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Pentagon flush with cash after windfall

Tribune Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON—After complaining for years it was starved for cash, the Pentagon now says it may have more money than it can possibly spend.

The windfall is due to a budget deal between Congress and the White House last month that promises an added \$80 billion for defense this fiscal year, including a requested \$19.6 billion hike for “operations and maintenance” — an all-purpose Pentagon account used to fund troop training, ammunition, maintenance of tanks, warplanes and ships, and other daily needs.

Defense Secretary Jim Mattis pushed for a sharp increase in the account this year, arguing that years of budget wrangling had degraded the military’s readiness to wage war.

Congress is finalizing 2018 appropriations levels for the Pentagon, a delay that has gen-

erals and admirals worried about spending all the promised cash in the five months remaining before the fiscal year’s end.

Critics say that giving the military more money than it can absorb invites waste and abuse, warning that the Pentagon has a long history of overpayments, cost overruns and fiscal shenanigans.

“They cried wolf, and now they have more than they can possibly put to use,” said Mandy Smithberger, the director of the Center for Defense Information, a policy organization critical of Pentagon budget practices. “I think it’s dangerous because you are going to see a use-it-or-lose-it kind of spending.”

Pentagon officials are worried about giving money back after claiming that mandatory spending caps since 2011, known as a sequester, had affected training, planning and maintenance.

There is no guarantee Congress or the White House will prove so generous next year.

Due to Congress’ delay in passing appropriations bills, Pentagon officials are urging lawmakers to allow them to carry over unspent funds into 2019 or to shift them to other accounts if they are unable to disburse all the operations and maintenance money by Sept. 30, the end of the fiscal year.

“We’re going to do our best to spend it in that time frame,” Gen. Stephen Wilson, the vice chief of staff of the Air Force, told Congress at a hearing. “The add is so significant that we’re going to have to look at having the ability to transfer some of that money from account to account.”

By long-standing tradition, the House and Senate appropriations committees require the Pentagon to spend opera-

tions and maintenance funds the same year they are provided — or turn the money back to the Treasury.

That’s different than other categories of defense spending, such as research and development money, which is usually available for up to two years, or procurement funds for buying ships, planes and vehicles, which are provided for up to three years.

At \$206 billion in 2017, the operations and maintenance account is around 40 percent of the Pentagon’s annual base budget of \$523 billion. Its spending has been under tight control since Congress imposed budget caps aimed at reducing the deficit in 2011.

The additional funds are earmarked for stepped-up training, spare parts, fuel, and restocking supplies of bombs and bullets, among other items.

Nor’easter slams East Coast with wind, rain, snow

The Washington Post

BOSTON — Residents along the East Coast on Friday batted down as heavy rain and gusting winds pummeled states from Maine to North Carolina.

The Nor’easter was predicted to bring damaging winds along the Atlantic through Friday, according to the National Weather Service, which issued severe-weather warnings and advisories lasting into Saturday.

At least six people were killed when fierce winds brought trees crashing down on roads, homes and other buildings. In the Putnam Valley area north of New York City, an 11-year-old boy was killed when a tree fell on a home, officials said. In Newport, R.I., a 72-year-old man was killed by a falling tree. In Baltimore County, Md., a 77-year-old woman was killed when a branch fell on her outside of her home. A 44-year-old man was killed in James City County, Va., when a tree branch fell on a car he was in. And in Chester, Va., a 6-year-old who was asleep in

bed was killed when a tree came crashing down into his family’s home. And in Connecticut, one person was killed in a car near the Stamford-Greenwich line.

Throughout the day Friday, at least 3,200 flights at airports between Washington to Boston had been canceled. At New York’s LaGuardia airport, which suspended all flights on Friday afternoon, 729 flights had been grounded by the end of the day.

In Boston, high tide peaked Friday morning at 14.67 feet, the third-highest level since record keeping began in 1928, with water lapping at the feet of skyscrapers in some districts, according to the Boston Globe.

Portions of New York received more than a foot of snow Thursday night.

Coastal Massachusetts was set to bear the brunt of the storm, with hurricane-strength winds in excess of 70 mph predicted for several areas in Cape Cod.

There are few areas of Cape Cod more vulnerable to the lashings of tide and wind than the quaint town of Chatham, which lies

at the elbow of the peninsula, exposed to the elements from the east and south. Public works employees hauled in tons of sand to protect some of the most vulnerable landings that dot the shoreline, and that serve as conduits for the floodwaters that over wash local streets during such storms.

In the District of Columbia area, high winds wreaked havoc on the Friday commute. A pilot landing at Dulles International Airport Friday morning reported a “very bumpy” descent in the high winds.

“Pretty much every one on the plane threw up,” the official pilot report stated. “Pilots were on the verge of throwing up.”

Numerous downed trees were reported in local neighborhoods and roads in the Washington area.

The Office of Personnel Management announced that all federal offices in the Washington area would be closed Friday. Nearly two dozen area school districts canceled classes, and the Smithsonian museums and zoo were closed for the day.

Australians among wounded in Kabul blast

By PHILLIP WALTER WELLMAN
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Two Australian security contractors were wounded Friday when a car bomb exploded in the Afghan capital, killing a child and injuring nearly two dozen Afghan civilians, officials said Saturday.

