

# STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

## Trump touts proposal for 350-ship Navy

By TRAVIS J. TRITTEN

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump said Thursday he spoke with the Navy and the shipbuilding industry about a major expansion of the U.S. fleet as he pushes ahead with a proposed boost to defense spending.

Trump said the Navy is “soon going to be the largest it’s been” during a speech aboard the soon-to-be commissioned Gerald R. Ford aircraft carrier in Newport News, Va. The president has called for a 350-ship fleet that would significantly grow the current 274-ship force, but would fall short of the more than 800 surface warships active at the end of World War II.

The call for a bigger fleet came after the president unveiled a proposed \$603 billion defense budget earlier this week — about a 3 percent increase over spending projections by President Barack Obama’s administration — and sparked a debate with congressional Republicans who believe it is not enough money to rebuild depleted military forces. Congress must approve funding for any military buildup.

“Our Navy is now the smallest it’s been, believe it or not, since World War I,” Trump said.

The Navy had 204 surface warships out of its total 774 active ships in 1918 when that war ended, though ship technology has changed during the past century and a direct comparison to today’s high-tech warships is not exact, according to the Naval History and Heritage Command.

Trump, who was wearing a Ford carrier baseball hat and jacket, said he has urged Congress to repeal the budget caps that have held down military spending since 2013 and to provide the Pentagon with sustained, stable funding for a buildup.

“After years of endless budget cuts that have impaired our defenses, I am calling for one of the largest defense spending increases in history, and by eliminating the sequester and the uncertainty it creates, we will make it easier for the Navy to plan for the future and, thus, to control costs and get the best deals for the taxpayer — which of course is very important,” he said.

Along with a larger fleet, the president also said the military must modernize and repair its aircraft, boost its force levels and improve its cyber operations capabilities.

The Republican chairmen of Congress’ armed services committees, who play a key role in crafting the defense budget, have been at odds with Trump since his budget proposal was released.

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., chairman of the Armed Services Committee, said during a town hall event Wednesday night that Trump’s claim that his \$603 billion budget proposal would be a historic boost in defense spending is “not true.”

“That is only a 3 percent increase,” McCain said during the CNN broadcast. “We need a much larger increase in defense spending.”

McCain and Rep. Mac Thornberry, R-Texas, the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, are pushing for a \$640 billion defense budget for 2018

— an increase of \$37 billion over Trump’s proposal.

“When we have gone through (budget figures) over the last several months to try to answer the question, ‘What would it take to begin to repair our readiness problems and to increase the force size — Army end strength, Navy ships — the way the president has talked,’ we believe that that is roughly \$640 billion,” Thornberry said.

The additional \$37 billion proposed by McCain and Thornberry could cover a variety of military needs, according to estimates put together by the House Armed Services Committee.

Some examples of what the committee said the additional spending could buy are:

- \$15 billion to modernize Marine Corps ground combat units and Army aviation and combat vehicles;

- \$11 billion for more F-35 fighter aircraft, F/A-18 Super Hornets and maintenance upgrades to F-16 aircraft;

- \$9 billion for a Navy aircraft carrier, a destroyer, a littoral combat ship frigate and upkeep of cruisers;

- \$5 billion to increase Navy ship operations and to buy equipment for repair facilities;

- \$4 billion to sustain, modernize and build new military maintenance facilities.

Thornberry said the debate is part of an ongoing negotiation with the White House, which is expected to release a full military budget proposal in May.

## US admiral in South China Sea: ‘We will be here’

*Associated Press*

ABOARD USS CARL VINSON, South China Sea — America will continue to patrol the South China Sea to ensure freedom of navigation and overflight in the disputed region, a U.S. admiral said Friday amid questions on whether U.S. involvement in one of Asia’s potential flash points will change.

“We will be here,” Rear Adm. James Kilby said aboard the

aircraft carrier USS Carl Vinson as it steamed through the gentle, blue waters, with F/A-18 fighter jets landing, taking off on catapults and zooming over the mammoth warship.

“We have operated here in the past, we’re going to operate here in the future, we’re going to continue to reassure our allies,” Kilby said. “We’re gonna continue to demonstrate that international waters are waters where everyone can sail, where

everyone can conduct commerce and merchant traffic, and that’s the message we want to leave with people.”

Kilby’s comments followed reported Chinese moves to install missile defense systems on islands it recently built, and the inauguration of a new U.S. president, who has raised questions about America’s role in Asia.

The U.S. military took a group of journalists to the air-

craft carrier during a routine patrol of the South China Sea, one of the world’s security hot spots, in a mission that U.S. Navy officials said has continued for decades.

A U.S. administration official has said the Carl Vinson strike group’s deployment in the South China Sea, a month after President Donald Trump took office, signaled U.S. intent to have a more active naval presence in the region.

## Army depot employee accused in theft case

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — An Anniston Army Depot employee has been charged with stealing more than \$175,000 worth of transmission oil coolers between 2013 and 2015.

The U.S. Attorney's Office, in a news release Wednesday, said federal prosecutors filed a bill of information charging Eric Hardy, 45, of Anniston, with one count of theft of government property.

In conjunction with the charge, prosecutors also filed a plea agreement with Hardy. As part of that agreement, Hardy agreed to plead guilty, to forfeit \$175,537 to the government, and to pay that same amount in restitution to the Anniston Army Depot.

The maximum penalty for the theft charge is 10 years in prison and a \$250,000 fine.

