

STARS AND STRIPES®

Monday, March 11, 2019

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Trump releases \$4.7 trillion budget plan

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump released a \$4.7 trillion budget plan Monday that stands as a sharp challenge to Congress and the Democrats trying to unseat him, the first act in a multifront struggle that could consume Washington for the next 18 months.

The budget calls for increased military spending, another in a string of proposals that prompted Democrats to label the budget a nonstarter that will not win congressional support.

If lawmakers and Trump don't reach a spending agreement by the end of September, many government operations will grind to a halt, dramatically raising the possibility of another government shutdown in October.

Trump also used the budget to notify Congress he is seeking an additional \$8.6 billion to build sections of a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border.

Trump's "Budget for a Better America" also includes dozens of spending cuts and policy overhauls that frame the early stages of the debate for the 2020 election.

For example, Trump for the first time calls for cutting \$845 billion from Medicare, the popular health care program for the elderly that he had largely said he would protect.

His budget would also propose a major overhaul of Medicaid, the health care program for low-income Americans run jointly with states, by turning more power over to states. This would cut spending by \$241 billion over 10 years.

Other agencies, particularly the Environmental Protection Agency, State Department, Transportation Department, and Interior Department, would see their budgets severely reduced.

"With severe cuts to essential programs and services that would leave our nation less safe and secure, the Trump budget is as dangerous as it is predictable. It has no chance in the House," House Budget Committee Chairman John Yarmuth, D-Ky., said ahead of the document's release.

Trump's GOP allies received the budget plan with a lukewarm embrace.

"The president's annual budget proposal is the first step in the federal budget process and will allow us to consider how his priorities align with the priorities of Congress," said Senate Budget Committee Chairman Mike Enzi, R-Wyo. "I look forward to working with my colleagues and the president to curb federal overspending and help bring our deficits and debt under control."

Over the next 10 years the budget would spend \$56 trillion.

More broadly, Trump's budget would impose mandatory work requirements for millions of people who receive welfare assistance while dramatically increasing the defense budget to \$750 billion next year, a 5 percent increase from 2019.

Trump and other Republicans have said the federal budget is full of waste and bloat and that many federal agencies could still perform their functions with less taxpayer assistance. Even though they have proposed budget cuts before, only to be rejected by Congress, his top advisers want to dig in

on the cuts this year, convinced Americans will support them.

Still, according to Trump's budget, the spending cuts would do little to reduce what is shaping up to be a colossal deficit in the next several years. The budget would spend much more money than it brings in through revenue, and that gap is called the deficit.

The budget foresees a \$1.1 trillion deficit in 2019, 2020 and 2021, and a \$1 trillion deficit in 2022.

These deficits will add to the existing \$22 trillion debt and put further strain on the budget. For example, the White House now projects the government will spend \$482 billion on interest payments for the debt next year, more than the entire budget for Medicaid, which provides health care benefits for millions of people.

Republicans have long called for taking steps that shrink — or even eliminate — the deficit, and putting forward a plan that would create \$4.3 trillion in new debt over four years could give Democrats fresh targets on the campaign trail.

Sirens at Misawa mark 8 years since tragedy hit Japan

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

Sirens rang out Monday at Misawa Air Base, home of the Air Force's 35th Fighter Wing in northeast Japan, marking the eighth anniversary of a devastating earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster that killed more than 15,000 and spurred a relief operation involving 20,000 U.S. servicemembers.

On March 11, 2011, a magnitude 9.0 earthquake set off a destructive tsunami that hit the

Tohoku coast, traveling 6 miles inland in places, causing widespread destruction and the release of radioactive plumes from the damaged Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Station.

Operation Tomodachi — the U.S. effort to help Japan deal with the aftermath of the disaster — involved sending servicemembers into coastal communities to help locals deal with the destruction.

At Misawa, the closest U.S. base to the disaster zone, sirens

sounded at 2:46 p.m. — marking the time that the earthquake struck — before personnel observed a moment of silence.

"We are proud to serve alongside our Japanese counterparts and always prepared to help our partners in times of need," officials said on Misawa's Facebook page.

People stationed there at the time of the disaster responded with comments about their experiences.

"It was a really difficult time, but I was really proud to see the

way the base came together to support our families and our off-base communities," wrote Mike Dashler, who said he was a member of the 35th Operations Group from 2010 to 2011.

Others shared photographs of troops working in the field, a Marine's radiation dosimeter, damaged cars and buildings and donated supplies.

Japanese media reported that 52,000 people who lost their homes in the disaster are still living in shelters.

Report: Taliban leader died near US base

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — The Taliban have confirmed that their shadowy founder died just a few miles from an American base in Afghanistan — and not in Pakistan as generally believed — even as the Kabul government rejected the claim, which is at the center of a new report from a New York-based research center.

Experts and intelligence analysts have long believed Mullah Mohammad Omar fled to Pakistan after the U.S. invaded Afghanistan in 2001. From there, according to the consensus view, he at some level directed Taliban operations until his death in 2013.

But the Taliban's one-eyed leader may have actually remained in Afghanistan and relinquished direct command of the group, according to the report.

The report's author, long-time Afghanistan researcher Bette Dam, relied on interviews with Mullah Omar's bodyguard as well as members of the Taliban and Afghan security agencies, she wrote.

