

STARS AND STRIPES®

Wednesday, June 14, 2017

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Rep. Scalise, 4 others shot; gunman dead

The Washington Post

A man unleashed a barrage of gunfire Wednesday at a park in Alexandria, Va., as Republican members of Congress held a morning baseball practice, wounding five people, including House Majority Whip Steve Scalise, R-La.

President Donald Trump said the gunman — identified by multiple law enforcement officials as James T. Hodgkinson III, 66, from Illinois — died after a shootout with police, two of whom were wounded in the gunbattle.

Scalise was critically injured and remained in critical condition as of Wednesday afternoon, according to MedStar Washington Hospital Center.

The wounded also include a

congressional aide, a lobbyist and two Capitol Police officers.

As people offered prayers for the victims, a profile began to emerge of Hodgkinson, a onetime home inspector. A Facebook page believed to be his includes pictures of 2016 Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders and rhetoric against Trump, including a post that reads: “Trump is a Traitor. Trump Has Destroyed Our Democracy. It’s Time to Destroy Trump & Co.”

In remarks made from the White House shortly before noon, Trump called for unity and commended the injured officers.

“Many lives would have been lost if not for the heroic actions of the two Capitol Police officers who took down the gun-

man despite sustaining gunshot wounds during a very, very brutal assault,” Trump said.

Trump said he spoke with Scalise’s wife and offered his full support to the congressman’s family. He called Scalise a friend, patriot and fighter, and thanked the first responders who aided those on the field that morning.

“We may have our differences, but we do well in times like these to remember that everyone who serves in our nation’s capital is here because, above all, they love our country,” Trump said.

The incident unfolded shortly after 7 a.m. during the final practice before Thursday night’s scheduled charity game between Republicans and Democrats at Nationals Park. Play-

ers and bystanders described a horrific and prolonged attack in which wounded police officers returned fire, and Scalise, felled by a bullet to his hip, crawled across the field to get out of harm’s way. Scalise’s office said the congressman underwent surgery at MedStar Washington Hospital Center.

Zach Barth, a legislative correspondent for Rep. Roger Williams, R-Texas, was shot but is expected to make a full recovery.

Matt Mika, a lobbyist for Tyson Foods, was taken to a hospital in unknown condition, a company spokesman said.

Capitol Police Chief Matthew Verderosa said his two wounded officers are in good condition and do not have life-threatening injuries.

Navy can’t find cause for T-45 ‘toxic oxygen’ incidents

BY TARA COPP

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Navy can’t uncover what is poisoning its student pilots in the cockpits of their T-45 trainer jets, despite stripping aircraft apart piece by piece, the top admiral for naval aviation told Senate lawmakers Tuesday.

“We are not doing well on the diagnosis,” Vice Adm. Paul Grosklags, commander of Naval Air Systems, told the Senate Armed Services subcommittee on seapower. “It would be far easier if we could find out what the root cause was and go after correcting the root cause. To date we have found no smoking guns.”

The Navy grounded all 197 of its training jets in early April after instructor pilots at the Navy’s three primary flight schools in Kingsville, Texas; Pensacola, Fla.; and Meridian, Miss.,

brought attention to the issue by refusing to allow students to fly the planes. No students have flown since then.

So far, about 75 future Navy and Marine Corps pilots have lost training and been delayed in joining their next squadrons. The grounding of student pilots will remain in effect until additional safety measures are put in place, Grosklags said.

Instructor pilots are allowed to fly, but only in scenarios that allow them to breathe without a mask — at altitudes below 2,000 feet and with restricted movements to keep gravitational pressures low.

Prior to the grounding, the students were experiencing repeat incidents of disorientation or worse due to failures in the on-board oxygen generation systems. Such failures lead to incidents of hypoxia — when a person doesn’t get enough oxygen to their bodily tissues. Hypoxia can

result in loss of consciousness or even death.

With the T-45s, Grosklags said the Navy has been able to determine the issue is with the oxygen mixture that pilots are breathing, not the amount of oxygen that is being delivered to them.

“For T-45s specifically, most of our issues to date — almost all of them — have been associated with what we’ll call breathing gas issues,” Grosklags told the subcommittee.

“Toxic oxygen, actually,” corrected Sen. Roger Wicker, R-Miss., chairman of the subcommittee, who represents Naval Air Station Meridian.

Grosklags said the Navy took several of the affected aircraft from Texas to its testing and evaluation facility at Naval Air Station Patuxent River in Maryland.

“We have torn some of them apart to the extent that we took every component, every single

component in that gas path, that breathing gas path, out of the airplane starting with the engine and moving through the entire system,” he said. In addition, the Navy has subjected those parts to “extreme testing” and taken some of the other affected aircraft and flown them to test for problems.

“We still have not been able to find what we would consider a proximate cause, contamination or something being released into the gas path,” Grosklags said.

The Air Force grounded its F-35s at Luke Air Force Base in Arizona last week after those aircraft reported five similar hypoxia incidents over the last month.

The Navy’s F/A-18s have also reported oxygen system failures. The F/A-18s’ problems seem to involve pressure on the oxygen being released into a pilot’s mask rather than the mixture of oxygen.

Mattis given authority to set troop levels in Afghanistan

By TARA COPP
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Jim Mattis told Senate lawmakers Wednesday that potentially thousands of additional troops could be deployed to Afghanistan to keep the country from sliding into further violence and to prevent Islamic State from achieving a stronger foothold there.