It was originally reported that no foreigners were wounded in the blast that appeared to target a convoy of Australian Embassy vehicles. On Saturday, Australia's Foreign Affairs Minister Julie Bishop said that while "all Australian Embassy staff are safe," two contractors from the country suffered minor injuries.

"The Australian government extends

its sympathies to families and friends of people killed and injured by this attack," Bishop said.

In addition to the two injured Australians, the explosion killed a child and wounded 22 civilians, three of whom remained in critical condition on Saturday afternoon, Health Ministry spokesman Wahid Majrouh said. On Friday, the Health Ministry said 14 people were injured in the attack.

Majrouh was unable to confirm the identity of the child killed.

The Associated Press reported Friday that the victim was a young girl, but a mechanic in the Qabil Bay area, where the explosion occurred, told Stars and Stripes that the child was a boy selling vegetables on a horse-drawn cart.

"The horse was badly injured, too," said the mechanic, Masoud, who like many Afghans only uses one name. "It was limping and trying to stand up, but it couldn't."

No group claimed responsibility for the blast, but the Taliban and a local branch of the Islamic State have claimed responsibility for a string of deadly attacks in the capital in recent months, which have taken a heavy toll on civilians.

The United Nations documented nearly 10,500 civilian casualties across Afghanistan last year, a 9 percent drop from 2016. The number is still significantly higher than pre-2014 figures, when NATO was engaged in combat operations in the country instead of solely training, advising and assisting national forces.

World leaders push back on trade war threat

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump on Friday insisted "trade wars are good, and easy to win," a bold claim that prompted threats of retaliation against U.S. exports such as blue jeans and motorcycles.

"Make no mistake: If the president goes through with this, it will kill American jobs — that's what every trade war ultimately does," said Sen. Ben Sasse, R-Neb.

Trump has declared that the U.S. will impose punishing tariffs on steel and aluminum imports. The move will likely raise steel and aluminum prices here. That's good for U.S. manufacturers. But it's bad for companies that use the metals, and it prompted red flags from industries ranging from tool and dye makers to beer distributors to manufacturers of air conditioners. The American International Automobile Dealers Association warned it would drive prices up "substantially."

Markets tumbled in Asia, where China expressed a "grave concern" about U.S. trade policy. And the European Union promised retaliation against American exports if Trump follows through.

"None of this is reasonable, but reason is a sentiment that's very unevenly distributed in the world," said Jean-Claude Juncker, president of the EU's executive body.

Early Friday, Trump took to Twitter to defend himself: "When a country (USA) is losing many billions of dollars on trade with virtually every country it does business with, trade wars are good, and easy to win. Example, when we are down \$100 billion with a certain country and they get cute, don't trade anymore—we win big. It's easy!"

Sasse echoed a sentiment of many U.S. lawmakers when he issued a statement in response: "Kooky 18th century protectionism will jack up prices on American families."

Trump's announcement came only after an intense internal White House debate. It brought harsh criticism from some Republicans and roiled financial markets with concerns about economic ramifications.

The decision had been strenuously debated within the White House, with top officials such as economic adviser Gary Cohn and Defense Secretary Jim Mattis raising concerns.

Evidence against Russians might not see light of day

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — When deputy attorney general Rod Rosenstein outlined the accusations against 13 Russians for meddling in the U.S. elections, he closed his rare public statement with a standard admonition that's tacked on to all Justice Department announcements of indictments.

"I want to caution you that everyone charged with a crime is presumed innocent unless, and until, proven guilty in court. At trial, prosecutors must introduce credible evidence that is sufficient to prove each defendant guilty beyond any reasonable doubt," Rosenstein said.

In any other case, ticking through the mechanics of due process would be perfunctory — an afterthought. But when Rosenstein spoke, it was a reminder that one of the most stunning attacks on American democracy might never be tested in court — the evidence never vetted, the defendants never heard from and the nation left wondering how credible the government's case is.

There's a good chance the 13 Russians charged with running an elaborate game of "information warfare" in the U.S. may

never appear in court. With no extradition treaty with Russia, nothing can compel them.

In a typical case, evidence gathered by a prosecutor would be challenged by defense attorneys — exposing holes or inaccuracies in the case. Without a trial, that's unlikely.

Legal experts said Mueller has a tricky balance to achieve between conducting his investigation and letting the public know what really happened.

"I think Mueller bringing these indictments at all is less about law enforcement and more of a public service announcement: 'Wake up, America. These guys are actively trying to make us hate each other!'" said Lester Munson, visiting fellow at George Mason University's National Security Institute and former top staffer on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

U.S. law enforcement may never nab the Russians, but Mueller's indictment set a clear legal boundary against other meddlers — like using "No Trespassing" signs to prevent others from gaining a legal claim to your property, said John Carlin, a former chief of staff to Mueller at the FBI.

Police: Suspect in college shooting is apprehended

Associated Press

MOUNT PLEASANT, Mich. — A 19-year-old student suspected of killing his parents at a Central Michigan University dormitory before running from campus was apprehended early Saturday following an intensive, daylong search that included more than 100 police officers, some heavily armed in camouflage uniforms, authorities said.

James Eric Davis Jr. was arrested without incident after someone spotted him on a train passing through the north end of campus shortly after midnight, according to a release posted on Central Michigan's emergency communication website.