Hardy's arraignment is set for March 9 in Birmingham.

## Ex-Navy sailor gets 10 years in online sex case

HARTFORD, Conn. — A former Navy petty officer who pleaded guilty to enticing young girls to perform sexually explicit acts during online video chats has been sentenced to 10 years in prison.

Adam Simpson was also sentenced Tuesday in U.S. District Court in Hartford to five years of probation.

Simpson, 30, of Benton, Pa., was stationed at the Naval Submarine Base in Groton, Conn., and served aboard the USS Hartford at the time. He pleaded guilty in June to using an interstate facility to entice a minor to engage in unlawful sexual activity. He also was discharged.

Prosecutors said Simpson enticed girls between the ages of 12 and 16 to engage in sexually explicit conduct, which he recorded and saved. He also lied about his age to deceive the girls.

## Holloman AFB unit to switch to newer drone

ALOMOGORDO, N.M. — A U.S. Air Force training unit at a base in southern New Mexico has retired a widely used armed drone to transition to a newer remotely piloted model.

The Alamogordo Daily News reported that the 6th Attack Squadron at Holloman Air Force Base is transitioning to the MQ-9 Reaper from the MQ-1 Predator, some of which remain in operational status.

From The Associated Press

# Fallen honored as Marines prepare to go to Helmand

By PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN  
*Stars and Stripes*

KABUL, Afghanistan — Just weeks before a contingent of Marines heads to Helmand province on a mission to train and advise Afghan soldiers and police, a memorial was unveiled at the U.S. Embassy here honoring Marines and Navy corpsmen who have died during the 16-year war in Afghanistan.

The wooden wall at the Marines House at the embassy holds 482 individual plaques, each with a deceased servicemember's name on it.

"Each of the names on this wall has a story, and some are perhaps better known than others, but they're all equally important," said Brig. Gen. Edward Banta, the highest-ranking Marine with NATO's Resolute Support mission, at a ceremony Thursday.

There are currently about 120 Marines in Afghanistan, predominantly in Kabul and at Bagram Air Field. At the end of April, about 300 more will be sent to the Taliban hotbed of Helmand to replace a contingent of U.S. Army soldiers who are there to train and advise Afghan soldiers and police.

Gunnery Sgt. David Nisbeth, former commander of the Marine Security Guard detachment at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, came up with the idea for the wall.

"The men and women who died carried a great burden for America, and I wanted to ensure that they did not die in vain and that their sacrifice is forever remembered," he said.

**'Each of the names on this wall has a story, and some are perhaps better known than others, but they're all equally important.'**

**Marine Brig. Gen. Edward D. Banta**

Marines made up the first major deployment of U.S. ground troops into Afghanistan, when hundreds were deployed to Kandahar in November 2001. Up until international combat operation ended

in late 2014, Marines fought in some of the most hostile regions of the country.

"That's what we were here for: We go to the places no one else wants to go and we go do the things that people say can't be done," said Marine Corps Sgt. Layton Nobles at Thursday's ceremony.

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# Pilot kicked out of Navy for indecent recording of officers

*Kitsap Sun (Bremerton, Wash.)*

BREMERTON, Wash. — A pilot has been kicked out of the Navy for recording female officers aboard the USS John C. Stennis two years ago.

The incident occurred Jan. 29, 2015. The court-martial closed in June 2016 and documents sought through a public information request were obtained Wednesday. All names were redacted.

The 33-year-old lieutenant was a member of Strike Fighter Squadron 192 based at Naval Air Station Lemoore, Calif. The unit was aboard the Bremerton-based Stennis, conducting pilot qualifications off Southern California.

The pilot was seen holding a cellphone

against a ventilation grate outside female officers' showers.

The lieutenant was interrogated and confessed to the incident and at least 15 others in which he recorded female officers in their bathroom on the Stennis, according to Navy documents. His phone and tablet were taken.

Deleted videos were recovered and revealed three more women videotaped while showering or dressing in their staterooms.

The pilot pleaded guilty June 7, 2016, to attempted indecent recording, indecent recording and conduct unbecoming of an officer.

He was sentenced to 36 months' confinement, 12 months of which was suspended, and he was dismissed from the Navy and was required to register as a sex offender.



# US carries out dozens of strikes in Yemen

Associated Press

SANAA, Yemen — U.S. jets carried out dozens of airstrikes on al-Qaida targets in Yemen overnight and in the past 48 hours in one of the lengthiest, sustained operations inside this country, Yemeni officials and residents said Friday.

According to the officials, the strikes focused on a mountainous region where three Yemeni provinces meet: Bayda, Shabwa and Abyan. Casualty figures

have been slow to emerge, but officials said seven alleged al-Qaida militants were killed in the strikes on Thursday.

A senior Yemeni official called the strikes as “open-ended” and said they raised questions about the operation’s objectives.

Residents in Shabwa said the strikes hit the town of Wadi Yabsham, where Saad Atef, the No. 2 figure in Yemen’s al-Qaida branch, is living.

Sadek al-Jaouf, a Bayada tribal leader, told The Associated Press that houses were bombed in Yakla district — the site of a U.S. special operations’ raid in January in which a Navy SEAL was killed, six American soldiers were wounded.

In the ground operation, a total of 25 Yemenis were killed, including 10 children, drawing criticism from international rights groups and calls for an inquiry.