Mattis told members of the Senate Appropriations defense subcommittee that President Donald Trump notified him at noon on Tuesday that he would not need to seek White House approval to increase the number of U.S. forces on the ground in Afghanistan, a departure from the decision-making process of former President Barack Obama's administration.

"We will define the way ahead and I will set the U.S. military commitment consistent with the commander in chief's strategic direction and his foreign policy," said Mattis, who is spearheading the strategy with Secretary of State Rex Tillerson.

Mattis said he would present a revised strategy to Trump for his approval by mid-July. Mattis would not say how many

additional forces that he and Army Gen. John Nicholson, the top U.S. commander in Afghanistan, are looking to deploy. Mattis said he would return to Capitol Hill in a matter of weeks to brief lawmakers on the recommended increase.

Senior defense officials have previously said that the new strategy would require between 3,000 to 5,000 additional forces.

Wednesday morning was the defense secretary's third appearance on Capitol Hill this week as he and Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, discuss their 2018 budget proposal with Congress.

At each hearing, more details emerged of the proposed new strategy for Afghanistan and potential forces that strategy could require. At a House Armed Services Committee hearing earlier this week, Mattis said the additional forces would likely come from the Army, to provide additional advisers and trainers for the Afghans.

"These are troops that will go out specifically trained by our U.S. Army to go out in the field" with Afghan forces, Mattis said earlier this week.

Mattis said Wednesday that his proposed strategy is also likely to call for inserting NATO air controllers within Afghan units to make air response more effective against the Taliban or ISIS.

U.S. and coalition air support for Afghan military operations against the Taliban diminished as the U.S. drew down its forces and ended combat operations there in late 2014.

After 16 years of war, there are now about 8,400 U.S. troops in Afghanistan and approximately 5,000 NATO forces. U.S. forces there, at one time, topped 100,000.

Why "risk more American lives [and how will] spending billions more make any difference 16 years from now than it has in the first 16?" asked Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill.

Mattis said the additional U.S. forces would be there to stop any additional resurgence of violence and to dissuade the Taliban of the notion of pursuing additional violence instead of reconciliation talks with the Afghan government.

"Reconciliation is fundamental," he said. "All wars have to end sometime."

Mattis says US task force in Philippines ended too soon

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

The United States should not have ended a special-operations task force in the southern Philippines three years ago in light of the weekslong jihadi siege of a city there, U.S. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis said Tuesday.

"In 2014, we canceled the named operation that we had down there, out of perhaps a premature view that we were gaining success," Mattis testified before a Senate Armed Services subcommittee. "Without [the task force], we lost some of the funding lines that we would have been otherwise able to offer."

The city of Marawi on Mindanao Island has been under attack by Islamic State-linked militant groups for the past three weeks. Dozens of Filipino troops and civilians have been killed in the fighting.

On May 24, the day after the attack began, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte declared martial law on the island.

In 2002, the U.S. opened a so-called "second front" on terrorism on Mindanao. Hundreds of special operations troops assisted the Philippine armed forces with training and surveillance through the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines, which officially ended in 2015.

A small number of U.S. special operators still rotating through the country have been assisting Philippine armed forces.

"We are working closely with them — the Philippines, for example — with both manned and unmanned aircraft as they try to retake Marawi there in Mindanao," Mattis said.

The Philippines government had requested assistance by U.S. special operations in Marawi, a Special Operations Command Pacific spokeswoman said.

Army orders training to accept transgender troops

USA Today

WASHINGTON — The Army has begun compulsory transgender sensitivity training for soldiers and civilians as the Pentagon makes halting progress in its efforts to establish policies to accept transgender troops.

The Army held sessions Tuesday — compulsory for all officers, noncommissioned officers and civilians who work with soldiers — to help them implement military policy on transgender troops and to "assist soldiers who have a medical diagnosis indicating that gender transition is medically necessary through the gender transition process."

The training sessions spring from the decision

last year by then-Defense Secretary Ash Carter to rescind the military's ban on transgender troops. Carter's move allowed transgender troops in uniform to continue to serve, but it gave the services one year to implement policies for recruiting enlisted troops and commissioning officers who are transgender.

"The training module specifically outlines key roles and responsibilities of commanders, transgender soldiers, military medical providers and administrative management organizations," Lt. Col. Jennifer Johnson, an Army spokeswoman said in an email. "This training is mandatory for all uniformed members, as well as Department of the Army civilians."

Bill to speed VA discipline sent to Trump

BY NIKKI WENTLING

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Three years after scandal rocked the Department of Veterans Affairs, a bill creating more repercussions and a quicker firing process for poor-performing VA employees will go to the president's desk.

The House voted 368-55 Tuesday to pass S. 1094, titled the Department of Veterans Affairs Accountability and Whistleblower Protection Act of 2017. The bill was part of President Donald Trump's 10-point plan to reform the VA, which he has called the "most corrupt" federal agency.

The bill has broad support from veterans service organizations that see it as a way to root out a perceived culture of corruption in the department. VA Secretary David Shulkin said it was necessary to fix a "broken" accountability process.

"Once President Trump signs this into law, I predict we will see the culture change at the VA, and our veterans will get the care we promise them and they deserve," said House Majority Leader Rep. Kevin

McCarthy, R-Calif.

