

STARS AND STRIPES[®]

Saturday, June 27, 2020

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Bounties placed on coalition in Afghanistan

The Washington Post

A Russian military spy unit offered bounties to Taliban-linked militants to attack coalition forces in Afghanistan, including U.S. and British troops, in a striking escalation of the Kremlin's hostility toward the United States, American intelligence has found.

The Russian operation, first reported by the New York Times, has generated an intense debate within the Trump administration about how best to respond to a troubling new tactic by a nation that most U.S. officials regard as a potential foe but that President Donald Trump has frequently embraced as a friend, said the officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a sensitive intelligence matter.

The officials said administration leaders learned of reported bounties in recent months from U.S. intelligence agencies, prompting a series of internal discussions including a large interagency meeting that was held in late March. According to one person familiar with the matter, the responses discussed at that meeting included sending a diplomatic communication to relay disapproval and authorizing new sanctions.

Russian involvement in operations targeting Americans, if confirmed, is likely to lead to outrage on Capitol Hill and questions about why the administration has not responded to it.

Spokesmen for the National Security Council, the Pentagon, and the CIA declined to

comment.

It was not immediately clear whether the militants approached by Russia as part of the initiative had succeeded in killing Americans or allied forces. News of the murky initiative comes as American diplomats attempt to kindle political talks that could put end to America's longest war, now in its 19th year.

Earlier this year, the administration struck an initial peace deal with the Taliban. The agreement, which outlined the full withdrawal of the U.S. military within 14 months, was supposed to lead to a prompt start to talks between militant representatives and the Afghan government.

But the Afghan parties have failed to reach agreement on

interim steps, and with the coronavirus crisis taking hold in Afghanistan, those talks have yet to materialize. Hanging over the process is Trump's oft-stated desire to remove U.S. forces from the country, where local forces have been unable to secure an edge over the Taliban despite two decades of foreign funding and advising.

The attempt to stoke violence against Americans, if confirmed, would also represent a significant departure from Moscow's earlier position toward Islamist militants in Afghanistan. Previously, U.S. officials had cited what they characterized as sporadic, low-level Russian support for the Taliban, including the supply of small arms via Afghanistan's northern neighbors.

Afghan's security forces hit hard by coronavirus

The Washington Post

KABUL, Afghanistan — The coronavirus is sweeping through Afghanistan's security forces, according to senior Afghan security officials from four provinces who report suspected infection rates of 60 to 90% among their units — reducing the number of forces available to conduct operations or take up duty at outposts.

Few have died, the officials say, but little to no testing capacity has forced many into weeks of isolation, leaving deployable forces stretched thin at a time when the country is under pressure from both increased Taliban violence and from the United States, where officials are eager to see the government and militants begin direct talks.

Afghanistan has extremely low coronavirus testing rates: Less than 0.2% of its population — 64,900 people out of an estimated 37.6 million Afghans — have been tested.

As of Wednesday, nearly 30,000 people were confirmed to have contracted the coronavirus and more than 600 had died.

But the Health Ministry warns the true numbers are much higher and that as many as 26 million people in the country could be infected with the virus in coming months and the death toll could top 100,000.

The Afghan government refuses to release data on the number of coronavirus cases within the security forces. Spokesmen from the Afghan ministries of defense and the interior acknowledge there are cases within the security forces but say the virus's spread has been contained because troops displaying symptoms are quickly isolated, masks have been made mandatory, and medical supplies have been distributed to bases nationwide.

Security officials from Nangarhar, Ghazni, Logar and Kunduz provinces — all hotly contested by the Taliban — spoke to *The Washington Post* about infection rates within their ranks on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak to the media.

In Herat, one of the epicenters of the virus's outbreak in Afghanistan, Police Chief Obaidullah Noorzai said only 36 positive

cases were registered among the thousands of police under his command. He also said he has received ample support from Kabul and U.S. forces in Afghanistan to contain the virus.

But other commanders on the ground say those numbers are skewed by extremely limited testing. At some bases, commanders reported not receiving any coronavirus testing kits at all and no additional medical supplies.

The virus has not only spread among the Afghan forces' lower ranks but has also killed senior figures, including the chief of police in Kunduz, a district-level police chief in Balkh province and a mid-level police officer in Kabul.

The Afghan ministries of defense and the interior say they have taken measures to prevent the spread of the virus in bases and outposts, such as closing dining facilities and requiring the wearing of masks. The ministries also said they have begun serving troops food with more vitamins, although this is not a measure generally recommended to combat the coronavirus.

Iraq arrests men in rocket attacks on military bases

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Iraqi security forces arrested over a dozen men suspected of a spate of rocket attacks against the U.S. presence in Iraq, the Iraqi military said Friday — the strongest action to date by the new government in Baghdad against perpetrators suspected of ties to Iran.

The arrests marked a bold move by the government to crack down on groups that have long been a source of tension for U.S.-Iraq relations. Two senior Iraqi officials, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with regulations, said the 14 men who were arrested had ties to an Iran-backed militia group.

A series of rockets have struck close to U.S. installations inside the Green Zone and an Iraqi army base near to the airport in the Iraqi capital since Baghdad embarked on strategic talks with Washington on June 11.