The report was published over the weekend by the Zomia Center, a research group affiliated with New America, a nonpartisan think tank in Washington.

Mullah Omar gave up control of the Taliban within days of their defeat and went into hermitic isolation in rural Zabul, an insurgent-friendly province on Afghanistan's southern border with Pakistan. At various points, he lived in houses just miles away from forward operating bases Lagman and Wolverine, said the report, titled "The Secret Life of Mullah Omar."

Mullah Omar did not trust Pakistan, and would not go there even for medical help, it said.

Dam's book about her own

efforts to track down Mullah Omar, "Searching for an Enemy," was published in Dutch in February.

In the Zomia Center report, she disputes the U.S. narrative that Mullah Omar actively commanded Taliban forces while cooperating with al-Qaida militants in Pakistan.

The mullah had almost no interaction with other people until his death except for a few scares in which American troops failed to find his hidden room, the report said.

It noted that The New York Times and Politico had also reported on speculations that Mullah Omar had died in Afghanistan.

The report has received mixed reactions in Kabul, where officials have long blamed Islamabad for insecurity in the region.

A former high-ranking member of the Taliban said he has

not read the report but its findings fit what he has heard.

"Mullah Omar did not die in Pakistan," said Hakim Mujahid, member of High Peace Council of Afghanistan and former Taliban representative to the United Nations during their regime. "He suffered somehow but he didn't go anywhere out of the country and died there."

The Taliban founder didn't go to any other country "for a single day," the Taliban said in a statement Monday.

Members of the government in Kabul have rejected the report's claims.

"We strongly reject this delusional claim & we see it as an effort to create & build an identity for the Taliban and their foreign backers," presidential spokesman Haroon Chakhansuri said on Twitter. "We have sufficient evidence which shows he (Mullah Omar) lived & died in #Pakistan."

Syrian forces make limited advance into ISIS pocket

Associated Press

BAGHOUZ, Syria — U.S.-backed Syrian forces made slow advances Monday into the edges of the last village held by Islamic State, battling militants holed up in underground tunnels, a spokesman for the force said.

The battle opened Sunday evening with large explosions and mushroom clouds rising into the air over Baghouz, on the Euphrates River in eastern Syria, as the Syrian Democratic Forces battered the village with

artillery and gunfire, hitting an ISIS ammunition dump.

On Monday morning, the thuds of renewed artillery and heavy weapons fire could be heard. An airstrike hit the ISIS-held pocket around noon.

Some 500 ISIS fighters are believed to be still in the territory, along with possibly 3,000 to 4,000 civilians, including women and children — mainly family members who remained after thousands of civilians streamed out of Baghouz in the

past week during pauses in the fighting.

SDF fighters captured an arms depot and marched toward the tent settlement on the edge of Baghouz, Mustafa Bali, of the Kurdish-led SD said in a tweet. He said dozens of ISIS fighters had been killed, and that one SDF fighter was killed and four wounded.

The U.S.-led coalition carried out 11 airstrikes, destroying depots, fortifications and vehicles, and four ISIS militants blew up

explosives vests in attempted suicide attacks on SDF positions, damaging a minesweeper, Bali wrote.

The tent camp had been home for many of the thousands of civilians who had been holed up in Baghouz for weeks. On Monday, an Associated Press team was able to see a part of the camp that had been abandoned earlier. Many tents were damaged and burned, some of them set up over empty trenches and foxholes.

Clashes erupt in Yemen's key port city following cease-fire

Associated Press

SANAA, Yemen — Fighting erupted in Yemen's key port city of Hodeida on Sunday, the first significant clashes since warring sides agreed to a U.N.-brokered cease-fire deal in De-

ember, security officials and eyewitnesses said.

Fires burned on the main front lines in the city's east and south, while exchanges of artillery fire shook buildings in combat that broke out overnight, they said.

Both the Shiite Houthi rebels who hold the city and the government-backed troops who oppose them have been seen erecting barricades and digging defensive trenches.

The fighting comes days after the internationally recognized

Yemeni government, along with allies Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, accused the Houthi rebel foes of breaking the cease-fire and refusing to withdraw their forces from the city in line with the December agreement.

Vet notified of cancer 10 months after test

*The Topeka (Kan.)
Capital-Journal*

An inspection at the Leavenworth VA Medical Center found that a patient with a possible malignancy result was notified by a physician 288 days after the test was completed.

Ten months after the initial CT scan, the patient was diagnosed with stage three lung cancer with the possibility of metastatic disease. The patient died in summer 2017, according to the Office of the Inspector General's report.

The inspection was initiated after an individual made an allegation in November 2017 about delays in a lung cancer diagnosis and the reporting of an abnormal radiology test.

The complainant also said a provider falsely documented the patient initially wasn't willing to have the test conducted. The OIG substantiated the claims, finding that the patient never refused the test or intervention.

Three subsequent allegations were unsubstantiated.

The OIG conducted a site visit on June 4-7, 2018, and determined the patient's records weren't assigned the appropriate code for follow-up.

Officials examined cases with the follow-up notification and found that 45 out of 249 veterans — or 18 percent — didn't receive communication of the results within the required time frame or that the results weren't documented in their electronic health records.

According to the VA's policy, test results requiring action must be communicated in seven calendar days. Normal results must be communicated within 14 days.