On average, it now takes 51 days for the VA to remove an employee, largely due to a 30-day notice period, Shulkin has said. At the end of May, there were 1,500 VA employees who had received notice of their termination but were still on the payroll.

The legislation would cut the 30-day advance notice period to 10 days. It would also speed up the process that employees use to appeal any disciplinary action against them. It lessens the evidentiary standards required to fire an employee, and it allows the VA secretary to recoup bonuses and relocation expenses in certain instances.

It also allows the VA secretary to directly appoint directors to lead VA hospitals and integrated service networks instead of going through lengthy hiring processes.

Lawmakers and veterans commended Democrats and Republicans on the House and Senate veterans' affairs committees for working together on the legislation, especially during a time of little bipartisan agreement.

The House already passed

a VA accountability bill in March, but the vote was split along party lines. Democrats argued it went too far to weaken employees' due process rights.

One week ago, the revised version of the bill passed the Senate, where previous accountability bills had stalled in 2015 and 2016. The legislation was a compromise between parties that added back in some workforce protections.

On June 6, Trump tweeted, "The House should get this to my desk ASAP!" Rep. McCarthy responded the next day, promising, "It will be on your desk next week."

"We are impressed by the speed by which Congress acted to move this critical legislation forward to the president's desk in a bipartisan manner," American Legion National Commander Charles Schmidt said in a statement.

Concerned Veterans of America has spent millions of dollars lobbying for the legislation since 2013. CVA is a conservative-leaning advocacy group reported to be associated with the Koch brothers' political network.

The group celebrated the

bill's passage Tuesday evening.

"It's taken many different versions of the bill working its way through Congress and years of activist engagement to get this measure passed," said CVA Policy Director Dan Caldwell. "This measure will incentivize employees within the VA to be more customer-focused. They'll now know that there will be consequences when they engage in misconduct."

J. David Cox, president of the American Federation of Government Employees, a federal union representing about 220,000 VA employees, has said federal public servants are "under constant attack."

In a statement Tuesday afternoon, Cox said Congress should be focusing their attention on filling vacancies within the agency.

"The VA's first, second and third priorities should be filling the 49,000 vacant positions currently on the books," he said. "Until these positions are filled and veterans are getting the excellent VA care our nation promised to provide, there shouldn't be any other priorities."

Emirati envoy: US should rethink Qatar base

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The United States should consider moving its air base out of Qatar, the Emirati ambassador to the U.S. said Tuesday, encouraging the Trump administration to use its leverage to further pressure Qatar over alleged support for extremism.

As the Persian Gulf crisis enters its second week, Ambassador Yousef al-Otaiba, of the United Arab Emirates, said Qatar's neighbors would "fairly soon" give the U.S. a list of specific actions Qatar must take before punitive steps are lifted. He said the list would likely include Qatari sanctions on bank accounts of individuals that Qatar's neighbors have already sanctioned — and possibly on the banks themselves.

"We've gotten fed up. We've had enough," al-Otaiba said.

In their bid to isolate Qatar by cutting off diplomatic ties, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and

other Arab countries have been emboldened by President Donald Trump, who has forcefully echoed their accusations that Qatar funds terrorist groups and foments instability in the Mideast. Al-Otaiba said both his country and the U.S. had allowed "bad behavior" by Qatar to continue for "a very long time."

"If I want to be honest, I think the reason action hasn't been taken against Qatar is because of the air base," Otaiba said, referring to al-Udeid air base not far from the capital, Doha. "The air base is a very nice insurance policy against any additional pressure."

Home to some 10,000 U.S. troops, the base has emerged as a flashpoint in the dispute between Qatar and its neighbors, the worst in the Persian Gulf in years. The forward headquarters of U.S. Central Command is a staging point for U.S. air campaigns in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria.

"Maybe someone in Congress should

have a hearing and just say, you know, 'Should we consider moving it?'" al-Otaiba said. "And maybe not moving the entire base. Maybe just distribute to various countries so you don't have all your eggs in one basket."

Al-Otaiba told reporters that the UAE hasn't told the U.S. it should consider moving the base, but is "willing to have that conversation." He suggested American troops could be moved to his country. Pointing to the new defense cooperation deal the U.S. and the UAE signed last month, al-Otaiba said the "infrastructure is in place" to have the conversation if the U.S. wanted to relocate.

The U.S. already has some troops in the UAE. The Pentagon has said the new document "provides the U.S. military with the ability to more seamlessly respond to a range of scenarios in and around the UAE, if necessary."

Utah monument proposal spurs action

Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY — Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke's recommendation to downsize a vast new national monument in Utah created optimism among opponents of 26 other monuments under review around the country and fear among conservation groups that worry he will propose shrinking or rescinding other sites in his final report due in late August.

Along the New England coast, commercial fishermen were ecstatic to hear Monday about Zinke's proposed reduction of the Bears Ears National Monument in Utah and hopeful it foreshadows a similar fate for a marine monument they oppose.

They're preparing to make a pitch for a

full undoing of the designation when Zinke visits the area later this week.

Opponents of other sites are making similar plans after the Bears Ears decision, saying the designations often close areas to oil, gas and mineral development along with other uses.

"It sets a precedent for the review of all the monuments," said Beth Casoni, executive director of the Massachusetts Lobstermen's Association Inc. "Under the former administration, we questioned whether this is about conservation or just control."

