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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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US, Afghan friendly fire kills at least 5

BY J.P. LAWRENCE

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Afghan soldiers at a checkpoint in the country's southern Uruzgan province fired on a patrol of their own troops and American advisers, leading to a firefight and an airstrike that left at least five Afghan soldiers dead and nine wounded Wednesday, military officials in Kabul said.

No Americans were killed or wounded in the incident, said a spokesman for NATO's Resolute Support mission.

The firefight was a result of a lack of communication between Afghan forces, a senior Defense Ministry official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

The Afghan forces and their U.S. advisers were conducting a planned night raid when they approached the Afghan National Army checkpoint near the town

of Tirin Kot, the capital of Uruzgan province.

"Our forces on the ground, they didn't know about this fact; they started shooting," the official said.

The patrol came under small-arms and rocket-propelled grenade fire, Resolute Support said in a statement. Despite efforts to bring the situation under control, they continued to take fire before calling in air support. The U.S. conducted the "precision self-defense" airstrikes on the people firing on the Afghan and American troops.

"We are operating in a complex environment where enemy fighters do not wear uniforms and use stolen military vehicles to attack government forces," the statement said.

Both sides thought they were battling Taliban attackers, according to some media reports.

Since the withdrawal of most international forces in late 2014, the Taliban have gained strength. Its fighters have overrun several checkpoints, killing security forces and stealing weapons, gear and vehicles.

Earlier in the week, the Taliban reportedly attacked an Afghan position in Badghis province, killing or capturing more than 50 soldiers at the outpost in Bala Murghab.

In Uruzgan, it was unclear whether the airstrikes or the firefight caused the casualties.

News of the incident came as Afghan President Ashraf Ghani took to Twitter to promise action on recent reports of civilian casualties caused by government forces in the country. Ghani has called for investigations into the incident and demanded that Afghan National Defense and Security Forces officials seek to

reduce unintended deaths.

"I've ordered ANDSF to either abort or to wait out a potential target if even a single civilian is present," Ghani wrote. "Our security and defense forces are committed to the rules of war and engagement and they only provide proportionate response to any enemy attacks."

Long a region considered the heartland of the insurgency, Uruzgan was among the three provinces with the most districts under insurgent control or influence, according to a Resolute Support assessment in October.

While all of Afghanistan's provincial capitals are under government control, Tirin Kot is in the only district in Uruzgan that was not considered controlled, influenced or contested by Taliban forces, a January report showed.

GI who died saving 3 to get Medal of Honor

BY CLAUDIA GRISALES

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — An Army staff sergeant who saved the lives of three other soldiers in Iraq by diving onto a suicide bomber will be posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor, the White House announced Tuesday.

Family members of Staff Sgt. Travis Atkins, a 10th Mountain Division squad leader, are scheduled to join President Donald Trump for the service slated for March 27 to commemorate Atkins' selfless service and sacrifice, the White House said.

Atkins, 31, a Bozeman, Mont., native, was killed in action on June 1, 2007, while his unit — Delta Company, 2nd Battalion, 14th Infantry Regiment,

2nd Brigade Combat Team 0151 — conducted route clearance southwest of Baghdad, according to an Army account of the incident.

During the mission, Atkins heard a report over the radio of suspected insurgents crossing an intersection in the Iraqi town of Abu Samak, the Army said.

As truck commander in his Humvee, Atkins ordered the driver to stop the vehicle at the intersection so they could intercept the suspected insurgents, according to the Army. Atkins approached one of the men to check him for weapons, but when Atkins attempted to search him, the man resisted.

As the two men fought, the insurgent reached for an explosive vest under his clothing. Atkins grabbed the suicide

bomber from behind with a bear hug and slammed him to the ground, away from the other soldiers standing only a few feet from the fight. As he pinned the insurgent to the ground, the bomb detonated.

Atkins was killed by the blast.

For his actions, Atkins was initially given the Army's second-highest award, the Distinguished Service Cross, which will be upgraded now to a Medal of Honor, the nation's highest military honor.

Before Atkins joined the Army, he worked for concrete and painting contractors and as an engine mechanic in Montana, according to the service. He enlisted in the Army in 2000 and attended basic training at Fort Benning in Georgia. He

was assigned to Company A, 3rd Battalion, 327th Infantry Regiment, 1st Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), at Fort Campbell, Ky., the White House said.