The U.S. has blamed Iran-backed militia group Kataib Hezbollah for orchestrating attacks against its embassy and American troops inside Iraqi bases and criticized the Iraqi government

for not identifying and arresting the culprits.

The recent attacks posed a challenge for Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, who was sworn in last month. His administration pledged to crack down on the groups behind the attacks at the start of strategic talks, according to senior U.S. officials.

The raid carried out by Iraq's elite Counter-Terrorism Service late Thursday in Baghdad's Dora neighborhood was a step toward this promise. A military statement following the arrests did not explicitly state the 14 arrested had militia ties. It said a special investigative committee was formed to include the Interior Ministry and other Iraqi security forces to follow up on the case.

It was unclear who was holding the men, with one Iraqi official saying it was the Popular Mobilization Forces, an umbrella group of paramilitary groups, while another said they were being held by the Interior Ministry.

There was no immediate comment from Kataib Hezbollah.

Report says Pakistan does little to fight terrorism

Associated Press

ISLAMABAD — Washington's annual terrorism report said Pakistan was doing too little to counter terrorist groups, particularly those taking aim at rival India and the dreaded Haqqani network operating in Afghanistan.

Islamabad bristled at the criticism in the U.S. State Department report, saying it has been relentless in its assistance to Washington as the United States brokered a peace deal with the Taliban, which it signed in February. At the time, the deal was touted as Afghanistan's best chance in four decades of finding a lasting peace.

Amir Rana, executive director of the Pakistan Institute for Peace Studies, which tracks militant groups, said Friday the report is a warning to Pakistan that it needs to do more to target terrorist financing and dismantle terrorist networks if it wants to avoid being blacklisted by the Financial Action Task Force, the global money laundering and terrorist financing watchdog based in Paris.

Pakistan, which was put on a so-called gray list by the task force in 2018, was given a further reprieve this month to avoid the blacklist by meeting a series of benchmarks set by the task force. If Pakistan is put on a blacklist, its international borrowing would be severely restricted.

"The tone of the report this year was more critical than the previous year's," said Rana. "This is a warning that it needs to do more to stay off the blacklist, to dismantle terrorist groups still operating in Pakistan."

Pakistan's Foreign Ministry in a statement late Thursday called the report disappointing.

IG: NATO coalition troops got free meals because of billing mix-up

BY PHILLIP WELLMAN

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — For more than three years, coalition partners in Afghanistan got free meals at U.S. expense because of billing mistakes made by the military, a new report says.

The problem was discovered at NATO's Afghanistan headquarters in Kabul, where the U.S. provides dining facility services for the coalition with the intention of getting reimbursed by 17 member countries each month.

However, the military only billed those countries for about half of the months between January 2016 and September 2019, resulting in a deficit of more than \$6 million, according to

the report released Friday by the Defense Department Inspector General.

Further mistakes in the bills that were delivered undercharged recipients by nearly \$3 million, meaning the DOD was short by more than \$9 million during the period examined, the report said. The report only looked at the situation at NATO's Resolute Support headquarters in Kabul, not other bases in Afghanistan.

U.S. Forces-Afghanistan Multinational Logistics is primarily responsible for dealing with the reimbursement agreements with coalition partners at the Kabul base.

The Inspector General blamed personnel for failing to establish terms and conditions — including rates and

calculation method — with each partner country before dining services were provided. This came after the manager in charge of the agreements failed to develop a training program for personnel.

Fifteen Western European countries, Australia and New Zealand reimburse the DOD for dining services at NATO's Resolute Support headquarters. The DOD covers the costs for more than 20 other coalition countries who would be unable to assist the mission without financial help.

The Inspector General encouraged USFOR-A to collect the missing payments, develop agreements with each coalition partner and update personnel training.

Appeals court: Wall funds illegally diverted

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — A federal appeals court on Friday ruled against the Trump administration in its transfer of \$2.5 billion from military construction projects to build sections of the U.S. border wall with Mexico, ruling it illegally sidestepped Congress, which gets to decide how to use the funds.

In two opinions, the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals agreed with a coalition of border states and environmental groups that contended the money transfer was unlawful and that building the wall would pose environ-

mental threats.

The rulings were the latest twist in the legal battle that has largely gone Trump's way. Last July, the Supreme Court allowed the \$2.5 billion to be spent while the litigation continued, blunting the impact of the latest appeals court action.

The administration has already awarded much of the money, including a \$1.3-billion job in Arizona that was announced last month. Trump visited Yuma, Ariz., on Tuesday to mark completion of the 200th mile of border wall during his administration, much of it with the transferred military funds that the 9th Circuit panel

found illegal.

After the \$2.5 billion transfer of military funds, the Pentagon diverted another \$3.6 billion that an appeals court in New Orleans ruled in January could be spent.

The 9th Circuit ruled that the Trump administration not only lacked the authority to authorize the transfer of funds, "but also violated an express constitutional prohibition designed to protect individual liberties."

The panel said the government was proceeding with border wall construction without ensuring compliance with any environmental regulations, thereby harming the interests

of Sierra Club members who visit the border region for hiking, bird watching and other recreational activities.