The inspection also found radiologists didn't receive training on new diagnostic codes or software that generates notifications.

Five recommendations were issued on training, timely communication and adherence to other VA policies.

Report says verdict issued against Navy vet held in Iran

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran's judiciary has delivered a verdict against U.S. Navy veteran Michael White, who was detained last July in Iran, but there is no information as to what the ruling contained, a semi-official news agency reported Monday.

A prosecutor in the northeastern city of Mashhad, Gholamali Sadeghi, was quoted as saying by the Tasnim news agency that the "verdict has been issued" against White and that he faced unspecified security charges.

Sadeghi's remarks counter a February statement by the Iranian Foreign Ministry, which said White faces no security or espionage charge. There was no immediate explanation on the discrepancies.

The report came as Iran's new hard-line judiciary chief, Ebrahim Raisi, took office.

White, who has been held in Mashhad, is the first Ameri-

can known to be detained since Donald Trump became president. Trump has pursued a maximalist campaign against Tehran that includes America's withdrawal from Iran's nuclear deal with world powers. Iran has in the past detained Westerners and dual nationals to use them as leverage in negotiations.

White's family says he traveled to Iran to visit his girlfriend — the two met online — and was arbitrarily detained. Joanne White, the detainee's mother, said in January that he was undergoing cancer treatment and that she feared he would not survive prolonged detention.

At least five other American citizens are being held in Iran, including businessman Baquer Namazi, 81, who has been held for more than two years and has been diagnosed with epilepsy.

Both Baquer Namazi and his son, Siamak Namazi, also a dual national who has been held for more than three years, are

serving a 10-year sentence after they were convicted of collaborating with a hostile power.

Iranian-American art dealer Karan Vafadari and his Iranian wife, Afarin Neyssari, received 27-year and 16-year prison sentences, respectively.

Chinese-American graduate student Xiyue Wang was sentenced to 10 years in prison.

Also in an Iranian prison is Nizar Zakka, a permanent U.S. resident from Lebanon who advocated for internet freedom and has done work for the U.S. government.

He was sentenced to 10 years on espionage-related charges.

Former FBI agent Robert Levinson, who vanished in Iran in 2007 while on an unauthorized CIA mission, remains missing as well.

Iran says that Levinson is not in the country and that it has no further information about him, but his family holds Tehran responsible for his disappearance.

Republican lawmaker blasts proposal that allies pay more to host US troops

Bloomberg

A top Republican blasted the Trump administration's potential demand that countries pay the full cost of hosting U.S. troops and then some, saying it's a "wrongheaded" move that would jeopardize both national security and relationships with allies.

"It would be absolutely devastating," Rep. Liz Cheney, of Wyoming, who heads the House Republican Conference and serves on the Armed Services Committee, said Sunday on NBC's "Meet the Press."

Cheney was responding to a Bloomberg News report Friday that the administration is developing so-called "cost plus 50" plans to force countries to pay the full price of American soldiers deployed on their soil, plus an additional 50 percent or more for the privilege. Nations hosting American forces could see their tab climb five to six times their current costs.

"We benefit tremendously" by stationing sol-

diers in South Korea, Japan, Germany and other countries, Cheney said. "The notion that we are now going to somehow charge them 'cost plus 50' is really — it's wrongheaded, and it would be devastating to the security of the nation and our allies."

Trump's planned proposal is in line with his efforts to encourage U.S. allies to boost their defense spending. But it's stoked concerns among diplomats and security experts who fear any "cost plus 50" demand would be an affront to allies in Asia and Europe who already question the depth of Trump's commitment to them.

Cheney vowed to oppose the move in Congress. Asked whether fellow Republicans would join her in rejecting the plan, given their tendency to not buck the president on most matters, she said politicians must be aware of the security dividends the U.S. gets from having troops stationed abroad.

"It's going to be very important for us to make sure that people understand the danger that that will do to our relationships and to our fundamental security," Cheney said.

Attorney: Tape may show R. Kelly sex abuse

Associated Press

NEW YORK — A man who said he was cleaning out an old videotape collection found what he thought was a recording of R&B singer R. Kelly in concert but instead turned out to show a man who appeared to be Kelly sexually abusing girls, he and his attorney said Sunday.

The man then turned the tape over to law enforcement, according to attorney Gloria Allred. She and her client, Gary Dennis, would not discuss the specifics of the tape during a news conference in New York. But Allred said it appears to show a separate incident from

the 10 counts of aggravated sexual abuse that Kelly faces in Chicago, though she acknowledged she could not be “100 percent certain” that the man in the tape is Kelly.

Steve Greenberg, an attorney for Kelly, noted that lack of certainty.

“The doubt here is self-evident, with reporting that the man on the tape kinda, sorta looks like R. Kelly,” Greenberg said Sunday in an email. “That doesn’t make it him. It is not him.”

The lawyer also said Kelly “denies that he is on any tape with underaged girls.”

“It is obviously now just open

season on R. Kelly,” Greenberg said.

Dennis, an assistant at a nursing home, said he was cleaning out a box of old VHS tapes in his Pennsylvania home recently when he found the footage, on a tape that was labeled with Kelly’s name. Dennis said he has never met Kelly and doesn’t know how the tape came to be in his possession. He said that because the tape also has a sports game on it, he believes it may have come from a friend.

