

## Klobuchar urges Biden to put woman of color on ticket

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Amy Klobuchar says she is dropping out of the running to be vice president and urging Democrat Joe Biden to select a woman of color instead.

The white Minnesota senator, who had seen her prospects fall as racial tensions swept the nation, said Thursday that she called the presumptive presidential nominee Wednesday night and made the suggestion. Biden had already committed to choosing a woman as his running mate.

"I think this is a moment to put a woman of color on that ticket," Klobuchar said on MSNBC. "If you want to heal this nation right now — my party, yes, but our nation — this is sure a hell of a way to do it."

Biden praised Klobuchar in a tweet Thursday, citing her "grit and determination" and saying, "With your help, we're going to beat Donald Trump."

Klobuchar's chances at getting the VP nod diminished after the killing of George Floyd by a white police officer in Minne-

apolis. Klobuchar was a prosecutor years ago in the county that includes Minneapolis, and during that period, more than two dozen people — mostly minorities — died during encounters with police.

Klobuchar didn't charge any of the officers involved in those deaths. Officer Derek Chauvin, who was charged with Floyd's murder, had been involved in one of those cases, the fatal 2006 shooting of a man accused of stabbing people and aiming a shotgun at police.



# A quarter of US virus deaths from nursing homes

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Nursing home residents account for nearly 1 in 10 of all the coronavirus cases in the United States and more than a quarter of the deaths, according to an Associated Press analysis of government data released Thursday.

As federal data collection becomes more robust, a clearer picture is emerging of the ravages of COVID-19 in nursing homes. About 1.4 million older and medically frail people live in such facilities, a tiny share of the American population that has borne a crushing burden from the pandemic. Most residents have been in lockdown since early March, isolated from families and friends, even in death.

AP's analysis of data from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services found that nearly half of the more than 15,000 nursing homes have reported suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 as of June 7. About 1 in 5 facilities — or 21% — have reported deaths.

Nationwide, nursing homes reported nearly 179,000 suspected or confirmed cases among residents and 29,497 deaths. The latest figures include about 95% of nursing homes.

## Arizona

GLENDALE — Arizona Gov. Doug Ducey's decision to let local governments mandate face masks in public to slow the spread of the coronavirus amid a surge is leading to a patchwork of requirements around the state — the very thing Ducey wanted to avoid.

But it looks like most Arizonans — those in large parts of metro Phoenix, Tucson and Flagstaff — will be required to wear face masks until the infection rate drops significantly.

Mayors in those cities are working through executive orders or city council votes. Tucson Mayor Regina Romero signed her order Thursday. Action in Phoenix could come Friday.

Phoenix Mayor Kate Gallego

said she's working with nearby cities for consistency.

"I'm concerned many people in our community thought we'd defeated it and that life was going back to normal," Gallego said Thursday. "As I've been talking about requirements for face coverings, it's given me an opportunity to share the statistics in Arizona and the alarming trend."

## California

SACRAMENTO — California on Thursday started requiring people throughout the state to wear masks in most indoor settings and outdoors when distancing isn't possible as the coronavirus continues to spread.

"Science shows that face coverings and masks work," Gov. Gavin Newsom said in a statement about the new order. "They are critical to keeping those who are around you safe, keeping businesses open and restarting our economy."

States including Michigan, New York, Maine, Delaware and Maryland already have statewide mask orders in place.

The order came as California broadly reopens its economy. In most counties, people can now shop, dine in at restaurants, get their hair done and go to church, among other things.

## Hawaii

HONOLULU — The Hawaii Department of Health on Thursday reported 18 new cases of the coronavirus, the biggest single-day increase in two months.

That brings Hawaii's total number of confirmed cases to 762. The number of people who have died remained unchanged at 17.

There were 21 new cases reported on April 18.

All of the recent cases were diagnosed on Oahu and 15 were Hawaii residents, while the residency of the other three remained under investigation, the state said.

Later Thursday, Kauai officials announced that a male

resident tested positive. It was the first new case for the island since early April, bringing Kauai's cumulative total to 22.

Kauai's case will be counted in the state's Friday total, said state Department of Health spokeswoman Janice Okubo.

"This spike in cases and other recent daily spikes have been expected as people begin to move around more freely and more businesses are re-opening," said State Epidemiologist Dr. Sarah Park.

## Mississippi

JACKSON — Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves said Thursday that because of the coronavirus pandemic, he should have worn a mask during a funeral a day earlier where hundreds of law enforcement officers gathered to honor a Simpson County deputy sheriff killed in the line of duty.