The panel also held that the government failed to show that construction would halt the flow of illegal drugs. It said the administration had cited drug statistics but didn't address how the wall would have an impact on the problem.

The White House said the decisions won't interfere with its ability to continue building the wall and noted that the Supreme Court has overturned many of the court's rulings.

Trump signs order to protect monuments

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump signed an executive order Friday to protect monuments, memorials and statues facing new scrutiny amid fresh debate over the nation's racist beginnings.

Trump had promised to take action earlier this week after police thwarted an attempt by protesters to pull down a statue of Andrew Jackson in a park across from the White House.

The order calls on the attorney general to prosecute to

the fullest extent of the law any person or group that destroys or vandalizes a monument, memorial or statue. Federal law authorizes a penalty of up to 10 years in prison for the "willful injury" of federal property.

The order also calls for maximum prosecution for anyone who incites violence and illegal activity, and it threatens state and local law enforcement agencies that fail to protect monuments with the loss of federal funding.

Trump announced earlier Friday on Twitter that he had

signed the order and called it "strong."

Earlier in the day, the president used Twitter to call for the arrest of protesters involved with the attempt to bring down the Jackson statue from Lafayette Park.

He retweeted an FBI wanted poster showing pictures of 15 protesters who are wanted for "vandalization of federal property."

Trump wrote, "MANY people in custody, with many others being sought for Vandalization of Federal Property in

Lafayette Park. 10 year prison sentences!"

He also said on Twitter that he had scrapped plans to spend the weekend at his central New Jersey home to stay in Washington "to make sure LAW & ORDER is enforced."

"These arsonists, anarchists, looters, and agitators have been largely stopped," Trump tweeted. "I am doing what is necessary to keep our communities safe — and these people will be brought to Justice!"

House OK's bill to make DC state, sends to Senate

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Democratic-controlled House approved a bill Friday to make the District of Columbia the 51st state, saying Congress has both the moral obligation and constitutional authority to ensure that the city's 700,000 residents are allowed full voting rights, no longer subject to "taxation without representation."

Lawmakers approved the bill, 232-180, largely along party lines, marking the first

time a chamber of Congress has passed a D.C. statehood bill. Minnesota Rep. Collin Peterson was the sole Democrat to oppose the bill. No Republican voted for it.

The legislation now goes to the Republican-controlled Senate, where it faces insurmountable opposition from GOP leaders.

Del. Eleanor Holmes Norton, the district's non-voting representative in Congress, sponsored the bill, saying it has both the facts and Constitution

on its side.

D.C.'s population is larger than those of Wyoming and Vermont, and the new state would be one of seven with populations under one million, she said. The city's \$15.5 billion annual budget is larger than those of 12 states, and D.C.'s triple-A bond rating is higher than those of 35 states, Norton said.

Opponents, mostly Republicans, called the bill a power grab for the firmly Democratic city, and said the nation's founding fathers intended the

capital to be separate from the other states.

The bill would create a new state of Washington, Douglass Commonwealth, in honor of the Virginia-born first president and the Maryland-born abolitionist and former slave Frederick Douglass.

The bill also would reduce the size of the federal district to a tourist-friendly area. Congress would retain control of that 2-square-mile area.

Leaders proceed with caution as cases rise

Associated Press

BERLIN — German Chancellor Angela Merkel cautioned Saturday that the coronavirus pandemic is far from over, as regional outbreaks gave rise to fears of a second wave. In the U.S., two of the largest states reversed course and reinstated some coronavirus restrictions amid a surge in new infections.

India reported more than 18,000 new cases, pushing its cumulative total over the half-million mark, the fourth highest globally behind the U.S., Brazil and Russia. Elsewhere, Egypt and Britain said they would ease virus controls, while China and South Korea battled smaller outbreaks in their capitals.

Merkel said in her weekly video podcast that getting Europe's economy back on track is her primary goal as Germany takes over the rotating European Union presidency next week, but stressed that everyone shared a "joint responsibility" in following social distancing, mask and hygiene rules as lockdown rules are relaxed.

German authorities renewed a lockdown in a western region of about 500,000 people in the past week after about 1,300 slaughterhouse workers tested positive for COVID-19, in an attempt to prevent the outbreak from spreading across the area.

"The risk posed by the virus is still serious," Merkel said. "It's easy to forget because Germany has gotten through the crisis well so far, but that doesn't mean we are protected, that the risk has been averted; that is not the case, as is demonstrated by these regional outbreaks."

In the U.S., the daily number of confirmed infections surged to an all-time high of 45,300 on Friday, eclipsing the previous high of 40,000 set the previous day, according to Johns Hopkins. Newly reported cases per day have risen on average about 60% over the past two

weeks, according to an Associated Press analysis.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott ordered all bars closed, and Florida banned alcohol at such establishments. Abbott, who had pursued one of the most aggressive reopening schedules of any state, also scaled back restaurant capacity and said outdoor gatherings of more than 100 people would need approval from local officials.

Mayor Carlos Gimenez in Florida's Miami-Dade County announced Friday night that he would close beaches over the Fourth of July weekend. He said cracking down on recreational activities is prudent given the growing number of infections among young adults.