Al-Jaouf added that the top tribal figure, Abdel-Elah al-Dhahab, whose brothers were accused of links to al-Qaida and were killed in the January raid, survived the latest strikes.

On Thursday, Capt. Jeff Davis, a Pentagon spokesman, said the latest strikes were aimed at degrading the group’s ability to “coordinate external terror attacks” and to limit its use of Yemen as a “safe space for terror plotting.”

## US steps up attacks on al-Shabab in Somalia

Associated Press

MOGADISHU, Somalia — With frequent suicide bombings and assaults on Somalia’s hotels and military targets, the Islamic extremist group al-Shabab has proved more resilient than expected, leading President Donald Trump’s administration to pursue wider military involvement here as current strategies, including drone attacks, are not enough, security experts say.

Senior U.S. officials have said the Pentagon wants to expand the military’s efforts to battle the al-Qaida-linked group. Recommendations sent to the White House would allow U.S. special forces to increase assistance to the Somali National Army and give the U.S. military greater flexibility to launch more preemptive airstrikes.

The U.S. is likely to find counterterrorism efforts in Somalia difficult and expensive, analysts say — especially with the emergence of fighters pledging alliance to the Islamic State group.

Currently, about 50 U.S. commandos rotate in and out of this Horn of Africa nation to advise and assist local troops. The commandos have accompanied Somali forces in several raids against al-Shabab fighters in which dozens of militants were killed, according to Somali intelligence officials.

Somalia, which has been

without an effective central government since the fall of dictator Siad Barre in 1991, was one of the seven predominantly Muslim countries included in Trump’s recent travel ban. That executive order has since been suspended by federal courts.

Al-Shabab emerged amid Somalia’s years of chaos. A regional military effort several years ago pushed the extremist group from the capital, Mogadishu, and most other urban centers. But experts say that push against al-Shabab then weakened, allowing it to regroup and adapt to operating in the country’s vast rural areas.

The U.S. already has military bases in Somalia, although it has not publicly acknowledged them. They often are used for drone attacks against al-Shabab targets. One of the largest bases is at Baledogle Airfield, a former Somali air force base in the Lower Shabelle region where U.S. military experts also train Somali forces, according to Somali officials.

In the past year, the U.S. launched 14 airstrikes — nearly all drone strikes — killing some top al-Shabab leaders, including Hassan Ali Dhore and Abdullahi Haji Daud, according to a Somali intelligence official who coordinated with the U.S. on some of them.

The attacks have helped combat al-Shabab but have not brought the group to its knees, the official said.

## Islamic State used Mosul sinkhole as mass grave

The Washington Post

ATHBAH, Iraq — The horror stories about the Islamic State group’s mass killings at a cavernous hole in the desert near Mosul became legendary over the years.

Soon after the group took control of the Iraqi city more than 2½ years ago, the 100-foot-wide sinkhole 5 miles southwest of the airport became a site for summary executions. Some victims were made to line up at the edge of the hole and were shot before being kicked inside, while others were tossed in alive, residents said. Sometimes bodies were trucked in.

It was only after Iraqi forces retook the area last month as they closed in on the city’s western side that the scale of the killings at the site began to emerge. Based on anecdotal evidence, Iraqi officials say thousands may have perished there in recent years.

No one knows the depth of the hole under the water at the bottom. The militants have filled it and booby-trapped it with explosives, making excavation particularly complex.

Meanwhile, authorities are overwhelmed. Members of Iraq’s human rights commission, which is tasked with mapping the Islamic State group’s mass graves, said they could not provide figures on how many have been found so far. Last sum-

mer, the Associated Press said it had documented some 72 mass graves from Islamic State atrocities in Iraq and Syria, containing as many as 15,000 bodies, with more expected to be unearthed.

Dozens of mass graves around the Iraqi town of Sinjar, which are thought to contain the remains of hundreds of Yazidis killed execution-style by the Islamic State, have yet to be fully excavated.

Mass graves around the city of Tikrit, containing the remains of an estimated 1,700 soldiers from nearby Camp Speicher who were massacred by the militants, are still being discovered two years after the area was retaken by security forces.

The sinkhole could be the group’s biggest mass grave.

The sinkhole was near an Islamic State oil refinery, and the militants regularly rounded up workers and Mosul residents who were buying fuel to watch the execution-style killings. Victims included former police and army officers, as well as those accused of spying or working with the Iraqi government, witnesses said.

Hussam al-Abar, a provincial council member, said 3,000 to 5,000 corpses might languish in its depths, though he bases that estimate on lists of missing people that he concedes could have been killed and buried somewhere else.

## Republican rebels stir up trouble

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Capitol is suddenly awash with troublemakers and rebels — and that's just the Republicans.

Whatever GOP unity was produced by Donald Trump's victory in November has all but disappeared, and Republican leaders are confronting open rebellion in their ranks as they try to finalize health care legislation.

In the Senate, three conservatives who have been a thorn in the side of leadership are back at it again. And in the House, recalcitrant conservatives are banding together and threatening to foil House Speaker Paul Ryan's plans for swift passage of the legislation to repeal and replace former President Barack Obama's health law.

One of the rebels, Rep. Thomas Massie of Kentucky, said leaders played clips of Trump's recent joint session speech, with the goal of convincing lawmakers that they are aligned with the president on the pending health bill.

But Massie dismissed the effort as "very unconvincing." And he and other conservatives claimed to count 20-plus GOP opponents to the health care bill, enough to sink it if all Democrats vote "no."