"I did have a mask. It was in my pocket. I should have put it on," Reeves said during a news conference.

He was responding to reporters' questions about why he didn't cover his mouth and nose while standing next to the family of James Blair during Blair's funeral in Mendenhall. Public health officials have said for months that masks and social distancing are important ways to try to slow the spread of the highly contagious virus.

## Montana

BILLINGS — Montana on Thursday reported 25 new confirmed cases of the coronavirus, the most in a day since late March as health officials in one county recommended a return to more stringent restrictions on activities.

The new cases came from every region of the state and reflect an emerging upward trend of infections since restrictions on social movements were eased in recent weeks.

They included two cases in Richland County in the northeast and four cases each in Big Horn County in the southeast, Gallatin county in the southwest and Flathead County in

the northwest. Six other counties also reported new cases.

## North Carolina

RALEIGH — North Carolina legislators sent another bill on Thursday to Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper designed to overturn parts of his executive order for COVID-19 that's kept several types of retail businesses shuttered for months.

The General Assembly finalized a measure to let bowling alleys and ice and roller rinks reopen at a reduced capacity, with employees wearing masks, sanitizing equipment and enforcing social distancing. The bill also attempts to let restaurants within minor league ballparks — where seasons already are canceled — serve larger groups of patrons for special events.

The bill, which already passed the House, now goes to Cooper, who has already vetoed one measure that sought to reopen bars by letting them serve patrons outdoors.

## New Mexico

SANTA FE — The New Mexico Legislature met Thursday for the first time since the coronavirus pandemic struck in a special session to shore up state finances and consider emergency election reforms.

House lawmakers began their session with a moment of silence for people who have died from COVID-19.

Democratic House speaker Brian Egolf described an urgent need for a "clear framework for the recovery of our state" and said other proposed legislation is designed to "uproot and uncover institutional racism in state government."

Lawmakers are confronting a 25% decline in estimated state government income for the coming budget year. Solvency proposals from a leading lawmaker and the governor would diminish but not do away with increased spending on public salaries, education and health care.

# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Snakes, tortoises stolen from animal park

**FL** BONITA SPRINGS — Authorities say three snakes and two tortoises were stolen from a Florida animal park, including a rare albino boa that was one of its main attractions.

The Fort Myers News-Press reports that the thefts occurred earlier this week at the Everglades Wonder Gardens in Bonita Springs. Taken were two red-tailed boas, a ball python and two Russian tortoises.

Notable among the stolen reptiles was Hera, an albino red-tailed boa. Wonder Gardens curator Leslie Stout says Hera has been the center's main snake for educational and outreach events and was "our most popular animal ambassador."

"Hera is friendly and good-natured," Stout added.

Wonder Gardens officials said all of the animals are rescues and were surrendered to the facility.

## Police officer killed in head-on crash

**TN** BRENTWOOD — A Tennessee police officer was killed in a head-on crash early Thursday morning, authorities confirmed.

Brentwood Police Officer Destin Legieza, 30, was headed back to the precinct at the end of his shift around 6 a.m. when a driver crossed over the center lane and struck his cruiser, news outlets reported, citing police.

The other driver was taken to a hospital with injuries that were not considered life-threatening. Tennessee Highway Patrol was investigating the cause of the crash.

Legieza worked for the department for five years, and was the first Brentwood police officer to be killed in the

line of duty, the agency said in a statement. The department said it would bring in grief counselors.

Brentwood Police Assistant Chief Richard Hickey called Legieza a "shining star" during a news conference Thursday and said he came from a family of law enforcement officers.

## Rainbow crosswalks return permanently

**FL** KEY WEST — Key West workers have installed permanent rainbow crosswalks on the Florida island city's main thoroughfare.

Spanning all four corners of the intersection at Duval and Petronia streets, the crosswalks feature long bands of all six colors of the rainbow flag, an internationally recognized LGBTQ symbol.

The crosswalks are composed of pre-formed thermoplastic color stripes. After the stripes were laid on the street by city workers, they were heat-treated with propane torches to affix the colors permanently on the pavement.

## Residents report seeing missing wallaby

**CO** AURORA — Surprise lived up to its name when a pair of Colorado residents made an unexpected sighting of a wallaby that recently escaped from an animal sanctuary.

The male wallaby named Surprise escaped from the Zoology Foundation in Larkspur two weeks ago and made an appearance this week in Aurora, well beyond its natural habitats in Australia and New Guinea, The Sentinel reported.