He was deployed to Iraq in 2003 and later honorably discharged as a sergeant.

Atkins went on to study at the University of Montana before re-enlisting in the Army in 2005. He was assigned to the 10th Mountain Division and deployed to Iraq a second time in August 2006. In May 2007, he was promoted to staff sergeant.

The 10th Mountain Division, based at Fort Drum in New York, honored Atkins by naming a fitness center at the installation after him in 2013, the Army said.

Pentagon sets limits on transgender troops

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Defense Department has approved a new policy that will largely bar transgender troops and military recruits from transitioning to another sex, and require most individuals to serve in their birth gender.

The memo outlining the new policy was obtained Tuesday by The Associated Press, and it comes after a lengthy and complicated legal battle.

It falls short of the all-out transgender ban that was initially ordered by President Donald Trump. But it will likely force the military to eventually discharge transgender individuals who need hormone treatments or surgery and can't or won't serve in their birth gender.

The order says the military services must implement the new policy in 30 days, giving some individuals a short window of time to qualify for gender transition if needed. It allows service secretaries to waive the policy on a case-by-case basis.

Under the new rules, currently serving transgender troops and anyone who has signed an enlistment contract by April 12 may continue with plans for hormone treatments and gender transition if they have been diagnosed with gender dysphoria.

But after April 12, no one with gender dysphoria who is taking hormones or has transitioned to another gender will be allowed to enlist. Any currently serving troops diagnosed with gender dysphoria after April 12 will have to serve in their birth gender and will be barred from taking hormones or getting transition surgery.

The memo lays out guidelines for discharging servicemembers based on the new policy. It says a servicemember can be discharged based on a diagnosis of gender dysphoria if he or she is "unable or unwilling to adhere to all applicable standards, including the standards associated with his or her biological sex, or seeks transition to another gender."

It adds that troops must be formally counseled and given a chance to change their decision before the discharge is finalized.

In a statement Tuesday night, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi called the ban "cowardly."

"The President's revival of his bigoted, disgusting ban on transgender servicemembers is a stunning attack on the patriots who keep us safe and on the most fundamental ideals of our nation," the California Democrat said. "The President's yearslong insistence on his cowardly ban

makes clear that prejudice, not patriotism, guides his decisions."

Palm Center, a California research institute, protested the new policy Tuesday. Director Aaron Belkin said, "The Trump administration is determined to bring back 'don't ask, don't tell,' a policy that forced servicemembers to choose between serving their country and telling the truth about who they were."

The final legal injunction blocking the new policy was lifted last week, allowing the Pentagon to move forward. But restrictions on transgender troops are likely to face ongoing legal challenges and have been slammed by members of Congress as discriminatory and self-defeating.

The memo was signed by David L. Norquist, who is currently serving as the deputy defense secretary.

Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., said in February that barring service by transgender individuals "would cost us recruits at a time when so few Americans are willing to serve." She spoke at a hearing in which transgender troops testified that transitioning to another sex made them stronger and more effective members of the military.

An estimated 14,700 troops on active duty and in the Reserves identify as transgender, but not all seek treatment.

Pentagon hazy on pot investment guidelines

BY BRIAN FERGUSON
Stars and Stripes

The Air Force Ethics Office has instructed legal offices to "stand by" for guidance on the legality of marijuana investments from the Pentagon's Standards of Conduct Office, according to an email posted on a popular social media site Tuesday.

"Please continue to stand by — I know there are lots of emails floating around on this issue," Shannon A. McGuire, the Air Force's associate general counsel for fiscal, ethics and administrative law, wrote in the email shared on the "Air Force amn/nco/snco" page. The email's authenticity was not immediately confirmed,

though it did include accurate agency contact information.

The email comes amid confusion over how ownership of pot-related businesses might affect suitability for federal employment and security clearance adjudication for the Pentagon's civilian and military workforce, given pot's unique legal status — still classified as illegal under federal law but allowed for recreational or medical use in many states.

While federal law and DOD policy remain opposed to possession, use, manufacture, sale or distribution of pot, rapid changes to the quasi-legal weed industry have raised questions among those looking to invest early into the "Amazon of pot."