Ryan and other GOP leaders, who are aiming to pass the legislation by early April, have tried to keep a game face despite the turmoil.

After mostly lying low and playing nice for the past several months, Sens. Rand Paul, of Kentucky, Mike Lee, of Utah, and Ted Cruz, of Texas, are uniting against the health care legislation, and like their conservative counterparts in the House, they command the votes to frustrate leadership efforts if they don't back down.

The lawmakers object to a system of refundable tax credits that form the centerpiece of the legislation, and which they say would amount to a costly, new entitlement. Instead they're demanding a vote on a straightforward repeal-only bill.

On Thursday, Paul infuriated GOP leaders on both ends of the Capitol by marching over to the House with a crowd of reporters and his own copy machine to demand to see the draft health care bill, and criticizing leadership for keeping it under wraps.

## Pressure mounts as Sessions backs off Russia investigation

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Attorney General Jeff Sessions may not have been clear about his contacts with Russian officials during the 2016 election, but this much is evident: The controversy over any Kremlin involvement in American politics is not going to fade away anytime soon.

Sessions on Thursday became the second high-ranking member of the Trump administration to take a hit over conversations with Russia's envoy to the U.S., recusing himself from any probe that examines communications between Trump aides and Moscow. An early backer and key adviser for Trump's campaign, Sessions said his staff recommended that he step aside from a probe.

"I feel I should not be involved in investigating a campaign I had a role in," he said.

Sessions' action followed revelations that he twice spoke with the Russian ambassador and didn't say so when pressed, under oath, by Congress. Though he rejected any suggestion that he tried to mislead anyone, he did allow that he should have been more careful in his testimony.

"I should have slowed down and said, 'But I did meet one Russian official a couple of times,' " he said.

The recusal, despite White House support for him, followed a chorus of demands

that Sessions resolve the seeming contradiction between his two conversations with Moscow's U.S. envoy, Sergey Kislyak, and his statements to Congress in January that he had not communicated with Russians during the campaign. It carried echoes of a similar controversy involving retired Gen. Michael Flynn, who two weeks ago resigned as national security adviser after misleading White House officials about his own discussions with Kislyak.

Additional communication was revealed Thursday between Kislyak and Flynn and Trump's son-in-law, Jared Kushner, at New York's Trump Tower. In addition, Carter Page, a former foreign policy adviser to Trump's presidential campaign, spoke with the ambassador last summer, according to a person with knowledge of the meeting.

The recusal means the attorney general should not receive any briefings on it and have no information to provide to Congress or the public. But Sessions' decision to leave the matter in the hands of a top deputy may not cool demands that someone from outside the department provide a fully independent set of eyes.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said a special prosecutor should be appointed to examine whether the federal investigation had been compromised by Sessions.

## Pence used private email for state business while Indiana governor

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Vice President Mike Pence used a private email account to conduct public business as Indiana's governor, according to public records obtained by the Indianapolis Star.

The newspaper reported Thursday that emails provided through a public records request show Pence communicated with advisers through his personal AOL account on homeland security matters and security at the governor's residence.

Pence's AOL account was subjected to a phishing scheme last spring, before he was chosen by Donald Trump to join the GOP presidential ticket. Pence's contacts were sent an email falsely claiming that the governor and his wife were stranded in the Philippines and needed money.

Pence spokesman Marc Lotter said Pence "maintained a state email account and a per-

sonal email account" like previous governors in the state. At the end of his term, Pence directed outside counsel to review all of his communications to ensure state-related emails were archived.

Pence frequently criticized rival Hillary Clinton's use of a private email server while she served as President Barack Obama's secretary of state.

The newspaper reported that the office of Pence's successor, Indiana Gov. Eric Holcomb, released more than 30 pages from Pence's AOL account, but declined to release an unspecified number of emails because they were considered confidential.

Public officials are not barred from using personal email accounts under Indiana law, but the law is interpreted to mean that any official business conducted on private email must be retained to comply with public record laws.



# AMERICAN ROUNDUP

## Woman suspected of giving child pot candy

**WY** CASPER — A woman was arrested on suspicion of giving her daughter marijuana candy and having drugs and paraphernalia at her house.

The Casper Star-Tribune reported Vanessa Smith was arrested Monday evening when she arrived to pick up her child from her sister's house.

A police report said Smith's boyfriend dropped the girl off Monday morning and when the girl's aunt noticed she was lethargic and had bloodshot eyes the boyfriend said Smith had given the girl a marijuana gummy Sunday night to calm her down. The girl's urine tested positive for the chemicals in marijuana.

Officers searching Smith's house found marijuana, bags with methamphetamine residue, marijuana edibles and unidentified pills. She was booked into jail on suspicion of child endangerment, drug possession and distributing to a person younger than 18.

## Police: 2 runaway calves are on the lam

**MA** HARWICH — Police said two calves are on the loose in the woods of Cape Cod after making a break.

The Boston Globe reported the young cows have evaded capture since they bolted while being delivered to a farm on Feb. 24. Police said the calves fled across a golf course and into woods in the town of Harwich. Residents have reported seeing the pair, but attempts to capture them have failed.

Harwich police officer Jack Burns told The Globe that the calves are jittery because they're so young and that they're faster than they look.

## State to separate King and Lee holiday

**AR** LITTLE ROCK — Arkansas has taken a step toward celebrating Martin Luther King Jr. on the third Monday in January and honoring Robert E. Lee in the fall rather than the current practice of recognizing both men on the same day in January.