Conservation groups that were stung by the recommendation are trying to rally public support to fully preserve the monuments but expect they will have to resort to a protracted legal fight if President Donald

Trump eventually downsizes or eliminates monument designations.

They assert the 1908 Antiquities Act allows presidents to create monuments but only gives Congress the power to modify or rescind them.

Zinke called the Bears Ears area "drop-dead gorgeous country" that merits some protection on Monday in explaining his recommendation, but said the boundaries should be more narrowly focused around key cultural sites.

Trump ordered the monument review based on the notion that presidents increasingly are protecting areas that are too large and do not fit the law's purpose of shielding particular historical or archaeological sites.

Police hunt 2 escaped Ga. inmates

Associated Press

Two Georgia inmates described as "dangerous beyond description" remained on the run early Wednesday after killing two guards on a prison bus before fleeing in a stolen car.

Authorities said Donnie Russell Rowe, serving life without parole, and Ricky Dubose, who has prominent tattoos on his face and neck, were spotted twice on Tuesday after they overpowered, disarmed and killed Sgt. Christopher Monica and Sgt. Curtis Billue as the guards drove 33 inmates between prisons. Their escape after carjacking a driver who happened to pull up behind the bus on a rural highway set off a massive manhunt involving local, state and federal officers, Putnam County Sheriff Howard Sills said.

Sills was emotional during a news conference as he described the scene.

"I saw two brutally murdered corrections officers, that's what I saw," he said. "I have their blood on my shoes."

Authorities said the two inmates got into a "grass green," four-door 2004 Honda Civic with the Georgia license plate number RBJ-6601 and drove west on state Highway 16 toward Eatonton, southeast of Atlanta.

"We are still desperately looking for these two individuals," the sheriff said. "They are armed with 9 mm pistols that were taken from these correctional officers. They are dangerous beyond description. If anyone sees them or comes into contact, they need to call 911 immediately."

He urged the two to turn themselves in. "They need to surrender before we find 'em," Sills said.

The two got a head start by taking and tossing the Honda driver's cellphone and leaving the other 31 prisoners locked inside the bus, Sills said.

Later Tuesday, the manhunt shifted about 25 miles to the north to Madison, where Sills said the two men burglarized a house and then two men fitting their descriptions were reportedly seen in a Family Dollar store less than a mile away. Authorities had no further signs of the inmates and had no reason to believe they had split up, Sills said.

The reward for information leading to the arrests of Rowe, 43, and Dubose, 24, continued to grow.

Georgia Bureau of Investigation spokeswoman Nelly Miles said in an email Wednesday that multiple agencies have contributed \$70,000.

Deadly overnight fire hits London apartment tower

Associated Press

LONDON — A deadly overnight fire raced through a 24-story apartment tower in London on Wednesday, killing at least 12 people and injuring 74 others.

One desperate woman threw a baby out of a high window and a man on the ground managed to catch the child, a witness said.

Flames from the inferno lit up the night and smoke spewed from the windows of the Grenfell Tower in North Kensington where more than 200 firefighters battled the blaze.

A plume of black smoke stretched for miles across the pale sky after dawn, revealing the blackened, flame-licked wreckage of the building.

"This is an unprecedented incident," Fire Commissioner Dany Cotton told reporters. "In my 29 years of being a firefighter I have never, ever seen anything of this scale."

People in apartments enveloped by the quickly advancing flames and thick smoke banged on windows and screamed for help to those watching below,

witnesses and survivors said. One resident said the fire alarm did not go off.

Police commander Stuart Cundy gave the death toll but added the figure was likely to rise "during what will be a complex recovery operation over a number of days." Paul Woodrow, head of operations for the London Ambulance Service, said 20 of the injured were in critical condition.

The London Fire Brigade received the first reports of the fire at 12:54 a.m. and the first engines arrived within six minutes, Cotton said. Flames could still be seen more than 11 hours later.

There was no immediate word on the cause of the blaze, but angry residents said they had warned local authorities about fire issues at Grenfell Tower. The public housing block of 120 apartments was built in 1974 and recently upgraded at a cost of \$11 million, with work finishing in May 2016, according to the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

1 jailed, 1 wounded in dispute over dog poop

FL WEST PALM BEACH — Police in Florida said an argument between two men over dog poop left one in jail and another with a knife wound to the hand.

The Palm Beach Post reported that Ricardo Garcia Sanchez, 33, was arrested Monday and charged with aggravated battery with a deadly weapon. A police report says he's a property maintenance worker at an apartment complex in West Palm Beach and fought with a resident who he believed allowed his dog to defecate without cleaning up afterward.

Garcia Sanchez admitted to confronting the man about the pet but denied having the knife, which police didn't find. He's being held in Palm Beach County Jail.

Smirnoff ad 'wink and a nod' to Russia probe

CT NORWALK — Smirnoff Vodka has a new ad campaign that references the investigation into Russian interference in last year's U.S. presidential campaign.

Pictures of bus stop and billboard ads have been posted to social media. The ad reads: "Made in America, but we'd be happy to talk about our ties to Russia under oath."

Former FBI Director James Comey testified under oath that he believes he was fired by President Donald Trump because of the Russia investigation, which Trump has called "a witch hunt."

A spokesperson for British company Diageo, which owns Smirnoff, said in a statement the ad is "a wink and a nod to current affairs." Smirnoff has been made in America for decades but its roots go back to Russia.