“To my shock and surprise, R. Kelly appeared to be on the tape, but not in concert,” Dennis said. “Instead he was

sexually abusing underaged African-American girls.”

“I was disgusted and horrified when I saw that,” Dennis said.

Allred said they assume the girls in the video were underaged because they didn’t appear to have developed.

The charges Kelly faces in Chicago are in connection with three girls and one woman. Prosecutors have said they have video of Kelly sexually abusing one of the girls.

Allred encouraged anyone who was in possession of similar tapes to come forward, either to her or to law enforcement.

Ala. church that was shelter holds first service since storm

Associated Press

BEAUREGARD, Ala. — The pastor of a church that became a center for shelter, help and grieving when a tornado killed 23 people in eastern Alabama said in his first Sunday service after the storm that the Lord has reached out his hand to the community.

Imperfect things like tornadoes and other tragedies happen because we live in an imperfect world, Providence Baptist Church Pastor Rusty Sowell said Sunday.

His sermon focused on the Bible verse Isaiah 41:13: “For I am the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you.”

Nearly 100 people safely rode out the March 3 storm in the church, which then became a center for donations and the place where Sowell and the county coroner told families they had lost loved ones.

On Sunday, 23 crosses sat outside the country church, one for each victim of the huge EF4 tornado that roared through Beauregard a few hours after last Sunday’s services with 170 mph winds and a path nearly a mile wide.

As she sat in a pew Sunday, Cindy Samford said all her emotions hit her suddenly. She lost her home in the storm hours after last week’s service.

“I’m heartbroken by the loss of lives and the devastation of it all. Today in church was a confirmation of faith that God was watching over us. God has his hands on us,” Samford said.

President Donald Trump visited the church Friday as he looked at the damage, signing Bibles for some victims there seeking help.

Sowell said it was easy to speak badly about the president and wondered if some of those who criticized Trump for the signings owned Bibles.

But most of Sowell’s sermon was how God reaches out his hand in times of need. He talked about how the church built a second building across the street with showers, a full kitchen and a large gathering space after the area was devastated by Hurricane Opal in 1995 and could not get help.

That building became the center of the relief efforts after the tornado.

“This is why this building is here,” Sowell said. “And God knew.”

Kan. pushes to promote Bob Dole to Army colonel

The Topeka (Kan.)
Capital-Journal

Members of the Kansas delegation to Congress are working to advance the decorated military career of Bob Dole, the former U.S. senator who was badly wounded as a soldier in World War II.

The U.S. Senate last week passed legislation sponsored by Sen. Pat Roberts and Sen. Jerry Moran that would promote the 95-year-old from captain to colonel in the Army.

U.S. Rep. Roger Marshall, from Kansas’ 1st District, is pushing for the bill to gain traction in the House.

“I am humbled to know that my friends in the Kansas delegation made it a priority to honor me in this way,” Dole said. “I was certainly proud to serve in the U.S. Army during World War II — alongside many heroes who never returned to American soil. To me personally, this legislation is a shared honor.”

Dole joined the Army Enlisted Reserve Corps in 1942 and was called to active duty the following year. He was deployed to Italy as an infantry lieutenant in the 10th Mountain Division, and he was wounded

in 1945 when German machine-gun fire struck him in the upper back and right arm.

Dole was cited for acts of heroism under fire and received two Purple Hearts and the Bronze Star. His injuries left him with numbness in his left arm and limited mobility in his right arm, which he minimized in public by holding a pen in his right hand.

“Bob Dole is an American hero and Kansas’ favorite son,” Roberts said. “I’m proud my colleagues in the Senate acted quickly to pass this important legislation, which will give Senator Dole the military promotion he has earned during his decades of service to our country.”

In Congress, he cosponsored bills to improve veterans benefits, improve accountability for missing members of the Armed Forces and recognize female veterans, among other initiatives.

“I can think of no one more worthy of an honorary promotion to the rank of colonel in the United States Army than Senator Bob Dole, who has for decades served our country with the utmost distinction,” Moran said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police respond when teens at mall flee

WA SEATTLE—Police in a city north of Seattle said a large group of teens and young adults entered and then suddenly fled a mall, and the chaos may have been sparked by a social media posting.

KOMO television reported the gathering early Saturday evening at Tukwila's Southcenter Mall drew a large police presence. No one was hurt in the incident.

Detectives said the crowd gathered at the urging of a post on YouTube. A large number of young adults suddenly ran for the exits, prompting fear that there might be a shooter or other threat.

Some stores closed their gates when they saw young people fleeing for the exits.

CVS to change on-hold jingle after request

MA BOSTON — A Massachusetts doctor who pleaded with CVS to change its on-hold jingle is getting his wish.

The Boston Globe reported a spokeswoman for the pharmacy chain said Friday the company is updating its voice-response phone system, including the on-hold music that Dr. Steven Schlozman so hated.

The child psychiatrist at Massachusetts General Hospital penned a tongue-in-cheek letter to WBUR-FM last year saying the music haunted him "day and night."

The letter sparked a nationwide debate.

Over 200 ticketed under left lane law

IN INDIANAPOLIS — Indiana State Police have handed out more than 200 tick-

ets to motorists for driving too slowly in the left lane.