Two residents reported seeing what they thought was a kangaroo around 7:30 a.m., Zoology Foundation General Manager Anna Miller said.

The wallaby could be mistaken for a young kangaroo, with a similar appearance and color but standing 3 feet tall and weighing between 50 and 60 pounds.

Surprise may have been spooked after leaving the foundation and traveled the 39 miles north from Larkspur to Aurora, Miller said.

## Man drowns after saving 2 kids at lake

**SD** SIOUX FALLS — A man who drowned in a Minnehaha County lake died after saving two children who had fallen off a flotation device, according to sheriff's officials.

Lazerick Grant, 38, of Sioux Falls, died at Sanford Hospital on Wednesday, according to the Minnehaha County Sheriff's Office.

Sheriff's Capt. Mike Walsh said deputies were dispatched to Wall Lake west of Sioux Falls shortly before 9 p.m. Tuesday on a report of a possible drowning.

Rescue divers from Sioux Falls Fire Rescue, several other agencies and a helicopter also responded to Wall Lake.

Witnesses told officials Grant had been on a flotation device in the swimming area of the lake with two children at the time of the incident when the children fell in the water and Grant went in after them.

## Driver charged after hitting, killing student

**PA** PITTSBURGH — Authorities have charged a Port Authority bus driver with involuntary manslaughter months after she struck and killed a University of Pittsburgh student.

Police on Wednesday also charged 33-year-old Shavonne James with reckless driving, failure to yield to pedestrians

in crosswalks and operating an improperly equipped vehicle. It could not be determined if James has a lawyer.

James was behind the wheel of the bus on Jan. 18 when she turned and hit 20-year-old Barbara Como of Chester Springs, authorities said. She was taken to UPMC Presbyterian, where she was pronounced dead.

The college senior studied anthropology and psychology, according to school officials, and she was on track to graduate this year. Como had aspired to be a research psychologist, school officials said.

The incident was caught on surveillance video.

## Mayor: Stop penalizing marijuana possession

**MO** KANSAS CITY — The mayor of Kansas City, Mo., is backing an ordinance that would strike possession of marijuana from the municipal code, a move that would eliminate even fines for those who possess marijuana.

Mayor Quinton Lucas said in a news release Thursday that he would introduce the ordinance with all four black members of the City Council. Lucas said eliminating laws that disproportionately affect black people can help "improve police-community relations," the Kansas City Star reported.

Missourians voted in 2018 to legalize medical marijuana, but recreational use of the drug remains illegal. In Kansas City, voters in 2017 decided to reduce the penalties for possession to a \$25 fine.

Although black and white people have comparable rates of usage, black people are 3.6 times more likely than whites to be arrested for possession of marijuana, according to the American Civil Liberties Union.

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## Off-suspended receiver Gordon applies to league for reinstatement

Associated Press

Frequently suspended wide receiver Josh Gordon has applied to the NFL for reinstatement, a person with knowledge of the move told The Associated Press.

The person spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity Thursday because the NFL does not publicly announce such moves. NFL Network first reported Gordon's application for reinstatement.

Gordon, 29, has been suspended eight times overall by either his team or the NFL, including six times since 2013, mostly for violating the league's policies on banned substances. He played for New England and then briefly for Seattle last season before being suspended indefinitely.

An All-Pro in 2013 for Cleveland despite missing the first two games while suspended, he led the league with 1,646 yards receiving, but his career has spiraled since. Before the 2014 season, Gordon was suspended for a year for violating the substance abuse policy, a ban that was later reduced to 10 games. But he was later suspended for the season finale by the Browns for violating team rules.

He didn't play in 2015 or 2016. Although Gordon was reinstated by the league in late July 2016 and allowed to participate in training camp, he was suspended for the first four games of the season. Gordon opted to enter a rehabilitation program rather than play when the suspension concluded.

And in 2018, as a member of the Patriots, he was suspended in December and missed the final three games on the schedule.

Gordon's troubles began in college when he was suspended indefinitely while at Baylor for a violation of team rules.

## Coaches revamp work-life balance

Associated Press

First in, last out.

NFL general managers and coaches, and those who assist them, work within a highly competitive culture. Putting in extremely long hours is simply understood as part of the job.

They show up early in the morning and often leave late at night — if they even go home at all. Day after day, week after week, month after month.

"Everyone that works in football and other professional sports sacrifices a lot of family time," Detroit Lions general manager Bob Quinn says. "That is just the way it has always been."

Unless there's a pandemic.