Elsewhere, Britain was expected to scrap a 14-day quarantine requirement for people returning from abroad in a bid to make summer vacation travel possible. Only travelers from "red" zones, places with a high level of COVID-19, will be told to self-isolate.

Egypt on Saturday lifted many restrictions put in place against the coronavirus pandemic, reopening cafes, clubs, gyms and theaters after more than three months of closure, despite a continued upward trend in new infections.

Authorities in other countries were taking a more cautious approach, with the Indian city of Gauhati, the capital of Assam state, announcing a new two-week lockdown starting Monday, with night curfews and weekend lockdowns in the rest of the state.

China saw an uptick in cases, one day after authorities said they expect an outbreak in Beijing to be brought under control in the near future.

Xu Hejian, the deputy chief of Beijing's publicity department, said the situation is severe and complex.

"We must not, in the slightest degree, lower our guard," he said.

New cases prompt bars to close again

Associated Press

HOUSTON — The din of conversation and music that normally fills The Cottonmouth Club in downtown Houston fell silent last Friday when the owners shut it down for a second time during the coronavirus pandemic — a week before the Texas governor ordered all bars to follow suit amid a surge in infections.

Co-owner Michael Neff — questioning what he saw as a rush to reopen by the state and wondering if his industry was making things worse as some bars flouted rules on occupancy limits — said he felt he could no longer provide a safe environment for his staff or customers at the neighborhood bar with a rock 'n' roll vibe.

He and his staff had started hearing of workers at other bars getting sick.

"Texas was a terrible, terrible experiment because it experimented with people's lives and this is where we are," Neff said.

That ended Friday, with Gov. Greg Abbott's announcement that bars would again be shuttered, a day after the state reported a record high of nearly 6,000 confirmed cases and on the day that Texas surpassed 5,000 hospitalizations for the first time.

Neff said while he faulted bars that ignored the rules, he also lays blame on local and state officials for what he says was a lack of guidance and support, a lack of a statewide mask order and, until recently, a lack of enforcement.

It's a sentiment shared by other bar and restaurant owners across the state and beyond who have been deeply hurt financially by anti-virus measures and are also struggling with tough decisions, with some shutting down again after workers became infected or closing as a precaution because of rising cases in their areas.

In a nearly 8-minute video he posted online earlier this month, Neff vented his frustra-

tion, beginning with a message directed at Abbott: "You're leading us to die."

From the time bars and clubs in Texas could reopen on May 22 with indoor service, social media has been filled with photos and videos showing packed businesses that were obviously not following rules on capacity and social distancing. But the first operation by the state to suspend the alcohol permits of establishments that ignored rules didn't happen until a week ago.

In closing bars again on Friday, Abbott said the rise in confirmed cases was "largely driven by certain types of activities, including Texans congregating in bars." Abbott also ordered restaurants to scale back to half capacity starting Monday.

He added that "every Texan has a responsibility to themselves and their loved ones to wear a mask" — but he has not mandated their use statewide. Last week, he did say cities and counties could order businesses to require that their customers wear masks.

A similar clampdown is happening in several states where confirmed infections are spiking. In some places, owners are doing it voluntarily, as Neff did.

On Friday, Florida banned alcohol consumption at bars after confirmed coronavirus cases neared 9,000.

"What we realize is that despite exceeding the required protocols and with very little federal or state guidance, that more needs to be done," Daniel Wright, the owner of five Cincinnati restaurants and bars that he shut down as a precaution, said in a Facebook post this week.

Neff said he is worried about losing his bar and has worked to find other revenue streams, including selling cocktails to go, starting a podcast and holding a nightly virtual bar livestream.

Ariz. tribe takes strict steps amid surge

Associated Press

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. — People in the deserts of Arizona flee to the White Mountains when the triple-digit heat is too much to bear, cooling off in the forest a few hours away. That worries a Native American tribe that calls the area home, as coronavirus infections and temperatures have both spiked in one of the hardest-hit states.

The White Mountain Apache Tribe is taking some of the most drastic actions in Arizona to protect its 13,500 residents, more than one-eighth of whom have already tested positive for COVID-19. It's taking cues from severe measures imposed by other tribes nationwide, including the Navajo Nation, which has curtailed an outbreak that once made it a national hot spot.

Those living on the White Mountain Apache Tribe's reservation in northeastern Arizona face the risk of fines and other penalties if they venture beyond their own yards this weekend. A two-week shelter-in-place order will follow. The tribe's Fort Apache Reservation also is closed to the summertime visitors who flock to the area to fish, hike and camp among ponderosa pines.

California

SACRAMENTO — California Gov. Gavin Newsom issued his sharpest warning yet on the rising coronavirus threat, announcing for the first time the state wanted a county to shut down again, pleading with residents to wear masks and reminding them that dozens of people are dying each day — 79 more reported Friday.

"Please, even if you don't feel sick, you may be transmitting this disease," he said. "Please, please, practice common sense, common decency. Protect yourself, but also protect others. ... What more evidence do we need?"

His tone marked a shift from his policy-wonk style on display at three press conferences earlier in the week, where he

talked about data modeling and delivered a trove of statistics, but offered assurances that the state's hospitals were prepared to deal with patients.