WRTV-TV reported state police ticketed 87 drivers in 2017 for left lane violations and 132 in 2018.

It also gave more than 1,000 warnings last year.

A 2015 state law requires drivers to move to the right lane to allow faster traffic to pass.

Trooper Aaron Pfaff said slower drivers clogging the left lane can cause aggressive driving and road rage.

Dozens rescued after being trapped on ice

OH MARBLEHEAD — A sheet of ice holding fishermen on Lake Erie broke loose in windy weather Saturday morning, sending many of them scrambling to safety but leaving nearly four dozen stranded on the floe for three hours more than a mile offshore until emergency crews could rescue them.

About 100 of 146 fishermen out on the ice were able to grab their gear and make it back to shore before any additional ice broke off, The Blade of Toledo reported.

One of the stranded fishermen, Tony Adkins, 42, said the ice began to crack quickly, and soon there was a huge gap between the ice floe and the shore.

"Thank God the Coast Guard was here for us," Adkins, of Akron, told The Blade.

Town elects goat as its honorary mayor

VT FAIR HAVEN — A 3-year-old Nubian goat named Lincoln is poised to become the first honorary pet mayor of the small Vermont town of Fair Haven.

The nanny goat was chosen last week by townspeople for the one-year post at the community's Town Meeting Day. Lin-

coln takes office Tuesday.

The ballot of 16 pets was open to all town residents. Most of the other candidates were dogs and cats; a gerbil named Crystal also was a candidate.

Lincoln, with 13 votes, beat out a dog named Sammie, who received 10 votes. The other candidates combined for 30 votes.

During her time as mayor, Lincoln will be expected to attend local events such as marching in the Memorial Day parade wearing a custom-made sash.

Feds say man wed stranger to stay in US

NC RALEIGH — Prosecutors say a couple was panhandling along a North Carolina road when a foreigner pulled over with a proposal for the woman — marry him so he could stay in the country, and they'd receive \$12,000 along with payments for a house and car.

Citing court records, The News & Observer reported that Melissa Anne Godshall, 31, accepted the offer from Levan Lomtadze, 44, a native of the country of Georgia. Her boyfriend, Robert Kennerly, 46, served as a witness during the marriage ceremony.

The U.S. attorney's office says all three have been indicted on charges involving marriage fraud.

Dog randomly shot; police seek suspect

TX DALLAS — Dallas police are looking for a man who authorities allege walked up to a group of children and shot their dog for seemingly no reason.

WFAA-TV reported that Nolan, a 9-month-old Labrador retriever mix, is expected to make a full recovery after undergoing emergency surgery.

The dog's owner, Genola Vance, told WFAA-TV her son and nephews were taking out the trash on Feb. 28 when the unidentified man walked up to them, said "sorry" and shot Nolan. The man wore a black hoodie and had a backpack.

The dog was shot in the front of his mouth, breaking his jaw.

The local SPCA chapter paid for his surgery, which was about \$7,000.

Man stabbed in head in fight at Walmart

KY BUECHEL — Police in Kentucky said a man was stabbed in the head during a fight outside a Buechel Walmart, and authorities are still searching for the suspect.

Louisville Metro Police spokeswoman Alicia Smiley told The Courier Journal that a fight started between two men outside the store Sunday afternoon and led to the stabbing. It's unclear what caused the fight. The suspect fled the scene, and authorities were still searching for him as of that night.

West Buechel police Chief Jim Sherrard said the man was in critical condition Sunday evening.

Loose cart on flight causes minor injuries

DC WASHINGTON — Some people aboard an American Airlines flight received minor injuries when a loose cart came down the aisle of the plane.

American Airlines spokeswoman Martha Thomas told The Associated Press on Sunday evening that upon Flight 2145's landing at Washington's Ronald Reagan National Airport from LaGuardia Airport in New York, a cart came loose in the aft galley.

From wire reports

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Kyle Busch completes weekend sweep

Associated Press

AVONDALE, Ariz. — Kyle Busch made it a weekend sweep at ISM Raceway in the Arizona desert.

Just like he nearly did last week at Las Vegas.

Busch tracked down Ryan Blaney over a long green-flag run before passing his Team Penske rival for the lead with 16 laps to go, then made his fuel and tires last to the checkered flag to add a victory in the NASCAR Cup Series on Sunday to his triumph in the Xfinity Series race.

“We were going to be right on the verge,” Busch said. “You have to go hard first and worry about fuel afterwards. After I got Blaney, I was able to save a little bit and take care of my tires for the rest of the lapped traffic I had to get through.”

Busch’s latest big weekend gives him 199 wins in NASCAR’s top three series, including 52 at the Cup level. He will go for the 200 milestone next

weekend at Auto Club Speedway in California.

“It’s not for me to worry about. It’s for everybody else to discuss and talk about and debate over,” he said of its importance. “But for myself and the view I’ve had, I’ve been fortunate to be around a lot of great people and a lot of great sponsors.”

Busch also won the Xfinity race last weekend at Las Vegas, and he would have hit the 200-mark on Sunday if not for a speeding penalty in the Cup Series race that left him with a third-place finish.

Even after victory outside Phoenix, Busch was still rueing what might have been.

“This makes last weekend feel so much stupider,” he said. “I wish we would have swept last weekend, too, with two weekend sweeps in a row. But we’ll take what we got today.”