CMU President George E. Ross thanked the campus, surrounding community and law enforcement personnel "who came together to keep each other safe and apprehend the suspect," according to the university police website.

Friday's shooting at Campbell Hall happened on a day when parents were arriving to pick up students for the beginning of a weeklong spring break.

The university identified the two dead as Davis' mother Diva Davis and father James Davis Sr., a part-time police officer in the Chicago suburb of Bellwood. The shooting occurred around 8:30 a.m. at a residence hall at Central Michigan, which is about 70 miles (110 kilometers) north of Lansing.

Following the shooting, police released a photo of Davis and urged the public to call 911 if they saw him but also warned that he shouldn't be confronted. Hours after a campus lockdown, police started a "slow, methodical removal" of staff and students who were ordered to take shelter in campus buildings, Lt. Larry Klaus said, adding that he "should be considered armed and dangerous."

Klaus said video at the dorm suggested Davis had fled on foot after the shooting. He was wearing a hoodie but had been shedding certain clothes while on the run.

"This has been a tragic day. ... The hurting will go on for a while," Ross said.

The search focused on Mount Pleasant neighborhoods near campus. Officers in camouflage knocked on doors and checked possible hiding places, such as yards and porches. In the surrounding community, students and staff in the Mount Pleasant school district were told not to leave nine buildings.

Klaus said Davis was taken to a hospital Thursday night by campus police because of a drug-related health problem, possibly an overdose.

"Whether there was a mental health component that was in conjunction with that, we don't know," Klaus told reporters, adding that police were still putting together "pieces of the puzzle" about the shooting and any motive.

The Davis family is from Plainfield, Illinois, about 35 miles southwest of Chicago. Davis Jr. graduated from Central High School in 2016, said Tom Hernandez, a spokesman for Plainfield School District 202.

Bellwood Police Chief Jimenez Allen released a statement Friday night praising Davis Sr.'s work.

Davis' "contributions to our community positively impacted everyone he served and served with," Allen said.

The shooting occurred on the last day of classes before a weeklong break. Parents who were trying to pick up students were told instead to go to a local hotel where staff would assist them while the manhunt was ongoing.

Chief of Staff Kelly says there's no reason to resign

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Defending himself weeks after the fact, White House Chief of Staff John Kelly on Friday insisted he had done "nothing to even consider resigning over" in his handling of domestic abuse allegations against a former top aide by the staffer's two ex-wives.

Kelly did allow that the White House team did not "cover ourselves in glory" in its response to allegations against former staff secretary Rob Porter. Porter resigned last month over reports that he had abused two ex-wives. The episode at one point seemed to put Kelly's job in jeopardy and raised questions about who at the White House had access to top-secret information.

Weeks later, with the Porter matter largely in the rearview mirror, Kelly still was clearly intent on clarifying his role in how the matter was handled.

Offering his own version of events, Kelly told reporters he first learned of the allegations against Porter on Feb. 6, after inquiries from journalists. Kelly said those first queries focused on an allegation of "emotional abuse" from one woman.

He said he then spoke to Porter, who resigned. Hours later, Kelly said, he learned there was also an accusation of physical abuse. At that point, Kelly said, he made sure that Porter was out.

Originally, the White House put out statements defending Porter, including one from Kelly. Kelly said he provided a statement of support for Porter after he heard only the first accusation.

"At that point in time, I thought the statement was accurate as it represented my relationship," Kelly said. The White House did not announce Porter was leaving until a press briefing the following afternoon.

"We didn't cover ourselves in glory in terms of how we handled that," Kelly said. "It was confusing."

Kelly described himself as shocked by the alleged abuse, saying he had viewed Porter as the "ultimate gentleman."

Questions persist about the timeline. According to two White House officials, Kelly was made aware by White House counsel Don McGahn last fall of at least the broad outlines of the issues with delays in approving Porter for permanent security clearance.

Billy Graham remembered for humility on crusades

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — The Rev. Billy Graham's children remembered "America's Pastor" as a man devoted to spreading the Gospel, living his life at home as he preached it in stadiums, with a personable humility and an unwavering focus on the Bible.

His adult children — all speakers or preachers in their own right — recalled during a funeral service Friday being taught by their parents how to read Scripture aloud and deliver sermons, but also taking quiet walks with their father and feeling his embrace even when they made mistakes.

Franklin Graham, the preacher's oldest son, who delivered the main elegy, said all of those qualities were part of the whole.

"The Billy Graham that the world saw on television, the Billy Graham that the world saw in the big stadiums, was the same Billy Graham that we saw at home. There weren't two Billy Gramhams," he said.

Franklin Graham's funeral message, which included a Gospel call to repentance and salvation, followed shorter remarks by his siblings in a service that lasted just over an hour before an invitation-only crowd of approximately 2,000.

‘Emoji Movie’ rated worst

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Maybe it was destiny for a movie with a pile of poop as a central character.

“The Emoji Movie” has received Hollywood’s most famous frown, the Razzie Award, for worst picture of 2017, making it the first animated feature in 38 years to earn the top dishonor.

“Leading this year’s list of movie-misfires is the emoticon-based, talking poop opus,” the Razzies said in a statement announcing the recipients, saying the film came in a year when “Hollywood’s recycled trash heap attained an all-time high” and saw a “toxic-level lack of originality.”