Idaho

BOISE — Hospitals are preparing for a potential influx of older patients after a recent spike in coronavirus infections among young people visiting bars who are likely bringing the illness home to their parents and grandparents, a health expert said Friday.

Barton Hill, vice president and chief quality officer of St. Luke's Health System, said most of the people testing positive recently have been in their 20s and 30s.

Most aren't "sick enough to need hospitalization," he said but noted several people in their 20s did need to be hospitalized. "I think probably it's going to be the family units where it's going to spread to more at-risk populations."

Young adults working in senior living facilities also have the potential to bring the illness into that vulnerable population, Hill said.

Louisiana

BATON ROUGE — Seeing a new surge in coronavirus infections, Louisiana is struggling with the critical tracking work needed to combat the spread, as contact tracers face unanswered calls, privacy concerns and distrust from elected officials.

Only 59% of those who have tested positive for COVID-19 since mid-May have responded to phone calls from contact tracers, according to the latest data from Louisiana's health department, and only one-third answered within the crucial first 24 hours after the test results.

As more of Louisiana's businesses have reopened and new virus cases have spiked, infectious disease experts describe a robust contact tracing program as essential.

"Contact tracing's a basic

public health tool. It's really important for us to identify people who've been exposed to a disease, to test them and, if need be, quarantine them until the results are back, and if necessary, put them in isolation if the result is positive," said Patricia Kissinger, an epidemiology professor at Tulane University's School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine.

Mississippi

JACKSON — The Mississippi Department of Health announced an additional 550 confirmed cases of the new coronavirus Friday after record-high numbers reported the day before.

After the department reported 1,092 new cases of coronavirus Thursday, State Health Officer Dr. Thomas Dobbs warned of continuing increases if people do not take social distancing and mask-wearing seriously.

"If we're not careful, Mississippi is going to look like New York at the height of the pandemic," Dobbs said at a press briefing.

On Friday evening, Gov. Tate Reeves announced the extension of his Safe Return Executive Order, which limits the number of people who can gather in groups, and recommends retail stores, bars and restaurants limit capacity to 50%. The Safe Return Order is extended through July 6. Reeves also extended all unemployment benefits to those out of work due to the coronavirus until the end of July.

Nevada

CARSON CITY — A labor union representing more than 6,000 Nevada state workers announced Friday it had filed a formal complaint to the state's labor relations board against Gov. Steve Sisolak.

In the complaint, the American Federation of State County Municipal Employees (AFSCME) Nevada branch claims that Sisolak violated a collective bargaining statute he signed

into law in 2019 by refusing to negotiate the furloughs and salary freezes enacted to cut spending amid the coronavirus pandemic.

In a June 11 letter to state employees announcing the furloughs, Sisolak lamented how the revenue shortfalls would prevent Nevada from using funds to enact policies he and the Democrat-controlled Legislature have passed since 2018.

"The economic crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has forced us to take a different direction with our state budget to respond to this new economic reality," Sisolak wrote.

New Mexico

ALBUQUERQUE — Bernalillo County will continue to allow for the use of single-use plastic bags amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

The county manager first suspended the ban on plastic bags during a March 10 emergency meeting.

County Manager Julie Morgas Baca said the use of single-use bags should cut down on the possible spread of the coronavirus.

Utah

SALT LAKE CITY — A rural county commissioner apologized after comparing Utah Gov. Gary Herbert to Hitler in a social media post after the Republican governor gave approval to two counties to mandate masks in an effort to slow the spread of the coronavirus.

Piute County Commissioner Darin Bushman tweeted Thursday night: "Hang on friends, it won't be long before you are required to do a Sieg Heil Salute to Herbert. Welcome to Utah now extend your right arm straight at 45 degrees keeping your hand parallel to your arm and offer your 'Heil Herbert.'"

He added the hashtags "Nazi" and "Masks" above a picture of Nazi followers saluting leaders.

Bushman later deleted the post and tweeted: "Sorry if you found my tweet offensive. I have removed it so as not to further offend. My apologies."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

24 arrested in major drug investigation

MA BOSTON — Two dozen members and associates of Boston street gangs are facing charges in connection with a nearly two-year investigation into drug trafficking at a city public housing project, federal prosecutors said.

Federal and state law enforcement executed 17 search warrants in various city neighborhoods and suburbs and seized about 30 firearms, a half kilogram of cocaine and \$350,000 in cash, according to a statement from the U.S. attorney's office.

Operation Snowfall started as an investigation into drug trafficking at the housing complex in the city's Brighton neighborhood.

Police: Suspect turned self in with bloody bat

HI HILO — A Hawaii homicide suspect surrendered himself at a police station holding a bloody bat believed to have been used in the killing, authorities said.

Stanley Marion Cummins, 51, appeared at a Big Island police station with the bat, The Hawaii Tribune-Herald reported.

Cummins is charged with second-degree murder in the death of Jace Whitney Ahquin, 35. He told police he went to the Pahoia station to turn in evidence of the killing earlier that morning.

Cummins told officers he went downstairs in his home to confront Ahquin, who was a tenant in the home.