Authorities: Head, torso likely from same person

MS JACKSON — Authorities here believe a severed head and a decapitated torso belonged to the same person.

The Clarion-Ledger reported the victim was identified on Monday as Jeremy Jerome Jackson, 30. Both body parts were discovered separately on Saturday in Jackson. The headless torso was badly burned.

Hinds County Coroner Sharon Grisham-Stewart said authorities were able to get a positive fingerprint match from one that hadn't been burned. She said the head had no distortion so facial recognition wasn't a problem. She said DNA also may be tested.

Jackson police Chief Lee Vance said the head was discovered on a home's porch hours before the body was found in a field about a mile away.

Hospital visitor finds newborn in his vehicle

MI GRAND RAPIDS — Police said a newborn baby was apparently abandoned inside a hospital visitor's vehicle in western Michigan.

Police said the baby was found Monday morning after the visitor returned to his vehicle at Mercy Health Saint Mary's hospital in Grand Rapids.

The baby was in good health and appeared to have been born within the previous three days, officers said.

Small plane lands on golf course; no injuries

NY BELLPORT — Authorities said no injuries were reported after a small plane made an emergency landing on a golf course.

Long Island MacArthur Airport Commissioner Shelley LaRose-Arken told Newsday that one person was aboard the plane when it landed at the Bellport Country Club about 6:15 a.m. Monday.

The pilot had reported engine problems. One of the plane's wings struck a tree during the emergency landing.

Girl, 9, fatally shot as father shows off gun

IN HOBART — Prosecutors have filed neglect and reckless homicide charges against the father of a 9-year-old northwestern Indiana girl shot to death when his firearm accidentally discharged.

The Lake County Prosecutor's Office said Monday that Eric Scott Hummel, of Hobart, also is charged with battery in the fatal shooting of Olivia Hummel.

The (Northwest Indiana) Times reported family members told police the father was showing a firearm to Olivia and her brothers Saturday afternoon when it discharged, striking the girl in the head. The father was being held at the Lake County Jail in Crown Point.

Man to stand trial for scaring woman to death

ME ALFRED — Jury selection was due to begin Monday for Carlton Young, who is accused of causing a Maine woman's fatal heart attack by frightening her during a 2015 attempted burglary, but the selection process was delayed.

Young has pleaded not guilty to felony murder. No new date for his trial has been set.

Young is accused in the death of Connie Loucks, 62, who suffered a heart attack after Young allegedly knocked on her door

and windows.

The Sanford man was accused of being part of a burglary ring in southern Maine. Authorities say he and at least one other person broke into Loucks' home when she wasn't there on March 21, 2015, and returned the following day to break in again..

Jailer arrested after drugs found in burrito

OK TULSA — A Tulsa County jailer was arrested after deputies say drugs were found inside a burrito he brought to the jail.

The Tulsa County Sheriff's Office said Kevin Mayo, 20, was arrested shortly before midnight Friday for possession of contraband in a jail, conspiracy to commit a felony, possession of marijuana and methamphetamine, possession of a schedule II drug and possession of drug paraphernalia.

Authorities said a burrito found in Mayo's backpack had marijuana, methamphetamine and a prescription painkiller wrapped inside it.

Bill to allow ballot selfies is in limbo

NJ TRENTON — A measure that would allow New Jersey voters to post ballot selfies on social media sites has cleared a legislative hurdle.

The state Assembly voted 74-2 on June 8 to approve the bill.

The proposal remains in limbo because a similar measure introduced in the state senate last year was soon withdrawn from consideration.

Several states have recently moved to allow ballot selfies. But laws nationwide are mixed on whether voters can take pictures of themselves in the act or of their ballots.

From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES®

On a mission to provide credible reporting and daily news to America's military, wherever they serve.

Mobile apps available: www.stripes.com/apps.

McIlroy among contenders at Erin Hills

Associated Press

ERIN, Wis. — The storms moved in overnight and kept pounding Erin Hills through the morning, closing the course for some three hours with just two practice days remaining before the U.S. Open. No one was happier than Rory McIlroy.

“I wasn’t crying when I saw that rain last night and this morning,” he said Tuesday. “It’s a long golf course, and it’s only going to play longer. That benefits a few guys, and luckily, I’m one of them.”

McIlroy won the first of his four majors in the U.S. Open six years ago at Congressional, a course so softened by rain that he shattered the scoring record (268) and won by eight shots. For someone who grew up in Northern Ireland, he has the reputation of favoring benign conditions instead of firm, wind-whipped conditions.

The course also was soft at the last two majors he won, the British Open at Hoylake and PGA Championship at Valhalla.

The bigger concern for McIlroy is his competitive form. This is the second straight time that a major championship has come to Wisconsin and McIlroy, the No. 2 player in the world, is coming off an injury.

Two years ago was far

worse. He ruptured a tendon in his ankle playing soccer and missed two months, including his British Open title defense at St. Andrews. He didn’t return until the PGA Championship at Whistling Straits, and while he broke par all four days, he finished 11 shots behind Jason Day.

This time, McIlroy has been out for six weeks because of a recurring injury in his rib that caused him to miss nearly two months at the start of the year. McIlroy skipped the BMW PGA Championship and the Memorial as a precaution and to let the rib properly heal.

McIlroy arrived at Erin Hills last Friday. He says he can swing and has full power. The only limitation is how much he can hit balls.