The annual awards bestowed on the worst the movie business has to offer were announced Saturday in their traditional spot, the day before the Academy Awards.

“The Emoji Movie” landed four of the 10 Razzies given out this year, also taking worst screenplay, worst director, and worst screen combo, which was given to “any two obnoxious emojis” from the movie.

Tom Cruise’s attempted reboot of the “Mummy” franchise landed him worst actor. He now has no Oscars after three nominations, but two Razzies. Cruise and Brad Pitt won for worst screen couple for 1994’s “Interview with the Vampire.”

Tyler Perry took worst actress for “Boo 2! A Madea Halloween,” the director’s 10th time donning a dress and playing his signature white-wigged matriarch.

Kim Basinger took worst supporting actress for “Fifty Shades Darker,” putting her in the special company of Faye Dunaway, Liza Minelli and Halle Berry as actresses who have won both a Razzie and an Oscar.

Bike helmets, ski goggles swept up in debate on guns

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Public pressure against companies connected to the gun industry following last month’s school shooting in Florida has hit an unlikely target: REI, the outdoors co-op better known for its public lands advocacy, liberal return policy and annual dividend for customers.

The Seattle-based retailer, which doesn’t sell guns, announced late Thursday that it will at least temporarily stop ordering ski goggles, water bottles, bike helmets and other products from some popular brands — including CamelBak,

‘This morning, we learned that Vista does not plan to make a public statement that outlines a clear plan of action.’

REI
in a statement

Giro and Bolle — because their parent company, Vista Outdoor, also makes ammunition and assault-style rifles. The decision came a few hours after REI’s

Canadian counterpart, Mountain Equipment Co-op, took a similar step.

“We believe that it is the job of companies that manufacture and sell guns and ammunition to work towards common sense solutions that prevent the type of violence that happened in Florida last month,” REI said.

“This morning, we learned that Vista does not plan to make a public statement that outlines a clear plan of action. As a result, we have decided to place a hold on future orders of products that Vista sells through REI while we assess how Vista proceeds.”

President, Alec Baldwin renew feud on Twitter

Associated Press

NEW YORK — President Donald Trump and Alec Baldwin — his chief impersonator — traded online barbs Friday, each describing the other as causing “agony,” the latest salvos in an ongoing feud between the commander in chief and the actor.

Trump, who has long grumbled about the way he is portrayed by Baldwin on “Saturday Night Live,” began the latest spat in a tweet sandwiched between his observations about world trade and the opioid crisis. (In an initial tweet that was later deleted, he misspelled the actor’s first name as “Alex,” prompting “Alex Baldwin” to trend on Twitter.)

The president seemed to be reacting to an interview Baldwin gave to The Hollywood Reporter that was published Thursday in which the actor said he doesn’t enjoy parodying Trump: “Every time I do it now, it’s like agony. Agony. I can’t.”

Wrote Trump on Friday: “Alec Baldwin, whose dying mediocre career was saved by his terrible impersonation of me on SNL, now says playing me was agony. Alec, it was agony for those who were forced to watch.”

In a final dig, the president said Baldwin’s performance wasn’t as good as comedian Darrell Hammond, who portrayed Trump on “Saturday Night Live” for years before Baldwin took over in September 2016. “Bring back Darrell Hammond, funnier and a far greater talent!” Trump tweeted.

Baldwin responded in a series of tweets.

“Agony though it may be, I’d like to hang in there for the impeachment hearings, the resignation speech, the farewell helicopter ride,” he wrote.

Baldwin also tweeted that he was “Looking forward to the Trump Presidential Library” and suggested that it would contain a live Twitter feed

and “a little black book w the phone numbers of porn stars.” (He also misspelled Trump’s Florida estate Mar-a-Lago as “Mara-A-Lago.”)

Hammond did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Baldwin, a Democratic activist, received an Emmy Award for his parody last year on “Saturday Night Live.” He and Trump, who appeared as a guest host on “SNL” in November 2015, have attacked each other on Twitter before. In 2016, the then-president elect called a skit that satirized Trump’s tweets as “sad,” prompting Baldwin to respond: “Release your tax returns and I’ll stop. Ha.”

Trump also complained to Matt Lauer in an interview that year that Baldwin’s portrayal of him wasn’t funny. “The skits are terrible. I like Alec, but his imitation of me is really mean-spirited and not very good. ... It’s very biased and I don’t like it.”

Calif. winter storm leaves 1 dead

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Heather Turping was snowboarding with her boyfriend when she heard someone scream “Avalanche!”

Then Turping, 39, saw “a cloud of snow coming down.”

The avalanche that hit Friday at the Squaw Valley Ski Resort caught five people — one day after a snowboarder died there during a blizzard as a winter storm rolled through California.

The storm that steamrolled through the Sierra Nevada threatened rain and snow through Saturday in Southern California, a few hundred miles away.

The National Weather Service said mountains in Ventura and Los Angeles counties could

see up to a foot of new snow at higher elevations.

Other areas could see some showers before an eastward-moving low-pressure trough moved on but forecasters said it wouldn't be enough to cause major flooding.

The Sierra Nevada avalanche Friday afternoon injured two people, one seriously. Three others escaped without being hurt.

Turping saw the massive avalanche passed only a foot in front of her.

A woman screamed that her husband was missing and someone spotted a snowboard poking out of the snow.