Martin Truex Jr. also got around Blaney to finish second, taking advantage of a No. 19 car that kept getting better on

longer runs. Blaney wound up third after starting on the pole, and after having to make two stops during the final caution because of a lugnut that would have come loose.

“I was kind of riding, trying to save tires, trying to save gas,” said Blaney, who opted for two tires and track position on his final stop. “I think [Busch] was kind of riding back there, too. He knew what situation I was in. I started to get real tight and we got to lapped cars and I was done.”

Still, it was a momentum building result for Blaney, who had watched Team Penske teammates Joey Logano and Brad Keselowski reach victory lane the past two weeks. Blaney had been outside the top 20 in each of his first three races this season.

“It definitely was a good weekend after the start of the year we had,” Blaney said. “A good day, the day we needed. We’ve been poised to have days like this and contend for wins

and it just hasn’t happened this year. This is what we deserve.”

Aric Almirola was fourth and Denny Hamlin was fifth, his car also performing better on long green-flag runs. Kyle Larsen drove to sixth from the back of the field after failing to get his money lap in during qualifying before time expired, while Kurt Busch and Jimmie Johnson also had strong runs.

“If you can’t win, it’s just about maximizing your day,” Almirola said, “and we were really close on fuel. I didn’t want to run out and finish 20th. I wanted to salvage a top-5 out of the day.”

The way Busch has been going lately, it seems as if nobody else can win.

“I’m always leery about all-time when you talk in pro sports,” team owner Joe Gibbs said, “because there’s been so many great ones. ... Kyle has the determination and drive that is very unusual.”

Newgarden claims IndyCar season opener

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Team Penske’s hot start to the motorsports season continued Sunday with a Josef Newgarden victory in the IndyCar season opener — the fourth win for a Penske car in seven days spanning three series.

Newgarden crossed the finish line on the downtown streets of St. Petersburg at almost the exact same time Ryan Blaney, another Penske driver, led the field to green in the NASCAR race outside Phoenix. Team Penske won consecutive NASCAR races with Brad Keselowski and Joey Logano to lock both into the playoffs, two Supercars races in Australia in the new Ford Mustang and now one of the showcase events on the IndyCar schedule.

The organization is off to such a strong start that Penske acknowledged his three-driver IndyCar lineup arrived at the opening race feeling pressure to match their counterparts.

Will Power and Newgarden delivered in qualifying by sweeping the front row, then Newgarden used tire strategy to put his Chevrolet out front.

“So proud of our group, we have the best

of the best working for Team Penske,” Newgarden said. “There’s a lot of pressure at Team Penske, everybody is rising up, and we joined the group today.”

It was the 204th victory in IndyCar for a Penske driver.

“To come out here and have a pole with Will, sweep the front row and win the race with Josef is a great way to start our season on the IndyCar side with Chevrolet,” Penske said. “Next week, we will be at Sebring and try to get our Acura Team Penske program in Victory Lane in the historic 12 hours race.

“But we need to keep looking out the windshield. The competition in all these series is strong and they will keep improving. So we need to keep pushing. There is a long season ahead of us.”

The sports car program, which started last year, had a third-place podium finish in the Rolex 24 Hours of Daytona in January.

Scott Dixon finished second in a Honda for Chip Ganassi Racing but was stymied by lapped traffic in his bid to catch Newgarden.

“You know the lapped traffic is trying to stay on the lead lap,” Dixon said. “I thought

we had a run on Josef, but once we caught the traffic it wasn’t enough.”

Power finished third.

Felix Rosenqvist was the breakout star of the race by finishing fourth in his IndyCar debut. The Ganassi rookie from Sweden led 31 laps and used a strong pass on Power on a restart to move to the front. He was taken out of contention for the victory during pit stops and just missed a podium finish in his debut.

“We are starting off the season better off than anyone could have expected,” said Rosenqvist, winner of three Indy Lights races in 2016.

The race finished with Penske and Ganassi, the two top teams in IndyCar, on top of the standings and the final scoring tower. Alexander Rossi was fifth for Andretti Autosport, James Hinchcliffe finished sixth for Arrow Schmidt Peterson Motorsports and Simon Pagenaud, the third driver in the Penske lineup, was seventh. Colton Herta finished eighth as the 18-year-old debuted for Harding Steinbrenner Racing.

The race was slowed by only two cautions, the fewest in the 16-year history of the race.

Top 25 roundup

Houston gets past Cincinnati

Associated Press

CINCINNATI — Corey Davis Jr. scored a career-high 31 points Sunday, and No. 12 Houston dominated the second half for an 85-69 victory over No. 20 Cincinnati that clinched the American Athletic Conference's regular-season title outright.

The Cougars (29-2, 16-2) knocked off the defending champs and earned their first league title since 1992 in the Southwest Conference. Their 29 regular-season wins are a school record.

Down by six early in the second half, Nate Hinton hit back-to-back threes that started a 35-12 spurt. Davis' back-to-back threes put the Cougars up by 17 points and sent Cincinnati fans headed for the exits with 4:22 to go.

Last year, the Bearcats (25-6, 14-4) won the regular-season title and the AAC Tournament, beating Houston in the title game. This time, the Cougars swept the season series, winning in Cincinnati for the first time after 16 losses.