The unknown is how sharp he will be this week.

“My expectations going into Whistling, I was playing well. I didn’t feel like my body was restricting me in any way from doing what I wanted to do,” he said. “I felt like coming back into it I was playing well enough to win. And I feel like it’s the same thing here. I don’t feel like my body is limiting me from doing what I want to do out there. It’s just a matter of being able to do it. And if I

play the way that I know I can, I fully expect to have a chance on Sunday.”

The sky brightened by the afternoon as Dustin Johnson, the No. 1 player, arrived at Erin Hills. Johnson played two practice rounds last week after missing the cut at the Memorial. And while Erin Hills is new to all but a dozen or so players who were at the 2011 U.S. Amateur, there are not many secrets.

Keep it in the fairway. Avoid the thick, knee-high fescue at all costs. Don’t miss the green in the wrong spots. And keep a good attitude.

Patience is as valuable as pars, and that holds true at any U.S. Open.

“I’ve heard nothing but great stuff about this golf course and how much everyone’s attitude is great at the start of the week,” Day said. “Everyone is going to run into some sort of trouble out there — everyone is. It’s a matter of how you handle yourself in that moment to prepare yourself to greatness.”

McIlroy and Day are the only ones of the top five in the world who have not won this year. McIlroy lost in a playoff in South Africa in January — his last tournament before the rib injury — while Day was coping earlier this year with his moth-

er’s treatment for lung cancer.

Jordan Spieth won two years ago at Chambers Bay, relevant only because that was another new U.S. Open course that had opened only a decade earlier. The grass is similar — green at Erin Hills, brown and dying at Chambers Bay — but both are relatively wide by U.S. Open standards.

Spieth didn’t see too many similarities except that both are a U.S. Open, and it still feels like one. Adam Scott concurs, though as much focus as there has been on length and driving, he still sees an impeccable short game as going a long way.

Phil Mickelson, a runner-up six times, is not the model of accuracy off the tee. Neither is three-time champion Tiger Woods. Both are renowned for their short games, as is Spieth.

“Even the best drivers of the ball can’t hit it in the fairway all the time at most U.S. Opens,” Scott said. “And you’re going to have to scramble. And great wedge players will do well, and that’s also what I’ve focused on a little bit this year, to lift the standard of that so I’m able to contend. ... It took me a long time to get a good result. I haven’t cracked the code, but hopefully I’m on my way.”

Weight lifted as Garcia chases 2nd major

Associated Press

ERIN, Wis. — Sergio Garcia was decked out in green Tuesday, as he set out for his first U.S. Open practice round at Erin Hills.

Yes, Garcia wears the title of Masters champion quite well. A weight was lifted when he finally captured the major title that eluded him for all those years.

What he’s done in the past does not guarantee success, adulation or even happiness in the future, though. Nobody has learned that lesson in a more public fashion than Garcia himself.

Of his dozens of close calls, failures and embarrassments, a few have come at the U.S. Open — the “torture chamber” of a major, as 1993 PGA champion Paul Azinger called it — a tournament that often

brings out the worst in people.

“It’s tough to win, and majors are even tougher,” Garcia said. “And the U.S. Open, we all know how difficult they are.”

Unlike his effervescent introduction to the majors — when he hit the shot from the base of the tree, then ran up the fairway during the 1999 PGA Championship at Medinah — Garcia’s first week in genuine contention at a U.S. Open was a sordid, awkward affair.

It was 15 years ago, back in the day of the wobble, when the Spaniard’s pre-shot routine involved dozens of hard-to-watch, back-and-forth motions with his hands as he tried to position himself to swing. He was playing in New York, going against Tiger Woods in the final round. He had complained bitterly earlier in the week about how everything always seemed to be

set up to benefit Woods, who was then at the peak of his powers.

Not surprisingly, the overserved fans at Bethpage Black let Garcia have it, heckling him at almost every turn. On Saturday, after someone shouted out “Waggle Boy” during Garcia’s backswing, he pointed to the crowd and challenged the heckler to “be brave” and say it again. It was neither the first, nor the last time he had exacerbated these showdowns with fans.

Garcia wilted in the final round and the showdown with Woods turned out to be something much less. Garcia finished fourth, and though it marked the first of five top-10 finishes he’s had at the U.S. Open, it formed a bad second impression that Garcia had trouble altering, especially in the U.S., over the next decade.

Time changes things. Winning does, too.

Pens in historic company after Cup win

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — The salary cap was a passion project for Mario Lemieux, the owner, when the NHL wrestled with it during the 2004-05 lockout even though he knows it would have been something Mario Lemieux, the player, would have fought to the bitter end.

"We couldn't compete with the [New York] Rangers and LA and the big markets and Chicago and Detroit," the Pittsburgh Penguins Hall of Famer-turned-chairman recalled.

So Lemieux pushed for the cap during the NHL's lost winter, well aware the ripple effects would include a rise in league parity at the potential expense of the dynasties that have been a part of the league since it started awarding the Stanley Cup nearly a century ago.

The math was easy for Lemieux. Better to have 30ish solvent and competitive clubs than just a handful.

"The salary cap gave us a

chance to spend to the cap and be on level playing fields with the other teams," he said.