Gov. Asa Hutchinson on Thursday made the unusual move of testifying before a legislative committee. He said King should be celebrated separately for his civil rights accomplishments and that Lee fought for the wrong side in the Civil War.

Sen. David Wallace, who proposed the bill, said "Having a slave owner's birthday celebrated on that same day is not right, and we need to make this right." Arkansas, Alabama and Mississippi recognize King and Lee, who both have January birthdays, on the same day.

Under a bill approved Thursday in a voice vote by the Senate Education Committee, Arkansas' Lee holiday would be moved to the second Saturday in October, the month in which Lee died. That day would be a memorial day commemorated by a gubernatorial proclamation, not a state holiday.

## State agency rejects 'atheist' license plate

**IN** ELKHART — The Indiana Bureau of Motor Vehicles has denied a man's request to have a personalized plate that read "atheist."

The Elkhart Truth reported the state agency denied Chris Bontrager's request. The letter states that the agency can deny a personalized plate if it has a connotation offensive to good taste or decency, would be misleading or if the agency considers it improper.

Bontrager said he believes the denial was religiously motivated.

The U.S. and Indiana Supreme Courts have both sided with the state's ability to decide whether a message on a personalized plate will be approved or denied because it's considered "government speech."

## Road closing to spare mating amphibians

**PA** EAST STROUDSBURG — The National Park Service has been closing a road in the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area so amphibians don't get squashed by vehicles as they seek out mates.

Park Ranger Kathleen Sandt told WNEP-TV that River Road was closed for the first time in February due to the mild, rainy weather that prompts salamanders, wood frogs and spring peepers to mate. The park service has closed part of River Road overnights during mating season since 2003, so the amphibians can safely cross the highway to breeding pools.

## Pot smoking, growing banned at luxury condo

**MA** BOSTON — One of Boston's most luxurious condominium buildings has banned pot smoking and growing.

Even though Massachusetts has legalized recreational use of marijuana, it's not welcome at The Residences at The InterContinental.

The Boston Herald reported that the building's condominium trust banned vaping; smoking tobacco, clove, marijuana or electronic cigarettes; and harvesting marijuana inside the high-rise. At least 89 owners of the InterContinental's 130 units approved the measure.

City real estate experts say they expect more condo bylaws and leases to specifically ban marijuana use and cultivation.

## Mouse on airplane delays flight for 4 hours

**CA** SAN FRANCISCO — A little mouse made for a big delay on a British Airways flight from London to San Francisco.

The passengers were all buckled up and ready to go when the crew told them that a mouse-spotting meant they couldn't take off.

The crew joked that the mouse couldn't enter U.S. airspace without a passport, and told everyone they needed a whole new plane. That meant a four-hour delay. British Airways apologized and said they were satisfied that only two-legged passengers were on the flight once it took off.

## Ex-con steals Maserati during test drive

**FL** BOCA RATON — Police in Florida have recovered a roaring fast Maserati that was stolen during a test drive.

They say it wasn't hard to find the man who drove off with the \$150,000 2016 Maserati GranTurismo, because he had to show his driver's license at the dealership in Fort Lauderdale.

An arrest report for Michael McGilvary II, 45, said he stopped at a Boca Raton resort during the drive on Feb. 21, promising to show a boat but then left the car salesman at the dock and drove away. Police didn't describe the car's condition or how they recovered it. The SunSentinel reported that McGilvary is back in custody on grand theft charges after violating parole in a federal drug case.

From wire reports

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# Chippewas' Keene is a scoring machine

Associated Press

TOLEDO, Ohio—Marcus Keene attracts a crowd on the court and in the stands.

Central Michigan's scoring machine, one of college basketball's most prolific scorers in 20 years, slashes to the basket at will, leaving one defender and drawing one or two who usually make contact. He also overcomes attention on the perimeter, where his array of moves and ability to go either way off the dribble set him up to hoist shots from NBA three-point range.

The league is taking notice.

Despite being listed as a 5-foot-9 point guard, scouts have been showing up to watch Keene play, especially on the road to avoid a trek to Mount Pleasant, Mich., in the middle of the state. The Youngstown State transfer, who was born in Germany and raised by his parents in San Antonio, is averaging 29.4 points going into Central Michigan's final regular-season game Friday night at Western Michigan. Keene is averaging five-plus more points per game than the nation's second-leading scorer, South Dakota State's Mike Daum.

Since Charles Jones averaged 30-plus points a game at Long Island University during the 1996-97 season, Keene has come closest to matching the feat. A 50-point game, the first in Division I hoops since 2013, along with becoming the first with six 40-point games in more than a decade boosted his average enough to put him in select company. Keene, Stephen Curry and Jimmer Fredette are the only players who have averaged at least 28.5 points per game over the last 15 seasons in Division I

basketball.

Isaiah Thomas, who like Keene may be shorter than 5-9 in socks, has proven with the Boston Celtics that the shortest player on the court can still be one of the best.

Keene has been in the spotlight during his spectacular season, becoming a story transcendent enough that even "CBS Evening News," visited him on campus. Keene, though, hasn't been able to rejoice in it because Central Michigan (16-14, 6-11 Mid-American Conference) has allowed a potentially promising season slip away with six straight losses going into Friday's matchup with the rival Broncos (14-15, 10-7) on the road.