Jarron Cumberland scored 20 points for

Cincinnati.

No. 21 Wisconsin 73, Ohio State 67 (OT): Khalil Iverson had a career-high 22 points and 14 rebounds as Wisconsin survived Ohio State's second-half rally.

Wisconsin (22-9, 14-6) led by as many as 23 points early in the second half. But Ohio State (18-13, 8-12) outscored the Badgers 27-5 over the last seven minutes of regulation to force overtime.

No. 22 Wofford 81, ETSU 72: Fletcher Magee made six three-pointers and scored 26 points, Cameron Jackson added 20 points and seven rebounds, and Wofford beat East Tennessee State to advance to the Southern Conference championship game.

Magee, the Southern Conference player of the year, made 10 of 14 shots from the field and 6 of 7 from three-point range, including two on which he twisted almost 180 degrees in the air to get the shot off. Jackson finished 9-for-12 from the floor and was dominant in the second half for the Terriers (28-4).

Gardner-Webb earns its first NCAA bid

Associated Press

RADFORD, Va. — DJ Laster's best game ensured it wouldn't be his last.

Laster scored a career-high 32 points and Gardner-Webb took command with a first-half run and beat Radford 76-65 on Sunday to win the Big South Tournament championship and earn its first trip to the NCAA Tournament.

Laster was dominant throughout, making 14 of 17 shots and grabbing six rebounds.

"I just knew I had to play hard, needed to play hard," he said, a piece of the championship net stuck inside the adjustable strap on his championship cap. "I just wanted to leave my legacy on the court, leave it all out there, so I just came with that mindset from the jump ball."

Laster had 30 of the Runnin' Bulldogs' first 44 points, including the last five during a 12-0 first-half run and seven during a 13-5 second-half run that gave them a 46-33 lead.

"I just felt I couldn't miss," Laster said.

It seemed that way to the Highlanders, too.

"He just dominated the paint and his teammates got him the ball in good positions," said Ed Polite Jr., the Big South defensive player of the year. "Once he got hot and gained confidence, it was hard to take that from him."

Gardner-Webb (23-11) saw its lead shrink to five several times, but each time it scored the next points to hold off the Highlanders. The first time, Jose Perez fed Laster inside for a bucket. Next, David Efanayi hit a jumper. Then Jose Perez hit one of the Bulldogs' five three-pointers.

Donald Hicks had 17 points, Polite 15 and Carlik Jones 14 for Radford (22-11), which was trying to win its fourth conference title and seeking a repeat of last season, when it followed a dramatic championship victory with its first win in an NCAA Tournament game.

Bradley rallies from 18-point deficit for Missouri Valley title

Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — A huge rally by Bradley resulted in quite a reward — its first trip to the NCAA Tournament since 2006.

Down by 18 points with 17 minutes left, Elijah Childs and the Braves surged past Northern Iowa 57-54 Sunday in the Missouri Valley Conference championship game.

"You can't make this up," Childs said. "We rode the wave and did the course."

Childs scored 16 points and Dwayne Lautier-Ogunleye added 13 for fifth-seeded Bradley (20-14).

The Braves advanced to the NCAA Tournament for the ninth time overall — in their last appearance, as a 13th seed, they beat Kansas and Pittsburgh before losing to Memphis.

Bradley trailed 35-17 before breaking loose. The Braves used a 12-0 run to get close.

Luqman Lundy had 11 points and eight rebounds as Bradley

won the MVC Tournament title for the first time since 1988.

"I knew we would make plays eventually," Lundy said.

Added Childs, "We kept our composure, stayed aggressive. If they let us get those same shots we knew they'd fall."

AJ Green led sixth-seeded Northern Iowa (16-18) with 23 points.

The Panthers took a 48-41 lead on Green's jumper with just over six minutes left. Bradley closed the game on a 16-6 run over the final 5:58.

Childs started the comeback with a short jumper. Lautier-Ogunleye brought the Braves to within 49-48 with a three-pointer. He then put his team in front to stay with four successive free throws after a dead ball foul against Luke McDonnell led to a four-point play.

Northern Iowa had a chance to go in front, but Green missed a jumper with five seconds left. Lautier-Ogunleye made two

foul shots three seconds later.

"[This] was kind of our year summed up in one game," Bradley coach Brian Wardle said. "Staying together, persevering, holding each other accountable, This was a player-led team, not a coach-led team."

Bradley had separate stretches of nearly nine minutes and more than six minutes where it didn't score in the first half, then hit 15 of 26 shots after the break.

Bradley claimed its third MVC crown to go with titles in 1980 and 1988. The Braves hit the 20-win mark for the 27th time in school history and second in a row.

"Their offense was just better than our defense in that four, five-minute stretch," Northern Iowa coach Ben Jacobson said. "They had some guys hit some big shots."

Bradley had lost its previous three MVC title games in 1996, 2001 and 2006.

Flames douse heartbreak, top Lipscomb in ASUN final

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — The Liberty Flames didn't talk about missing the NCAA Tournament a year ago on a buzzer-beating three-pointer. Instead, playing again for an automatic berth, junior guard Caleb Homesley wouldn't let them forget.