The league closed team facilities in March due to the coronavirus outbreak, sending coaches and general managers home. Those with families wound up under the same roof with their wives and kids on a daily basis for an extended period for the first time in their careers.

When team headquarters opened earlier this month, teams such as the Lions choose to stay in place while continuing to connect with each other via computers and cell phones. And when the NFL allows doors to open for training camp this summer, the Lions will be among the franchises evaluating what standard operating procedures can be altered to help employees strike an improved life-work balance.

"I never thought I could be as efficient working exclusively from home since mid-March," Quinn said. "It has opened my eyes to be able to spend a little less time at the office."

League leaders found out it is possible to pull off a relatively regular offseason in some major

ways, conducting the draft, free agency and owners meetings virtually, while making contingency plans for potential delays in the preseason and regular season.

"I've learned more about myself as a person through this," Buffalo Bills coach Sean McDermott said. "Just in terms of the patience that has to go into moments like this."

During the draft, kids were hanging out around their dads while picks were being made, and TV cameras captured the touching scenes not seen before because, well, they didn't happen before.

"I get emotional talking about this because I love these two kids, and I love my wife," Quinn said. "It's hard to be away from these guys, traveling around to pro days and jumping on flights, getting home late, then sleeping for six hours and going to the office the next morning."

Jacksonville Jaguars coach Doug Marrone tried to take full advantage of the unique opportunity, sitting at the dinner table and stirring up conversations with his family on a regular basis.

"This is a time that I feel like I can make up for maybe some of the things I feel guilty about," Marrone said. "For so many years, I've been at work."

Dr. Michael Gervais, a high-performance psychologist, said the pandemic is an opportunity for successful people to explore other dimensions of their lives.

"When people are highly skilled at any craft, there's an identity trap that waits in the wings. It's called identify foreclosure," said Gervais, who has worked closely with Seattle Seahawks coach Pete Carroll and his team.

## Bills' Allen kept busy despite pandemic limits

Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Josh Allen has hardly spent this coronavirus pandemic-altered offseason in self-isolation.

The Buffalo Bills quarterback instead kept himself busy in seeking advice from Peyton Manning and Brett Favre on Zoom calls, to gathering his teammates together for workouts on both coasts.

It's all been done with an intent to continue developing into a team leader entering his third season, and smooth the inconsistencies that have hampered Allen and the offense's production.

What fuels Allen is the still stinging memory of his up-then-down performance in a

22-19 overtime loss to Houston in an AFC wild-card playoff, in which the Bills squandered a 16-0 third-quarter lead.

It was a performance that encapsulated the best and worst of Allen, the Bills' 2018 first-round pick, who has yet to shed his pre-draft reputation of being a strong-armed, but raw product with accuracy issues.

"I've got personal goals set out for myself," Allen said, noting his 11-0 career record when completing 60% or more of passes in games he starts and finishes.

The test for Allen this offseason has been finding ways to improve without the benefit of on-field practices, with the pandemic wiping out the NFL's entire spring schedule.

He began by seeking advice from former Dallas Cowboys quarterback Tony Romo, whom he met at the Super Bowl. It continued with offensive coordinator Brian Daboll inviting Favre — Allen's childhood idol — and Manning to provide tips during the Bills' virtual quarterbacks meetings.

Allen then took it upon himself to organize a workout with Bills offensive rookie draft picks in California in early May, followed by bringing together 19 offensive players for workouts in Miami a few weeks later.

"It's a critical step that he took it upon himself and his own initiative to put this together," coach Sean McDermott said.

# MLB players propose 70-game season

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Baseball players proposed a 70-game regular-season schedule Thursday, a plan immediately rejected by baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred with the sides 10 games and about \$275 million apart on plans to start the coronavirus-delayed season.

As part of the union proposal, players would wear advertisement patches on their uniforms during all games for the first time in major league history.

"This needs to be over," Manfred said. "Until I speak with owners, I can't give you a firm deadline."

Both sides envision spring training resuming June 26. Counting back, that means pitchers and catchers would have to travel Monday for the start of medical intake testing the following day.

While the gap has narrowed, both sides remain opposed to

additional concessions. The path toward an agreement remains uncertain and difficult.

"We believe this offer represents the basis for an agreement on resumption of play," union head Tony Clark said in a statement.

Manfred met with Clark in Arizona for about five hours Tuesday, and MLB said Wednesday that they had reached a framework for the season. The union disputed that, saying it was merely another proposal.