The cap has proven to be more of a speed bump than a road block for the Penguins. The proof was all around Lemieux as he spoke on the ice at Bridgestone Arena on Sunday night after the Penguins nudged past the Nashville Predators in Game 6 of the Stanley Cup Final to become the first team in 19 years and the first of the salary cap era to win back-to-back titles.

"It's hard to win the Cups as we've found over the last 10-12 years," Lemieux said.

Just not impossible.

The Penguins flew home to Pittsburgh on Monday with the Cup in their possession for the third time in nine years. A downtown parade was held Wednesday, a party that's on the verge of becoming a rite of late spring.

Pittsburgh has done it by investing heavily in their core group and finding the right

complement of players and staff around Sidney Crosby, Evgeni Malkin and Kris Letang to make it work.

"I always say best organization, amazing team," Malkin said. "We have [a] great chance [to] win every year."

That's not how it's supposed to work nowadays. Championship windows are supposed to be narrower with the cap in place, not wider. Sure, Chicago has won it three times in six seasons in the cap era but the Blackhawks were forced to blow it up after 2010. The Kings won it all in 2012 and 2014, and are now in the process of starting over.

Not Pittsburgh. The Penguins have more Cup appearances (four), playoff wins (90) and regular-season victories (467) over the last decade than any team in the NHL. And it's not really that close. While Crosby is loath to talk about his "legacy" — he won't turn 30 until August — the way he describes the only franchise he's

ever known sounds an awful lot like a "dynasty."

"Your goal is to win every year and our team just had a collection of guys that knew how to win, knew how to find ways," Crosby said after picking up his second straight playoff MVP trophy.

The Penguins are up against the salary cap annually but they also don't overpay their stars. Considering their value to the team both Crosby (\$8.7 million) and Malkin (\$9.5 million) are bargains. They're not the only ones.

Rookie Jake Guentzel (NHL rookie playoff record-tying 21 points), Bryan Rust, Conor Sheary and Scott Wilson all found themselves playing vital roles at some point during the postseason. None of them had a cap hit of more than \$675,000.

"I think we still play together long time and maybe when we retire think about it," Malkin said. "We're still young, still hungry and of course we want more."

Chargers bittersweet about final week in San Diego

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — Antonio Gates first arrived at Chargers Park in 2003, and Philip Rivers joined him one year later on the peaceful practice fields and low-slung buildings tucked below a golden hillside in northern San Diego.

The tight end and his quarterback have spent their entire NFL lives inhabiting this training complex. They've honed their skills with uncountable thousands of throws and catches on these fields, and they've built warm friendships with hundreds of their fellow Chargers in its locker room.

But Chargers Park and San Diego are down to their final week as this team's home. After a three-day mandatory minicamp concludes Thursday, the players will disperse for summer vacation before the moving vans portentously parked

outside the complex are filled for the 85-mile drive north to Costa Mesa, the Orange County city where the Los Angeles Chargers will hold training camp in July.

Chargers Park will be empty this summer for the first time in two decades, and San Diego will spend its autumn Sundays without the team that arrived from Los Angeles in 1961. The move has loomed for five months, but its imminent finality has some veterans feeling nostalgia during their last few workouts in San Diego's postcard-perfect sunny weather.

"There's a lot of time spent out there, a lot of balls thrown," Rivers said while standing in the cool shade just off the practice fields. "A lot of time spent in this locker room, weight room, meeting room. Qualcomm (Stadium) and the memories there from game days are public memories that a lot of people

shared in."

While coach Anthony Lynn and many current Chargers haven't been around long enough to truly feel their fans' pain, the senior players and team employees are still processing the end of this era.

"You've got to look at it as a positive, as we're going somewhere to a new beginning," said pass rusher Melvin Ingram, who has spent his entire five-year career with the Chargers. "But you've also got to have a bitter feeling, (because) this is where it all started, and you're leaving the place where it all started."

While the Rams packed up swiftly in St. Louis after securing relocation last year, the Chargers elected to make a slower transition north, holding their offseason workouts and running out their lease at the training complex still owned and maintained by the city of

San Diego.

Rivers was grateful for the gradual breakup, which allowed him extra time to decide whether to commute to LA or to move his wife and eight children out of their longtime family home.

"I will figure it out at some point," he said with a laugh.

Gates has long spent parts of his offseason in Los Angeles, so he has given his teammates plenty of tips on the sprawling metropolis. He also needs just one touchdown catch to become the NFL's career leader in TDs by a tight end, and Gates is at peace with the fact that he'll set the record and finish his career away from San Diego.

"I'm excited to move to LA. I'm excited about the new change, and hopefully they'll welcome us with open arms, embrace us, and we can win some games and win a championship."

Twins notch 28 hits in rout of Mariners

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Eddie Rosario wasn't a happy camper after not starting four games in the past nine days.

He took his frustrations out on the Seattle pitching staff, and his teammates joined the hit party as well.

Rosario hit three home runs and drove in five runs and the Minnesota Twins set a franchise record with 28 hits while batting around in two different innings of a 20-7 victory over the Mariners on Tuesday night.

"He made a little bit of a statement out there tonight," manager Paul Molitor said. "He's been out a few days and he came back with a vengeance."

Max Kepler and Brian Dozier also went deep, Eduardo Escobar had five hits and two RBIs

and Jason Castro had four hits and four RBIs for the Twins, who are in first place in the AL Central despite an AL-worst 13-19 record at Target Field.