“That's what saved his life,” Turping said.

“I took my gloves off and I helped dig him out,” she said.

“When he got uncovered, a ski patroller said, ‘You were under for six minutes.’”

The man wasn't seriously hurt and was able to snowboard back down the mountain, she said.

The skiers and snowboarders were within areas open to skiing at the time and the guests had been warned of the potential danger, Squaw Valley spokeswoman Liesl Hepburn said.

The avalanche occurred hours after the body of a missing snowboarder was found at the same resort.

Wenyu Zhang, 42, vanished Thursday as the region was hit by a blizzard packing winds gusting to nearly 150 mph over the ridge tops. It dumped 3 feet of snow in the mountains.

Questions surround 1st wall contract

Associated Press

OMAHA, Neb. — A tiny Nebraska startup awarded the first border wall construction project under President Donald Trump is the offshoot of a construction firm that was sued repeatedly for failing to pay subcontractors and accused in a 2016 government audit of shady billing practices.

SWF Constructors, which lists just one employee in its Omaha office, won the \$11 million federal contract in November as part of a project to replace a little more than 2 miles of a current fence with post-style barriers 30 feet high in Calexico, Calif.

It's the first wall contract awarded in the Trump administration outside of eight prototypes built last year in San Diego. The project represents a sliver of the president's plan for a wall at the border with Mexico.

It remains unclear why SWF was listed on the bid for the wall contract instead of Edgewood, N.Y.-based Coastal Environmental Group, which online government documents list as its owner.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in Fort Worth, Texas, bid the Calexico wall project, according to federal records. The agency told The Associated Press on both Thursday and Friday it would provide information on the process used to select and vet SWF but had provided no such information by late Friday afternoon.

Colo. lawmaker expelled over misconduct claims

Associated Press

DENVER — Numerous female representatives in Colorado's state House took their turns at the podium to come out as victims of sexual harassment or abuse in an emotional debate that culminated with the expulsion of the second U.S. state lawmaker accused of sexual harassment since the #metoo movement emerged last fall.

Democratic Rep. Steve Lebsack wasn't present when Democrats and Republicans voted 52-9 Friday on a Democrat resolution to expel him. One of his accusers — fellow Democrat Faith Winter — cried and smiled and was mobbed by supporters after the historic vote.

Winter and four other women accused Lebsack of harassment and intimidation inside the Capitol and at area bars and restaurants. Lebsack bitterly contested the claims, said

his accusers were lying and accused an independent investigator of bias in concluding the claims were credible.

Lebsack's ouster came after Arizona Republican Rep. Don Shooter was expelled Feb. 1 over misconduct claims. A California state senator resigned just moments before his colleagues last month sought to formally expel him after a series of sexual misconduct allegations.

Lebsack left the statehouse during Friday's daylong debate and changed his party affiliation to Republican about an hour before he was expelled.

Normally, his replacement would be named by a Republican vacancy committee. But the state GOP said it might not do so. In that event, Democratic Gov. John Hickenlooper would name a replacement.

Republicans concerned about a possible rush to judgment — a

redacted investigator's report was made available to them only Tuesday — had suggested they'd vote no on expulsion. Some sought censure. Others called for a formal legislative panel to investigate the case with subpoena powers.

Lebsack wasn't present when House Speaker Crisanta Duran made a last-minute plea in a hushed chamber for him to resign.

“We will not tolerate harassment,” Duran said after the vote. “It's unbelievable to me that in 2018 we are still having this conversation.”

The debate over sexual harassment has engulfed both chambers of Colorado's Legislature. Three Republicans in the GOP-led Senate were accused of misconduct. One has stepped down as chair of a committee, while denying wrongdoing.

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Tatis Jr. face of rebuilding Padres

Associated Press

PEORIA, Ariz. — There's no question Fernando Tatis Jr.'s birthright is to play major league baseball.

Having just turned 19, the phenom is in his first big league camp with the San Diego Padres. He's one of baseball's top prospects, is the son of a former major leaguer and, until Eric Hosmer signed as a free agent, was probably the one player in the organization that fans of the downtrodden Padres were most eager to see.

If the shortstop plays as well as he did last year in making the jump from low Class A to Double-A, he could get his first call-up, perhaps in September.

Why is he so good, so young?

"This kid was born in the big leagues," his father said from San Pedro de Macoris, Dominican Republic, which often is referred to as "The Cradle of Shortstops."

Tatis Jr. was born on Jan. 2, 1999, just before his dad's third big league season. Fernando Tatis' 11-year big league career ended just eight years ago.

"I was already there playing for the Cardinals," the elder Tatis said. "As soon as he opened his eyes, everything he watched was big league baseball."

Fittingly, Tatis Jr. is the

face of the Padres' rebuild around young players. He was obtained as the team scrapped its failed win-now attempt with high-priced veterans, coming over from the White Sox in the deal that sent James Shields to Chicago in June 2016.

Tatis Jr. said he talks with his father by phone every day.

The senior Tatis will visit his son in spring training soon. Tatis Jr. hit an impressive opposite-field home run in his second Cactus League at-bat and has been making nice plays at shortstop.

"He's happy for me, man," said Tatis Jr., the youngest player in any big league camp. "He brought me into this game since I was a kid and now here we are, since a young age and doing stuff and playing the good baseball."