Cummins told officers he hit Ahquin in the head "approximately three times" with the bat as Ahquin lay in bed, police records said.

Man charged for ruining Catholic cemetery

RI PROVIDENCE — A man painted swastikas and anti-Catholic language on gravestones at a cemetery at Providence College and assaulted a campus safety officer who tried to intervene, according to the school and city police.

Keveon Gomera, 26, faces 15 counts of desecration of a grave and an assault charge for the alleged vandalism on the Catholic school's campus.

Gomera targeted the Dominican Cemetery's central cross and seven headstones, and was burning American flags at some of the gravesites when he was spotted, according to a statement from the college.

Firefighter's body found after 4-day search

FL JUPITER — A decomposing body was found in an area where a Florida firefighter crashed his vehicle before going missing, sheriff's officials said.

Palm Beach County Sheriff's officials had yet to confirm the identity of the body found near Jupiter Farms. But the Broward County Professional Firefighters and Paramedics Association posted on Facebook that firefighter James Von Minden, 56, had died.

Authorities had been searching for Von Minden since Friday when his truck was involved in an accident.

Inmate convicted of sending menacing letters

NH CONCORD — A man jailed in New York state was sentenced to 15 months in federal prison for mailing threatening letters to a woman and her daughter in

New Hampshire.

According to court documents, Matthew Oliver, 38, mailed the letter to the woman in Seabrook in January 2017, when he was incarcerated at the Onodaga County Justice Center in Syracuse, N.Y., on burglary charges. That April, he mailed another letter to the home that contained a threat to the woman's daughter.

School athletic director probed over KKK photo

GA EVANS — A Georgia high school athletic director is under investigation, his district said, after he posted a racially insensitive photo on Facebook that trivializes violence perpetrated by the Ku Klux Klan against African Americans.

The post allegedly shared by Lakeside High School Athletic Director Jody Hilley shows a Black man dressed in a white hood and robe, news outlets reported.

The post claimed Black people killed more African Americans in six months than the KKK has in 86 years.

Plant-based meat item now on Starbucks' menu

WA SEATTLE — Starbucks is adding plant-based meat to its U.S. menu for the first time.

The Seattle coffee chain said a breakfast sandwich made with imitation sausage from Redwood City, Calif.-based Impossible Foods is now available at a majority of its U.S. restaurants. The sandwich comes with egg and cheese and is served on a ciabatta bun.

Starbucks said earlier this year that it would add plant-based meat to its menus worldwide as part of an effort to reduce its environmental impact.

Woman files lawsuit for paternity test on goat

FL ODESSA — A Florida woman has filed a lawsuit seeking either a paternity test on her goats or a refund — and she's not kidding.

Kris Hedstrom filed a civil lawsuit against her neighbor Heather Dayner seeking DNA for the goats she purchased. Hedstrom paid Dayner \$900 for five Nigerian Dwarf goats.

According to the lawsuit, Hedstrom believed the goats could be registered with the American Dairy Goat Association, a group that records goat pedigrees.

Dayner said the father goat was registered, but the Tampa Bay Times reported the American Dairy Goat Association rejected Hedstrom's application to register the babies because Dayner is not an active member.

Police: Man used pit bull to attack others

IA ANKENY — Police in suburban Des Moines arrested a man they accused of siccing a pit bull on people at a party before killing the dog himself after it turned on him.

Juan Carlos Moreno Martinez, 33, of Ankeny, was charged with several counts of assault, animal neglect, trespassing and probation violations, television station KCCI reported.

Police said the incident happened at a party in Ankeny, when Moreno-Martinez entered the property of another person without permission and retrieved the dog. Police said he then agitated the dog with the intention of intimidating others at the party.

The animal ultimately attacked three people, one of whom was seriously injured, police said.

From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES®

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

Reporting
World, National
and Military News

Play-in team wins NHL Draft lottery

Associated Press

Alexis Lafreniere was supposed to walk on stage Friday night in Montreal as the top pick in the NHL Draft.

After the COVID-19 pandemic paused the hockey season and postponed that possibility, Lafreniere was supposed to find out Friday night where he'd be going when the league held its draft lottery. Instead, he'll have to wait a little bit longer.

Chaos reigned at the NHL Draft lottery, with the No. 1 pick still up for grabs in a second lottery drawing among the eight teams that lose in the qualifying round of the playoffs — if play resumes.

"We all knew this could happen," Ottawa Senators general manager Pierre Dorion said. "It definitely has been a different 2020 compared to every other year that I've been on the face of this earth."

As part of the NHL's 24-team playoff format if it resumes, 16 teams will play each other in best-of-five series to move on — and the losers of those matchups now have a major consolation prize looming: equal 12.5% odds of landing Lafreniere.

"Still not drafted, so we'll still have to wait a little bit," said Lafreniere, a star left winger for Rimouski Oceanic in the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League who also was captain of Canada's world junior championship gold medal-winning team.

The league's bottom seven teams that had their seasons ended when play was paused March 12 will be off for nine months or more if the start of 2020-21 is delayed until December or January. They also won't be able to pencil Lafreniere into their lineup of the future.