The Chippewas will open the MAC Tournament on an opponent's home court Monday, hoping to advance to the quarterfinals in Cleveland to keep Keene's dream alive of playing in the NCAA Tournament.

"If we play our game, we can beat everybody," he told The Associated Press. "I still feel confident in myself and in my team that we can win."

Confidence, or the lack of it, has never been a problem for Keene. That was true even when Youngstown State was the only Division I program that really wanted him out of Warren High School in San Antonio, where he was teammates with Atlanta Hawks rookie Taurean Prince.

"Everyone thinks you have to be 6-3 to be a guard in college," his father, Ivan Keene, said. "He just got overlooked because of his size, but I remember telling him, 'It only takes one school to take you, because you can't play for them all.' I prayed to God that

one school would take a chance on him and one did and we'll always be thankful for that."

After averaging 6.5 points as a college freshman, Keene spent the summer focused on improving his game.

His hard work paid off as a sophomore when he averaged a team-high 15.6 points a game and scored a then-career high 24 points on Nov. 18, 2014, in a loss to the free-wheeling Chippewas. When Central Michigan coach Keno Davis saw on social media after the season that Keene wanted to transfer and confirmed with Youngstown State's compliance department, assistant coach Jeff Smith called Keene and was thrilled to find out he was interested in reuniting with a fellow 5-9 Texan, Braylon Rayson. Keene sat out last season as a redshirt, starring for the scout team.

Davis gives Keene the green light to shoot whenever and wherever he wants, helping him break MAC and school season scoring records set by former NBA players Ron Harper at Miami and Dan Majerle at Central Michigan. Davis acknowledged he may coach the once-in-a-generation scorer for only one season.

"He's going to have opportunities to play at another level," Davis said.

Keene insisted he doesn't know yet if he will stay in college or enter the NBA Draft this year.

"There's a chance I'll go because what I'm doing probably won't be done again," he said in an AP interview. "I just have to see what people say after the season and see how it plays out."

## Late shot lifts Iowa over No. 22 Wisconsin

Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. — Jordan Bohannon looked in the direction of his older brother, Zach, as he ran back up the court after hitting a 3-pointer with 9 seconds left against Wisconsin, his sibling's alma mater.

Little brother hit a big shot for Iowa.

Bohannon's three finished a frantic comeback from a nine-point deficit with 4:15 left, and the Hawkeyes brushed past mistake-prone No. 22 Wisconsin for a 59-57 victory Thursday night.

"I said, 'Go Hawks,'" Bohannon recounted with a laugh when asked what he said to his brother. Zach and another older brother, Jason, both played for the Badgers.

"We were pretty much a Wisconsin family growing up," said Bohannon, who finished with 11 points. "This game meant a lot to me."

It also meant a lot to Iowa's long-shot changes to make the NCAA Tournament. The Hawkeyes (17-13, 9-8) have won three straight, including two on the road against ranked opponents.

**No. 14 SMU 93, Tulsa 70:** Semi Ojeleye scored 26 points with a perfect night from the field and the host Mustangs clinched at least a share of the American Athletic Conference title with a victory on Thursday.

Ojeleye made all nine of his field goal attempts, including a couple of highlight dunks and three three-pointers. All five starters scored in double figures for the Mustangs (26-4, 16-1), who can clinch the league title outright with a win at home Saturday against Memphis.

**No. 18 Cincinnati 65, Houston 47:** Gary Clark had 14 points and seven rebounds in his team's balanced attack, and

the Bearcats rolled to their 26th straight win at home.

Cincinnati (26-4, 15-2 American Athletic) wrapped up its fourth undefeated season at Fifth Third Arena, which opened in 1989. The Bearcats' home winning streak is the second-longest at the arena. They won 41 in a row from 1997-2000.

**Bucknell 78, Army 62:** At Lewisburg, Pa., Stephen Brown scored 20 points and hit four three-pointers to help lead the No. 1 seeded Bison to a win over the No. 8 Black Knights in the quarterfinals of the Patriot League Tournament.

Bucknell will host No. 4 seed Navy on Sunday. Zach Thomas added 14 points, while Nana Foulland and Kimbal Mackenzie each finished with 13 for the Bison (24-8), who hit 12 three-pointers and had 18 assists on their 30 field goals.

# Title bouts highlight fan-friendly UFC 209

Associated Press

While the UFC waits for its mainstream stars to return to the octagon, the promotion has booked a UFC 209 card that appeals directly to its serious fight fans.

Conor McGregor, Ronda Rousey, Jon Jones, Georges St. Pierre and Brock Lesnar are all in various states of inactivity, suspension or retirement. Only St. Pierre has a fight currently booked, and it doesn't have a date.

So Saturday's show from T-Mobile Arena in Las Vegas is packed with talent, if not worldwide name recognition.

In the main event, welterweight champion Tyron Woodley and Stephen "Wonderboy" Thompson meet in a rematch

four months after their entertaining majority draw. Moments before that, rising stars Tony Ferguson and Khabib Nurmagomedov will have one of the year's most anticipated bouts for the interim lightweight championship.

If two title fights aren't enough, the pay-per-view portion of the card leads off with veteran heavyweights Mark Hunt and Alistair Overeem. Hunt happens to be currently suing the UFC, President Dana White and Lesnar, alleging racketeering and fraud in the circumstances around his fight last July at UFC 200 against Lesnar, who subsequently failed a doping test.