Tatis recalls being a clubhouse kid.

"I remember my dad was taking me to the field. It was fun. It was great. It was a thing that I love and that was the first love that I brought to this game."

Padres general manager A.J. Preller was with the Texas Rangers when he first saw Tatis Jr. when he was 14 or 15. Tatis Jr. ended up signing with the White Sox. That Padres scouting department continued to

follow Tatis Jr., so when the Padres moved Shields, the young player was a "priority guy," the GM said.

"When you see guys you like, that are interesting, obviously the son of a big leaguer and everything like that, those guys stick with you," Preller said.

The GM likes Tatis Jr.'s lineage.

"In general, being familiar with being around the ballpark, being in the clubhouse, having an understanding what offseasons look like, and work ethics, all of those things come into play," Preller said. "You're given another experience at an earlier age than guys obviously if your dad didn't play. We see it as an advantage from a bloodline standpoint. Not all the time, but the apple doesn't fall far from the tree in a lot of these situations."

Tatis Jr. had a big 2017 season, when he started at Low-A Fort Wayne and tore up the Midwest League before being promoted to Double-A San Antonio in August. Spring training will give the Padres a better look at how close he is to coming up and, if expectations play out, stop the revolving door at shortstop.

The Padres have had a different starting shortstop each of the last four opening days.

They traded for Freddy Galvis, who has one year left on his contract, to keep the spot warm for Tatis.

"I think I'm ready," said Tatis who at 6-foot-3 is four inches taller than his father. "Everything's a process, but what can I say? I've worked hard for it and am still going to keep going until I get a call."

Preller said Tatis likely will start the season at Double-A. A promotion to the bigs will depend on a lot of factors, a big one being how he does against pitchers in the Texas League.

Last Friday, in his second Cactus League at-bat, Tatis Jr. hit a monster opposite-field homer on a seemingly effortless two-strike swing.

He struck out three times in his next game and had two more 0-for-3 games, but then had two hits during a seven-run sixth inning Wednesday, as well as a nice defensive play.

Tatis and other young players "are going to push as hard as they can to be here as fast as they can," manager Andy Green said. "We want them to do that. It's our job to tap the brakes and take our time with them if we think they need more time and seasoning. They're clearly dynamic baseball players and we're excited to have them."

OU's Brown has historically bad day at NFL combine

BY ARNIE STAPLETON

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — The only thing that's gone well for Oklahoma's massive tackle Orlando Brown Jr. this week is a vote of confidence from his Heisman Trophy-winning teammate.

"When are you ever going to watch Orlando Brown run 40 yards down the field?" quarterback Baker Mayfield asked Friday. "You can watch last year's tape and see he allowed zero sacks. I'd say that's pretty important for a left tackle."

It sure is.

But measures matter, too, and Brown's wretched week will undoubtedly stick in the minds of scouts, coaches and general managers leading up to the draft next month.

The nearly 6-foot-8, 345-pound left tackle managed just 14 reps on the 225-pound bench press Thursday, the lowest total of any lineman who has lifted at the combine this week.

That's tied for third-worst among offensive tackles since 2000, according to Pro Football Reference.

Things only got worse Friday for the son of former Browns

and Ravens right tackle Orlando Brown.

He lumbered through the 40-yard dash in 5.85 seconds. Even by big O-linemen standards, that's sloth-like slow.

It's the fifth-slowest time by any player at the combine in the last 16 years, and none of the four who were slower were drafted or started a single game in the pros.

"I've been fat my whole life," Brown said earlier this week. "I wish I was fast."

Brown was projected to get drafted in the first couple of rounds, but his bad week in

Indy could prove very costly.

His vertical jump was just 19½ inches — nobody has ever gotten drafted with such a bad vertical jump — and his 6-foot-10 broad jump was off-the-charts bad, as well.

Historically, offensive tackles post a tad more than 25 reps in the bench press, run the 40-yard dash in 5.24 seconds and average 28.4 inches in the vertical jump and more than 8½ feet in the broad jump.

He has another chance to impress at his pro day in a couple of weeks.

Busch claims Truck race in hometown

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Kyle Busch won his hometown NASCAR Truck race Friday night at Las Vegas Motor Speedway for his 50th series victory.

Busch took advantage when Brett Moffitt, last week's winner in Atlanta, went sideways with 26 laps left. Busch, who had been fighting to overtake Moffitt in the final stage, took control on a restart with 12 laps to go.

Moffitt pushed Busch on the final laps, but Busch held off Moffitt — who got caught up in lapped traffic with less than five laps left.

Johnny Sauter was second. Moffitt was third, followed by Grant Enfinger and Stewart Friesen, the winner of the second stage.

Busch, who won the pole and

led 55 laps, has a career sweep in Las Vegas, winning NASCAR events in the Cup, Xfinity and Truck series. He has made 142 career Truck starts.

"It was really, really fast. I felt like we were struggling just a little bit in the long run," Busch said. "It's been a lot of fun to win these races, especially with your own team and being with your own guys."

Sauter has finished first, second and third in three races this season — but he was still frustrated to finish second to Busch.

Sauter pushed his lead over Moffitt to 39 points with the runner-up finish.

In other auto racing news:

■ Ryan Blaney claimed the pole Friday night for the NASCAR Monster Energy Cup race at Las Vegas Motor Speedway.