Meanwhile, Sidney Crosby's Pittsburgh

Penguins or Connor McDavid's Edmonton Oilers could get lucky again or Taylor Hall could bring his lottery luck to a third franchise.

The league-worst Detroit Red Wings dropped to fourth, the Los Angeles Kings got the second pick and the Senators ended up with Nos. 3 and 5 because of the 2018 Erik Karlsson trade with San Jose. The drama was down to the Kings or a still-to-be-determined team, and deputy commissioner Bill Daly unveiled a card with the NHL logo on it at No. 1.

"It's a little strange when they flip it over and you have to process that there is a secondary lottery that's going to take place," Kings GM Rob Blake said. "Everything has kind of taken a different path since the pause and you maneuver your way around it."

The winning placeholder team got the top pick despite a 2.5% chance. Ottawa had the best odds at 25% combining its pick and San Jose's, Detroit had an 18.5% chance — and the combined eight teams that could play on this summer added up to 24.5%

"I'm not really surprised," Red Wings GM Steve Yzerman said. "The odds were better that the first pick went to (one of) the bottom eight than it did to us."

Detroit finished with 39 points, 23 points behind 30th-place Ottawa, and was the biggest loser of the night, dropping out of the top three. The Red Wings had a league-low 17 wins in their 71-game season.

Yzerman, who the Red Wings took fourth in 1983 and went on to be a Hockey Hall of Famer, brought up that Colorado lost the 2017 draft lottery and at No. 4 took Cale Makar, a rookie of the year candidate.

"Ultimately, let's see in a few years when

we see how the draft shakes out and who becomes a good player," Yzerman said. "We can sit here today and feel sorry for ourselves if we want. It doesn't matter. The system is what it is, and it's the same for all the teams. We'll get a great prospect and do whatever we can to develop him. Maybe we will get lucky."

The Sharks are perhaps even less fortunate after not being in contention this season and losing out on the chance to take someone like center Quinton Byfield second. That opportunity belongs to Ottawa, which is the first team since 2000 to have two picks in the top five.

"It's a major step forward in our carefully laid plan to build a perennial Stanley Cup contender — and a champion," Senators owner Eugene Melnyk said.

The Anaheim Ducks wound up with the sixth pick, the New Jersey Devils the seventh and the Buffalo Sabres the eighth. No. 1 and picks 9-15 will be decided later.

The teams that could still pick first are the Canadiens, Blackhawks, Coyotes, Wild, Canucks, Predators, Panthers, Flames, Rangers, Jets, Islanders, Blue Jackets, Maple Leafs, Hurricanes, Oilers and Penguins.

The top four teams in each conference — Boston, Tampa Bay, Washington and Philadelphia in the East and St. Louis, Colorado, Vegas and Dallas in the West — got byes into the traditional "first round" of the playoffs that could start as soon as late July. If hockey doesn't return, the teams outside the top eight in each conference as of March 12 by points percentage all have equal chances at No. 1: the Canadiens, Blackhawks, Coyotes, Wild, Jets, Rangers, Panthers and Blue Jackets.

Sports briefs

14 more Clemson players test positive

CLEMSON, S.C. — Clemson said 14 more football players tested positive for the coronavirus this week, bringing the team total to 37 who have had the disease since workouts began earlier this month.

Clemson said Friday it has conducted 430 tests of personnel with 47 coming up with COVID-19. 28 of those have completed a 10-day isolation period.

No one has been hospitalized for the virus, athletic spokesman Jeff Kallin said.

'Civil War' rivalry name dropped

Oregon and Oregon State have agreed to drop the name "Civil War" for their rivalry games on Friday.

Oregon State President Ed Ray said the Civil War name "represents a connection to a war fought to perpetuate slavery."

"While not intended as reference to the actual Civil War, OSU sports competition should not provide any misconstrued reference to this divisive episode in American history," Ray said in a statement.

Dodgers' OF Toles jailed in Florida

KEY WEST, Fla. — Los Angeles Dodgers outfielder Andrew Toles was in jail Saturday and charged with trespassing.

The 28-year-old player was detained this week at the airport in Key West, Fla.

Jail records show Toles appeared to be homeless when arrested Monday on the misdemeanor charge.

The team said Toles never reported to spring training camp in 2019 because of a personal matter. He did not play that year.

NASCAR set for Pocono tripleheader

LONG POND, Pa. — NASCAR is set for a tripleheader of racing at Pocono Raceway from three national series Sunday.

NASCAR says it's the first time three NASCAR National Series races will be raced on the same day at the same track. It will be the fifth time three NASCAR National Series races will be run on the same day but those were at different tracks.

Rain washed out the Truck Series race on Saturday in what was already a packed schedule.

From The Associated Press

Wallace finds his voice as an activist

Associated Press

LONG POND, Pa. — Being an agent of change in NASCAR cuts both ways for Bubba Wallace.

He is seen as a hero to some, particularly those who have longed for a Black driver to shake things up in a predominantly white sport. To others, the 26-year-old Wallace represents something else entirely and he has seen plenty of haters on social media over his career. It has intensified in recent days.