The 28 hits are the most in a game since the Rangers had 29 in a 30-3 win over the Orioles on Aug. 22, 2007.

"We just couldn't stop them," Mariners manager Scott Servais said. "They kept squaring it up."

Christian Bergman (3-4) gave up nine runs and 10 hits in 2¹/₃ innings for the Mariners. Jarrod Dyson had a homer, a double and an RBI. Ben Gamel had two doubles and an RBI.

With slugger Miguel Sano getting a night off, the Twins batted around in a seven-run third inning and a seven-run seventh to snap a five-game home skid.

The Twins strung together

eight straight hits in the third inning, including back-to-back homers by Rosario and Dozier, to bust the game wide open.

"I just had a bad day as far as stuff and command goes," Bergman said.

Rosario's second two-run shot of the game came off of the first pitch from reliever Casey Lawrence, and Dozier followed with a solo shot for an 11-3 lead.

Rosario's final blast of the night came in the eighth inning off backup catcher Carlos Ruiz.

"Sometimes you have frustrations," Rosario said. "But I keep working hard. That's it."

A night after scoring 14 runs in a series-opening win over the Twins, the Mariners still pounded out 14 hits. Dyson's homer was his third of the season to set a career high.

Unique visit

Kyle Gibson (4-4) wobbled through six innings, giving up six runs and 12 hits and striking out four.

After the Twins' big third inning, Gibson promptly gave up three doubles and two runs. That compelled manager Paul Molitor to make a rare, one-on-one visit to the mound. Pitching coach Neil Allen remained in the dugout and catcher Jason Castro remained behind the plate. It was just Molitor and Gibson talking man-to-man.

Molitor finished the visit by patting Gibson on the behind and the right-hander was able to get the final two outs of the inning without surrendering another run.

"He just said, 'This is your game and we need you to get to the seventh,'" Gibson said.

MLB roundup

Bellinger's 2 HRs back Kershaw in win over Indians

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Clayton Kershaw wasn't at his best, but still extended his unbeaten string.

Cody Bellinger continued his outstanding rookie season with two home runs, including a tie-breaking shot in the eighth inning off Andrew Miller.

Kershaw and Bellinger combined to lead the Los Angeles Dodgers to a 7-5 win over the Cleveland Indians on Tuesday night.

Kershaw (9-2) allowed two runs in seven innings and has not lost in his last eight starts. The left-hander gave up a run in the third on Michael Brantley's single and a leadoff homer to Roberto Perez in the fifth that tied the game.

The three-time Cy Young Award winner yielded six hits, struck out four and walked two while throwing 101 pitches. He is 5-0 with a 1.94 ERA since his most recent defeat on May 1.

"Tonight was not a great night for me," Kershaw said.

"My fastball was pretty erratic, and I was falling behind hitters."

Angels 3, Yankees 2 (11): New York pitcher CC Sabathia exited early with a strained left hamstring, and Eric Young Jr. rallied host Los Angeles to a victory that snapped the visitors' six-game winning streak.

Young tied the score at 2 with a solo homer off Tyler Clippard in the eighth and drove home the winning run with a sharp infield single off the leg of reliever Ben Heller with two outs in the 11th.

White Sox 6, Orioles 1: Matt Davidson hit his first career grand slam, Derek Holland scattered eight hits over six innings and host Chicago beat Baltimore.

Rays 8, Blue Jays 1: Rookie Jacob Fara dazzled again and Logan Morrison hit his 18th home run of the season to help visiting Tampa Bay beat Toronto.

Diamondbacks 7, Tigers 6: David Peralta homered to left center in the ninth inning off

Justin Wilson, lifting visiting Arizona to a win over Detroit.

Nationals 10, Braves 5: Ryan Zimmerman hit his 18th and 19th home runs of the season in his return from back soreness, and host Washington scored five sixth-inning runs to defeat Atlanta.

Marlins 8, Athletics 1: Giancarlo Stanton returned to Miami's starting lineup after recovering from a bruised wrist and hit a two-run homer to help beat visiting Oakland.

Rangers 4, Astros 2: Rougned Odor hit a solo homer in the seventh inning and his tiebreaking two-run shot in the eighth lifted visiting Texas to a victory over Houston.

Cardinals 6-5, Brewers 0-8: Keon Broxton and Travis Shaw each hit solo home runs and combined for five RBI to help visiting Milwaukee beat St. Louis and split their day-night doubleheader.

The Cardinals won the opener behind Jose Martinez's two home runs.

Red Sox 4, Phillies 3 (12):

Andrew Benintendi singled to right in the 12th inning driving in Xander Bogaerts from third for the winning run as host Boston outlasted Philadelphia.

Pirates 5, Rockies 2: John Jaso hit a pinch-hit two-run homer off Colorado's Adam Ottavino in the seventh inning to break a tie and Andrew McCutchen homered twice as host Pittsburgh pulled away.

Cubs 14, Mets 3: Anthony Rizzo began the game with a long home run after a surprising move to the leadoff spot, rookie Ian Happ hit his first career grand slam and visiting Chicago trounced New York.

Padres 6, Reds 2: Clayton Richard carried a shutout into the ninth inning, Franchy Cordero homered twice and host San Diego beat slumping Cincinnati.

Royals 8, Giants 1: Alcides Escobar hit a two-run double as part of a six-run sixth inning and visiting Kansas City beat San Francisco.