Blaney earned his third ca-

reer pole with a lap at 191.489 mph in his Team Penske Ford, easily outdistancing Kevin Harvick on a windy evening.

Blaney blazed through the final round of knockout qualifying for his first pole of the young season and his first since late last year in Phoenix. The 24-year-old is off to a solid start to the season with a seventh-place finish at Daytona, and he'll be in prime position in Vegas to record his second career victory.

"I thought our car was pretty good, but I didn't know if we had pole speed," Blaney said. "We made really good changes between practice and qualifying, and really good changes throughout qualifying. ... That's really all you can ask for. I think our team does such a good job of getting better round to round. That's so huge now with the

three rounds. That's something we've been working really hard on for the last couple of years, and it's paying off."

Harvick kept up his outstanding start to the season and secured a front-row Ford lockout with a second-place finish in qualifying for Sunday's Pennzoil 400. The Stewart-Haas Racing stalwart earned his best starting position in 18 career races in Vegas by turning a lap at 190.248 mph.

Fords claimed the top three spots and five of the first eight. Las Vegas native Kurt Busch qualified right behind Harvick at 190.067 mph in his Stewart-Haas Racing Ford, while Martin Truex Jr. drove his Furniture Row Racing Toyota into fourth. "Three Fords in the top three there, that's pretty cool," Blaney said.

NHL roundup

Lundqvist stops 50 shots to lead Rangers past Flames

Associated Press

CALGARY, Alberta — Henrik Lundqvist became the first goalie to stop 50 or more shots in consecutive victories since the NHL began tracking saves in 1955, lifting New York over the Calgary Flames 3-1 on Friday night.

Lundqvist tied a career high with 50 stops on his 36th birthday. He is only the third NHL goalie to post consecutive 50-save games, joining the Rangers' Gump Worsley on Jan. 27 and 30, 1963, and Chicago's Al Rollins on Oct. 9 and 15, 1955. Worsley lost both his 50-save games, and Rollins split his.

No Rangers goalie had made 50 saves in a win since Mike Richter in 1996 before Lundqvist beat Vancouver 6-5 in overtime Wednesday night.

Recently acquired center Ryan Spooner led New York with a goal and an assist. The 26-year-old has one goal and six assists in three games since he was part of a package traded to the Rangers from Boston for

Rick Nash. Spooner is the first in franchise history with six assists in his first three games with the team, and also the first Ranger with multipoint efforts in his first three games with the club, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

Jets 4, Red Wings 3: Patrik Laine scored his 32rd and 33rd goals of the season to help Winnipeg beat visiting Detroit.

Dustin Byfuglien and Ben Chiarot also scored and Connor Hellebuyck made 30 saves for his 33rd victory of the season. Winnipeg has won six of its last eight games to improve to 38-17-9.

Canadiens 6, Islanders 3: Alex Galchenyuk completed his hat trick shortly after Paul Byron and Noah Juulsen scored 1:43 apart in the third period, lifting Montreal over host New York.

Galchenyuk scored his third goal into an empty net with 49 seconds left and also had an assist. Brendan Gallagher also scored for Montreal, which im-

proved to 24-29-10 with its second straight win.

Avalanche 7, Wild 1: Nathan MacKinnon had two goals and three assists as host Colorado beat Minnesota.

The five points were a career high for MacKinnon, who also set personal bests in goals (31) and assists (45) for the season. He reached the 30-goal plateau for the first time in his five-year career.

Tyson Barrie had a goal and an assist, and Gabriel Landeskog, Carl Soderberg and Matt Nieto also scored to help Colorado gain ground in the Western Conference playoff race with its 13th win in 14 home games.

Senators 5, Golden Knights 4: Alexandre Burrows scored with 8:51 left to lift visiting Ottawa over Vegas.

Vegas has lost three straight and fallen to second in the Western Conference behind Nashville after briefly sitting atop the NHL standings.

Ducks 4, Blue Jackets 2:

Andrew Cogliano and Josh Manson scored 1:27 apart in the second period and host Anaheim defeated Columbus.

The Ducks hold the second wild card in the Western Conference and are one point behind Los Angeles for third place in the Pacific Division.

Hurricanes 3, Devils 1: At Raleigh, N.C., Teuvo Teravainen and Justin Williams scored in the third period and Carolina overcame yet another goal by New Jersey's Taylor Hall.

The Hurricanes pulled a half-game ahead of Columbus for the Eastern Conference's final playoff spot.

Panthers 4, Sabres 1: Aleksander Barkov scored his 24th goal of the season, James Reimer made 24 saves in his first start in six games and surging Florida beat visiting Buffalo.

The Panthers have won five straight and are 12-3-0 in their past 15. They began the night three points behind Columbus for the final Eastern Conference playoff spot.

College basketball roundup

Spartans move into Big Ten semifinals

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Cassius Winston hit a go-ahead jumper with 7:17 to play and No. 2 Michigan State won its 13th straight game Friday, beating Wisconsin 63-60 in the quarterfinals of the Big Ten Tournament.

Miles Bridges led the Spartans (29-3) with 20 points and Winston finished with 17 in advancing to the semifinals Saturday against No. 15 Michigan (26-7).

This was Michigan State's third win over Wisconsin (15-18) this season.