He has brushed them off, especially the ones accusing Wallace or his No. 43 team of being involved in a hoax, of somehow being behind the garage door pulldown rope fashioned as a noose that was found in their garage stall at Alabama's Talladega Superspeedway last weekend.

"You quickly realize," Wallace said, "they don't give a damn about you and I don't give a damn about them."

It has been a remarkable and exhausting three weeks for Wallace since he helped spark NASCAR to ban the Confederate battle flag at its races and venues. That is seen as a sea change for the 72-year-old stock car series with its core Southern fan base, but then came the

noose and a federal investigation that ultimately determined Wallace had not been the target of a hate crime.

He's been besieged with media requests and made the rounds on morning talk shows and chatted with late night hosts. Wallace even unified the sport when every one of the 40 teams on the grid lined up with Wallace and their series in an effort to show they do not and will not tolerate racism.

The face of a movement is a tough haul for anyone, especially when he stands as the lone Black driver at the top level of NASCAR.

"It's just what I feel in my heart, what feels right," Wallace said Friday. "I'm finally voicing my opinion on tough subjects that a lot of people are afraid to touch on. I'm not afraid to speak my mind. I've done it and gotten in trouble and learned from it. People that know me, I'm 100% raw and real."

It's part of his appeal, and why a small number of Black fans rushed the fence and cheered for Wallace after he finished 14th at Talladega. He wants more Black fans in NASCAR — he said his social media following has exploded and scores of famous fans like LeBron James have offered

support — and said he is ready to lead the charge.

He would also like some of his newfound fame to lead to more sponsorship to fund the No. 43 Chevrolet for Richard Petty Motorsports. He's not going to change his approach for them.

"Ever since I've been speaking out, I haven't been thinking about my sponsors," Wallace said. "I've been thinking about me being a human being and standing up for what's right. I would hope that sponsors would see that and back me up on that."

But he's tired. His free time has been chewed up and life in the spotlight as a national newsmaker has him "wore the hell out" and there are two more races this weekend for a team that has been running well.

"It's not like I wanted to be in this position or asked to be in this position," Wallace said. "It just kind of happened."

He is grateful NASCAR released the photo of the rope; NASCAR President Steve Phelps stated "the noose was real," though it remains unknown who tied it. Phelps said NASCAR determined the noose was not in place when the October 2019 race weekend began but was created at some point during that weekend.

"We can't say it was directed toward me, which is good," Wallace said. "But somebody still knows how to tie a noose. Whether they did it as a bad joke or not, who knows? It was good for the public to see. It still won't change some people's minds of me being a hoax. But it is what it is."

He has received support from NASCAR friends and foes, like fellow driver Aric Almirola, who started a text with "we're not friends and we don't act like we are" but was ready to stand next to Wallace as a brother. Wallace even had fun on the Talladega grid after drivers pushed his car to the front, joking, "I don't like half you guys, but I appreciate all of you guys."

NASCAR is at Pocono Raceway this weekend for Cup Series races on Saturday and Sunday, just one more piece of a grueling schedule where all eyes are on Wallace.

"Let's get away from what happened at Talladega," Wallace said. "Let me go out and have some good races, have some bad races, try and figure out what the hell we're going to do to rebound from those bad races and get back to race car life."

Mickelson cards 63, takes one-stroke lead in Travelers

Associated Press

CROMWELL, Conn. — Phil Mickelson figures age might be an asset.

Playing his first tournament since turning 50 this month, the five-time major champion shot a 7-under 63 on Friday in the Travelers Championship to take a one-stroke lead into the weekend.

Lefty said it was perhaps the wisdom that comes with his age that made him stay within himself instead of going toe-to-toe with his long-hitting playing partners, top-ranked Rory McIlroy and Bryson DeChambeau.

"There's some holes I can

open it up and try to hit driver, but really I just want to get it in play on a lot of holes and let my wedges take over, and I've hit a lot of good wedge shots this week," said Mickelson, the 2001 and 2002 tournament winner.

Two more players withdrew because of the coronavirus Friday — Denny McCarthy for a positive test, and Bud Cauley, who tested negative, but decided to pull out after playing alongside McCarthy on Thursday. There have been seven COVID-19-related withdrawals.

Mickelson was at 13-under 127.

First-round leader Mackenzie Hughes followed an open-

ing 60 with a 68 to drop into a second-place tie with 23-year-old Will Gordon, who led most of the day after shooting an early 62.

Since winning at Pebble Beach early last year for his 44th PGA Tour title, Mickelson has mostly struggled, with far more missed cuts than good finishes.

On Friday at tree-lined TPC River Highlands, Mickelson made a bogey on his second hole before moving up the leaderboard. He made the first of his eight birdies from a green-side bunker on No. 5 and shot 30 on the back nine.

While Mickelson is making

his 624th PGA Tour start, Gordon is in his eighth tour event on a sponsor's exemption.

He had nine birdies and just missed a few others, including on the fourth hole, where his 35-foot birdie putt came to rest on the edge of the cup.

The former Vanderbilt star is carrying on a long tradition of young players who received a break at TPC River Highlands. Since 1996, 77 of the tournament's 98 unrestricted sponsor invitations have gone to players with fewer than 15 starts on the tour and those players have gone on to combine for 90 victories.