Woodley (16-3-1) retained his belt in New York late last year after two judges couldn't

choose a winner in his first bout with Thompson (13-1-1), the 34-year-old karate teacher from South Carolina. The result left both fighters determined to prove their superiority, and the UFC swiftly scheduled a rematch — something that's not always a given in the money-driven world of mixed martial arts.

Thompson hasn't lost a fight since April 2012, and he would love to continue his rise with a striking-heavy victory over Woodley, who claimed the belt last July.

"I only threw half the things I normally do," Thompson said of the first bout, "which is good going into this fight, because he hasn't seen even half of everything I've got. My goal is to not

leave it in the judges' hands this time, which is easier said than done when you're going against the welterweight champion."

The feelings aren't nearly as cordial in the co-main event, where Ferguson (23-3) and Nurmagomedov (24-0) are facing off for a star-making shot at McGregor, the current 155-pound champion. The California-based contenders have spent most of the promotion sniping at each other.

"He thinks he's tough," Nurmagomedov said. "But when the cage closes, me and him alone inside the cage, I'm going to break this guy."

Nurmagomedov has never lost, and the Dagestani-born fighter has rarely been seriously threatened during his first eight UFC fights.

## Lillard scores 33 points, leads Blazers past Thunder

Associated Press

PORTLAND, Ore. — The Trail Blazers huddled in a timeout with just more than 17 seconds left against Oklahoma City, and the overwhelming sentiment was simple: relax.

The Thunder had trimmed Portland's lead to 110-109, but the Blazers refused to get rattled and came away with a 114-109 victory Thursday night.

"Even though it got scary there at the end, we were still able to calm ourselves down and get the win," said Damian Lillard, who finished with 33 points.

Russell Westbrook scored 45 on 12-for-36 shooting for the Thunder, who had their four-game winning streak snapped. Oklahoma City newcomer Taj Gibson added 15 points, including a high-arching buzzer-beater from 61 feet away to put the Thunder up 60-57 at halftime.

Alex Abrines' three-pointer gave the Thunder their biggest lead at 97-89 with 7:48 left, but Al-Farouq Aminu made a layup that tied it at 101 with 3:43 to go. He missed the free throw, but Jusuf Nurkic got the tip-in to give Portland the lead.

Lillard's three-pointer extended it to 106-101 before Westbrook's driving layup and free throw pulled Oklahoma City to 110-106.

Abrines' three-pointer with 17.7 seconds left narrowed it to 110-109. After the timeout, Lillard was fouled twice in the final seconds and made all four free throws before Westbrook and Doug McDermott missed three-pointers at the end.

Nurkic, acquired by the Blazers just before the All-Star break in a trade with Denver, was a spark with 18 points, 12 rebounds, a career-high six assists and five blocks.

"He has a good sense of the game," Portland coach Terry Stotts said. "When you have that, I think the integration goes a little bit better."

Westbrook hit all 15 of his free throws. He had eight rebounds and four assists, ending a streak of four straight triple-doubles.

Enes Kanter added 18 points and 10 rebounds.

"Difference tonight was we just couldn't make our shots," Westbrook said. "We missed the same shots that we've been

making every game."

The Thunder were coming off a 109-106 victory over Utah. Westbrook had 43 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists in that game for his 30th triple-double of the season. The Thunder opened the game against the Jazz with 12 straight threes.

The Blazers were coming off a 120-113 overtime loss at Detroit, which capped a 2-7 February.

The game marked the Thunder debut of guard Norris Cole, signed on Wednesday to help fill the void after the team traded backup point guard Cameron Payne to Chicago. Cole won NBA titles with the Miami Heat in 2012 and 2013, but most recently played with the Shandong Golden Stars of the Chinese Basketball Association.

Gibson and McDermott, acquired in the trade with the Bulls, were playing in their fourth game with the Thunder.

Cole hit a three-pointer early in the second quarter, his first field goal with the team, and the Thunder went up 27-26. But the Blazers reclaimed the lead and went ahead 52-45 on Aminu's three-pointer.

CJ McCollum's three gave Portland a 57-48 lead, but Westbrook made consecutive three-pointers and three straight free throws to tie it before Gibson's stunning shot from beyond halfcourt.

The Thunder led 85-81 heading into the final period.

**Bulls 94, Warriors 87:** Jimmy Butler scored 22 points and host Chicago won in Golden State's first game since Kevin Durant injured his left leg.

Golden State was breathing a little easier after learning Durant probably will play again this season. He was hurt two nights earlier in a loss at Washington.

**Suns 120, Hornets 103:** Marquese Chriss scored 17 points and host Phoenix shot a season-best 59.7 percent from the field against Charlotte.

Chriss shot 6-for-9 and missed roughly a full quarter after straining a calf early in the first.

T.J. Warren added 16 points and eight rebounds, and Alan Williams had 16 points and 12 rebounds, including a layup with 2:46 to play that made it 114-99.



# MLS starts season with 2 new teams

Associated Press

The theme for Major League Soccer this season is 22 in 22, as the league embarks on its 22nd year with 22 teams — including two new teams in the Atlanta United and the Minnesota United.

The theme just as easily could be “expansion, expansion, expansion.”

Launched with 10 teams in 1996, MLS has plans to expand to 28 teams in the coming years. The replacement for the defunct Chivas USA, Los Angeles FC, joins the league next season. It is hoped that a long-anticipated Miami franchise, an effort led by David Beckham, will materialize as the league’s 24th team.