Scottie James' layup with 55.8 seconds left put Liberty ahead to stay and the Flames capped their first season in a new conference by topping Lipscomb 74-68 Sunday for the ASUN Tournament championship and their first NCAA Tournament trip since 2013.

The win was sweet redemption a year after losing the Big South Conference tournament final at the last second. Homesley insisted that loss to Radford wasn't mentioned before this final.

"But there were times in this game where I kind of rallied the guys together when they would go on a run and just say, 'Let's finish the game. Let's do the hard little things,'" Homesley said. "And I think that it really caught on to do the stretch that we had through the end of the game."

Liberty pulled off a big win at the biggest crowd to see a game at Allen Arena, and this thriller featured 18 lead changes in the second half. The Flames won for the second time this season on Lipscomb's home court.

"I'm so proud of our guys the way we weathered the storm," Liberty coach Ritchie McKay said. "I think this is just one of those games that you needed a break or two down the stretch, and we were fortunate to get one."

Liberty (28-6) switched to the ASUN Conference for this season and split the regular season title with Lipscomb. The Flames earned their fourth NCAA Tournament bid overall and first since playing in the Big South.

The Flames were up 29-28 at halftime and never led by more than four until the final seconds.

Garrison Mathews, the ASUN player of the year, made a pair of free throws with 1:31 left to give Lipscomb its last lead at 66-65. James then scored, and Georgie Pacheco-Ortiz hit a three with 14.8 seconds remaining for a 70-65 lead. James added two free throws with 8.4 seconds, and Homesley finished it off with two more with a second on the clock.

NBA roundup

Suns get rare win over GSW

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — Devin Booker scored 13 straight Phoenix points during a decisive fourth-quarter stretch and finished with 37, and the Suns snapped the NBA's longest active losing streak to one opponent at 18 games by beating the Golden State Warriors 115-111 on Sunday.

The Suns beat Golden State for the first time since a 107-95 victory on Nov. 9, 2014, and earned their first road win in 20 tries against the Western Conference this season.

Klay Thompson's two free throws with 1:04 to go made it 111-108. Andre Iguodala secured a rebound after two missed Suns shots but Stephen Curry missed on a three with 23 seconds left. Booker then converted two free throws.

76ers 106, Pacers 89: Joel Embiid had 33 points and 12 rebounds in his first game in nearly a month, leading host Philadelphia to the victory.

With Embiid back, the Sixers (42-25) moved into a tie with Indiana for third in the East, and they hold the tiebreaker over the Pacers by virtue of their 3-1 record in the season series.

Rockets 94, Mavericks 93: At Dallas,

Eric Gordon scored 26 points and Chris Paul blocked Jalen Brunson's jumper in the final seconds, sending Houston to its eighth straight win.

Raptors 125, Heat 104: Kyle Lowry had 24 points and 10 assists, Pascal Siakam scored 20 and visiting Toronto tied a franchise record with 21 three-pointers.

Spurs 121, Bucks 114: LaMarcus Aldridge had 29 points and 15 rebounds, and host San Antonio rallied for its fifth straight win.

Pistons 131, Bulls 108: Blake Griffin scored 17 of his 28 points in the third quarter, helping host Detroit to its fifth straight win.

Timberwolves 103, Knicks 92: At Minneapolis, Taj Gibson scored a season-high 25 points, powering short-handed Minnesota to the win.

Hawks 128, Pelicans 116: Kevin Huerter scored 17 of his 27 points in the second quarter, taking the scoring load from fellow rookie Trae Young, and host Atlanta stopped a three-game slide.

Grizzlies 105, Magic 97: Mike Conley scored 14 of his 26 points in the fourth quarter, helping host Memphis to its third straight win.

NHL roundup

Penguins stop streaking Bruins

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — For the first time in nearly two months, the Boston Bruins ran out of time. It tends to happen when the Bruins play in Pittsburgh, no matter how hot they are.

Jared McCann scored twice, Matt Murray finished with 39 saves and the Penguins handed the Bruins their first regulation loss since January with a 4-2 victory on Sunday night.

Boston came in 15-0-4 in its last 19 games for the franchise's longest point streak since 1940-41. A goal by John Moore with just over a minute to go got Boston within one, but McCann's empty-netter with 21 seconds left made the Bruins regulation losers for the first time since Jan. 19 against the New York Rangers.

The Penguins won for the fifth time in seven games to strengthen their position in the race for a playoff spot. Pittsburgh rose to third in the Metropolitan Division with 13 games to go.

Capitals 3, Jets 1: Carl Hagelin scored the go-ahead goal on a breakaway out of the penalty box and Pheonix Copley made 33 saves, helping host Washington to its seventh consecutive victory.

Led by Copley, Hagelin and Nick Jensen, the Capitals killed off all five minor penalties they took and won despite being outshot 34-18. They haven't lost since adding Hagelin and Jensen to their lineup before the trade deadline and now lead the Metropolitan Division by four points.

Flames 6, Golden Knights 3: Matthew Tkachuk had his first NHL hat trick, and host Calgary snapped Vegas' six-game winning streak.

Panthers 6, Red Wings 1: Aleksander Barkov reached 30 goals for the first time in his career, and host Florida earned its second straight win since a six-game slide.

Kings 3, Ducks 2: Carl Grundstrom scored his second NHL goal in his second career game and visiting Los Angeles won for just the second time in 15 games.