"We had a list of issues. We stated positions on each of those issues. We then made trades and compromises across and within those issues," Manfred said. "At several points in time, I went back to the list of issues with Tony and reviewed where we were, and I did that again at the end of the meeting. We shook hands and we both agreed we were going to — push was the word — push our sides

to reach an agreement consistent with that framework."

That plan included a 60-game regular-season schedule that would have \$1.48 billion in salaries plus a \$25 million players' postseason pool, people familiar with the framework told The Associated Press, speaking on condition of anonymity because details were not announced. MLB for the first time agreed to pay full prorated salaries with games in empty ballparks.

"He was clear that it wasn't going to be easy and we were both clear that we needed approval from our respective constituencies," Manfred said. "Tony in fact informed me last night on the phone that he could not sell the framework even to his subcommittee, and that it was going no further and it was not going up for a vote of the players or anything like that because the subcommittee had rejected it. He then encouraged

me to offer improvements in the framework. I told him I was not going to do that, but if he could make whatever counter-proposal he wanted to make."

The union proposal would have \$1.73 billion in salaries, plus a \$50 million postseason pool, people familiar with that plan said.

"In my discussions with Rob in Arizona we explored a potential pro-rata framework, but I made clear repeatedly in that meeting and after it that there were a number of significant issues with what he proposed, in particular the number of games," Clark said. "It is unequivocally false to suggest that any tentative agreement or other agreement was reached in that meeting."

MLB's plan would have players receive about 37% of salaries that originally totaled \$4 billion, and the union's proposal would have them get roughly 43%.

## Birdies galore as Poulter, Hubbard take RBC lead

Associated Press

The RBC Heritage began two months later than usual with a little rain, a little sunshine and a lot of birdies, most of them from Jordan Spieth to turn a rough start into a furious finish.

Ian Poulter holed a 30-foot birdie putt and followed with a 5-iron to 4 feet for a birdie that closed out his round of 7-under 64, giving him a share of the lead Thursday with Mark Hubbard at Hilton Head Island, S.C.

"I've always loved coming here to play golf," said Poulter, and he has plenty of company this year.

The RBC Heritage, typically a week after the Masters in April, is the second tournament since the PGA Tour returned after 90 days from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The top three players in the world are at Hilton Head — Rory McIlroy, Jon Rahm

and Justin Thomas — and none broke par on a day in which 66 players in the 151-man field shot in the 60s. A year ago, only 38 players in the 132-man field opened with rounds in the 60s.

Spieth wouldn't have guessed he would be one of them after a tee shot that was 5 yards right of the 12th fairway hit a tree and didn't stop rolling until it was out-of-bounds. He made triple bogey and was 3 over through three holes.

"All of a sudden, I'm 3 over through three, and you start to see guys going 2 under through two, 2 under through three early," Spieth said. "It's not a great feeling."

Determined to at least try to get under par for his round, Spieth had a career-best six straight birdies on his back nine and finished with seven birdies over his last eight holes for a 66.

Poulter and Hubbard, who started birdie-eagle, were a shot ahead of a group that in-

cluded Webb Simpson, Ryan Palmer and Viktor Hovland, Colonial winner Daniel Berger, Brooks Koepka, Ernie Els and that incredible bulk, Bryson DeChambeau, who were in the large group at 67.

DeChambeau, who added some 40 pounds of mass to increase his swing speed, was hammering shots over the range during practice earlier in the week. He had to tone it down on the tight, tree-lined Harbour Town Golf Links.

"I couldn't unleash the Kraken today," DeChambeau said, a student of physics and Scandinavian folklore. "It was just too tight out there. The wind was swirling all day, and I couldn't feel comfortable to give it a good whack, but I was still able to manage keeping it mostly in the fairway."

Dustin Johnson was poised to make a move until he hit into the water on the par-3 14th and compounded the error with a three-putt triple bogey. He still

managed a 68.

It was the first PGA Tour event with spectators on the property, just not on the golf course with tickets.

Harbour Town is lined with vacation homes, villas and townhouses, and plenty of people spilled onto their decks and into their yards to watch. The tour has ropes to line the fairway. This year, they put up ropes to line the yards to keep people from coming all the way onto the course.

One family had a sign up for Spieth as he walked along the eighth fairway, one of only two holes on the front nine where he failed to make birdie.

That shot out-of-bounds had all the markings of bad breaks he has seen too often during three winless years. With a provisional tee shot in the fairway, Spieth went over to look at the trees, and then some 20 yards to the right at his original tee shot nestled in the pine straw. And then he three-putted.