There were 12 bids submitted earlier this year for the

final four teams. In a preseason interview with The Associated Press, Commissioner Don Garber said a decision about two of the teams could come by the end of this year and they could begin play in 2020, while the final two will be announced sometime thereafter.

“I think it’s fair to say that this year and the last number of years we’ve been very focused on strategically growing the league and celebrating new markets coming in and building a fan base, helping to create this soccer nation that we’ve been so focused on,” Garber said. “And this year is probably no different. We’ve got a team coming in that is setting records for attendance in Atlanta, and a team in Minnesota that’s similar to Portland in that it is coming into Major League Soc-

cer after many decades of support for the professional game.

“I think you’ll continue to see more and more stories coming out of our league that are about growth, but I try to focus as much on celebrating all the great things that have gone on in so many markets for the last number of years.”

The 12 bids, along with Atlanta United’s season-ticket sales topping 30,000, are proof that soccer continues to gain a foothold in the American sports landscape.

“It just speaks to the overall development and growth of our sport in our country and Canada,” Garber said. “I continue to be impressed by how many of our clubs prove that it is irrelevant how big your market is or where it’s located. It really is about your plan, your focus,

your commitment. ... If the ingredients are right I’m convinced we can be successful in any city, any state in the United States. And that’s not something we believed 10 years ago.”

**Game of the week:** MLS officially opens its season on Friday night with a match between the host Portland Timbers and the expansion Minnesota United on national television. The Timbers were the MLS Cup champions in 2015 but failed to make the playoffs last season. The rabid Providence Park fan base — the Timbers have sold out every home match since joining the league in 2011 — should make for entertaining viewing of the Loons’ historic debut. The two teams played to a 2-all draw in the preseason.

## Lundqvist’s 32 saves help Rangers hold off Bruins

Associated Press

BOSTON — With the Rangers struggling offensively, Henrik Lundqvist bailed them out with a vintage performance.

Lundqvist made 32 saves on his 35th birthday and New York got third-period goals from Pavel Buchnevich and Oscar Lindberg to beat the Boston Bruins 2-1 on Thursday night.

“You can never score on him,” said Rangers newcomer Brendan Smith, acquired from Detroit before the trade deadline this week. “I got to watch it on the opposite side and it was amazing to be a part of.”

Lundqvist bounced back after giving up nine goals in his previous two games. He earned his 403rd NHL win, tying Grant Fuhr for 10th on the career list.

“I tried to leave everything out there today,” Lundqvist said. “In the end we came up with some big plays, big blocks and we found a way.”

The Rangers have mustered only 17 goals in the last eight games and are 4-3-1 over that stretch.

“In the third we had a couple

of chances that we buried and then we grinded it out,” coach Alain Vigneault said. “The goaltender made some big saves and he found us a way to win.”

Boston was stymied on several outstanding chances as Lundqvist improved to 25-12-2 against the Bruins with a 1.93 goals-against average.

New York, which has beaten Boston five straight times, outscored the Bruins 12-5 while sweeping the three-game season series.

Brad Marchand scored his team-leading 29th goal for the Bruins to cut it to 2-1 at 12:56 of the third. David Backes just about extinguished any final hopes for Boston when he was whistled for goaltender interference with 2:22 remaining.

“I don’t agree with the call and you can watch the replay,” Backes said. “He initiated the contact and it is a frustrating way to finish the game.”

Buchnevich, called up from the minors earlier in the day, fired a shot over goalie Tuukka Rask’s left shoulder to put the Rangers ahead. Lindberg

scored 4:25 later to make it 2-0 at 9:35 of the third.

Marchand tipped in a pass from David Pastrnak.

“I think the effort was there,” Bruins forward Patrice Bergeron said. “We were playing a great team, but points are at a premium and we will need to bounce back Saturday against New Jersey.”

**Canadiens 2, Predators 1:** Paul Byron scored the tiebreaking goal with nine seconds left and host Montreal edged Nashville in P.K. Subban’s first game against his former team.

**Blue Jackets 1, Wild 0:** Brandon Saad scored in the third period and Sergei Bobrovsky stopped 38 shots to lift host Columbus over Minnesota.

**Capitals 1, Devils 0:** NHL-leading Washington won its franchise-record 14th consecutive home game, beating New Jersey thanks to rookie forward Jakub Vrana’s power-play goal with about 12½ minutes left in the third period.

**Senators 2, Avalanche 1:** Alex Burrows scored twice in his debut with host Ottawa and led his new club to a win over

Colorado.

**Flyers 2, Panthers 1 (SO):** Newly acquired Valtteri Filppula scored in regulation and Jakub Voracek and Jordan Weal netted goals in the shootout to lead host Philadelphia over Florida.

**Sabres 6, Coyotes 3:** Evander Kane scored the go-ahead goal with 5:36 remaining and host Buffalo was finally able to preserve a third-period lead in a victory over Arizona.

**Islanders 5, Stars 4:** Ryan Strome had a goal and two assists, and visiting New York rallied with four straight goals to beat Dallas.

**Kings 3, Maple Leafs 2 (SO):** Captain Anze Kopitar snapped a 13-game goal drought in regulation and scored again in the shootout, leading host Los Angeles back from a two-goal deficit in the third period for a victory over Toronto.

**Sharks 3, Canucks 1:** Marcus Sorensen snapped a second-period tie with his first NHL goal, and San Jose beat Vancouver to end a six-game home losing streak to its Pacific Division rival.