The ninth-seeded Badgers, who had won five of their last seven games, had a chance to tie the game in the waning seconds but the Spartans played tough defense and Brad Davison's long, contested three-pointer from beyond the top of the key never hit the rim.

Ethan Happ had 22 points for Wisconsin.

No. 8 Purdue 82, Rutgers 75: Carsen Edwards and Vincent Edwards each scored 26 points for the Boilermakers in the Big Ten Tournament.

Corey Sanders scored 23 points, including a baseline jumper in the closing minute to pull Rutgers within 78-75. Sanders scored 74 points the three-game run by the last-place Scarlet Knights at Madison Square Garden.

Both Edwardses made free throws in the final 30 seconds to send Purdue (27-5) into the semifinals against seventh-seeded Penn State (21-12).

Geo Baker scored 25 points for Rutgers (15-19), the 14th seed.

Penn State 69, No. 13 Ohio State 68: Tony Carr found Josh Reaves for a game-winning dunk with 3.1 seconds to

play for the Nittany Lions in the Big Ten Tournament.

Carr had 25 points for the second straight night and seventh-seeded Penn State scored the final five points in beating the 13th-ranked and second-seeded Buckeyes for the third time this season.

Penn State (21-12) will face No. 8 Purdue in the semifinals on Saturday at Madison Square Garden.

Ohio State (24-8) had a chance to win after calling a timeout, but a last-second shot by C.J. Jackson was not close.

No. 15 Michigan 77, Nebraska 58: Muhammad-Ali Abdur-Rahkman scored 21 points and Moe Wagner had 20 for the Wolverines in the Big Ten Tournament.

The fifth-seeded Wolverines (26-7) face top-seed Michigan State in the semifinals.

Isaiah Roby led the fourth-

seeded Huskers (22-10) with 18 points.

Davidson 63, No. 17 Rhode Island 61: Jon Axel Gudmundsson's driving layup with 3.1 seconds left lifted the host Wildcats to the upset.

It was the second loss of the week for the Rams, who were coming off a shocking 30-point home defeat on senior night against unranked Saint Joseph's on Tuesday.

Peyton Aldridge had 18 points and 12 rebounds for the Wildcats (18-11, 13-5 Atlantic 10). Gudmundsson finished with 11 points.

Davidson outscored Rhode Island 9-0 over the final 1:47 of the game.

Jared Terrell had 22 points for the Rams (23-6, 15-3), who squandered a six-point lead in the final 41 seconds after missing the front end of three straight 1-and-1s.

NBA roundup

Westbrook's 43 points help rally Thunder past Suns

Associated Press

PHOENIX — The Phoenix Suns have been real pests against Oklahoma City the last couple of seasons, beating the Thunder three straight times.

Russell Westbrook made sure it didn't happen again.

The reigning MVP had 43 points, including the go-ahead three-pointer with 56 seconds to play, and the Thunder scored the final 10 points of the game to escape with a 124-116 victory over the Suns on Friday night.

"They always play us tough, especially here," Westbrook said. "We stayed with it and made big plays down the stretch."

Paul George scored 20 points for Oklahoma City. Westbrook also had 14 rebounds and eight assists.

"His passion, his energy that

he brings every night is unbelievable," Phoenix guard Devin Booker said.

Booker scored 39 points, his career high for a home game. At 21 years, 123 days old, he became the third-youngest player in NBA history to reach 4,000 career points. Only LeBron James and Kevin Durant were younger.

Warriors 114, Hawks 109: Stephen Curry scored 28 points, including 15 in the final seven minutes of the first half after returning from an ankle injury, and Golden State beat host Atlanta for its fifth straight victory.

Curry turned his right ankle and left the game in the first quarter. He returned for his high-scoring second period before returning to the locker room for good in the third. The Warriors said a "tweaked right

ankle" was the reason Curry would not return.

Kevin Durant also had 28 points for the Warriors, who are unbeaten since the All-Star break.

Jazz 116, Timberwolves 108: Rudy Gobert scored a season-high 26 points and grabbed 16 rebounds, Donovan Mitchell also scored 26 points and Utah beat visiting Minnesota.

76ers 110, Hornets 99: Joel Embiid had 23 points and 14 rebounds to help host Philadelphia pull away from Charlotte late.

Raptors 102, Wizards 95: DeMar DeRozan scored 23 points, reserve CJ Miles added 20 and Toronto beat host Washington.

Pacers 103, Bucks 96: Victor Oladipo had 21 points, and Indiana nearly blew a 17-point lead in the middle of a mistake-

laden fourth quarter before holding off visiting Milwaukee.

Nuggets 108, Grizzlies 102: Gary Harris scored 26 points, hitting a key basket with just under a minute left, and Denver weathered a fourth-quarter rally to beat host Memphis.

Clippers 128, Knicks 105: DeAndre Jordan had 19 points and 20 rebounds, Lou Williams scored 21 points and visiting Los Angeles used a dominating third quarter to beat New York.

Magic 115, Pistons 106 (OT): Aaron Gordon had 27 points and 13 rebounds to help host Orlando stop a seven-game losing streak.

Bulls 108, Mavericks 100: Bobby Portis scored 22 points and made three straight shots during the decisive run late in the fourth quarter to help host Chicago roar back and beat Dallas.