Taliban-US talks show progress, no breakthrough

BY J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — The United States and the Taliban have drafted an agreement in principle on two of four core issues at the center of peace talks intended to end the U.S.' longest war, but officials and experts say much work remains.

Touted by both sides as "the most substantive" talks to date and "extensive and detailed," the 13-day round of discussions in Qatar addressed four main concerns: the eventual withdrawal of U.S. and coalition troops from the country; assurances the Taliban would not support terrorism; dialogue between the Taliban and the Kabul government; and an end

to the fighting.

"When that agreement, in draft, is finalized, the Taliban and an inclusive Afghan negotiating team that includes the Afghan government and other Afghans will begin intra-Afghan negotiations of a political settlement and comprehensive cease-fire," Robert Palladino, deputy State Department spokesman, told reporters.

Officials have declined to discuss details, and experts said that despite the advancements a breakthrough has not yet been achieved.

A Taliban official at the talks, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity, said the sides remain far apart on the timeline for a withdrawal of U.S. forces.

US, Japanese UK navies to hold drills in sub hunting

BY CHRISTIAN LOPEZ
Stars and Stripes

The U.S. Navy, British Royal Navy and Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force are scheduled to start anti-submarine warfare drills Thursday for only the second trilateral exercise of its kind in the western Pacific.

Patrol Squadron 16 will send a P-8A maritime patrol aircraft to operate alongside the Royal Navy frigate HMS Montrose and the JMSDF destroyer JS Murasame, a P-1 aircraft and a submarine, a Navy statement Tuesday said.

“The Royal Navy, Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force, and United States Navy all support a free and open Indo-Pacific,” Capt. Brian Erickson, commander, Task Force 72, said in the statement. “Exercises like this demonstrate our nation’s resolve in the region, while improving interoperability, maintaining readiness and learning best practices from one another.”

The three maritime forces have trained together in multilateral exercises such as Rim of the Pacific, but this is only the second time for this kind of exercise in the region.

The allies first came together in December for a two-day submarine-hunting exercise by the Royal Navy’s oldest serving frigate, the HMS Argyll, and the JMSDF helicopter destroyer JS Izumo in the Philippines, according to the statement. A Navy submarine also took part, the Navy said at the time.

“The improvement of our tactical skill set is expected throughout” the exercise,” Cmdr. Shusaku Okada, commanding officer of the JS Murasame, said in the statement.

Prior to meeting the western Pacific for the anti-submarine warfare exercise, U.S. and British ships conducted a search and seizure drill in the South China Sea and also trained for a replenishment at sea.

Navy’s \$205.6B budget request for 2020 largest among services

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The latest budget request for the Navy, released Tuesday, calls for \$194.5 billion for more personnel and ships to meet the challenges of increased activity and competition in the maritime domain.

The Department of the Navy’s total proposed budget, which includes funding for the Marine Corps, is \$205.6 billion — making it the largest service request for fiscal year 2020.

“Our budget is strategy driven, and it’s focused on maximizing our naval power,” said Rear Adm. Randy Crites, deputy assistant secretary of the Navy for budget, during the Navy’s presentation at the Pentagon. “It resources the force required to implement the National Defense Strategy and aligns our people, capability and processes.”

The largest request in the overall Navy budget is for operation and maintenance, at \$68.5 billion, an increase of \$5.6 billion. Of that, \$57.8 bil-

lion would be used specifically for the Navy, including ship operations (\$19.1 billion) and air operations (\$11.7 billion).

For active-duty personnel, the Navy requested 5,100 sailors for end strength of 340,500, up from 335,400 for fiscal 2019.

One of the Navy’s long-term plans is to increase battle force ships to 355 by fiscal year 2034. Tuesday’s budget request would bring the deployable battle force count to 301 ships. Currently, the Navy has 289 ships, and by the end of fiscal year 2019 there could be 296 ships.

The fiscal 2020 budget is “the largest ship construction budget request in 20 years,” Crites said.

The Navy says its request would support 11 aircraft carriers and 33 amphibious ships that serve as the fleet’s foundation. Ten battle force ships will be delivered in fiscal 2020: four destroyers, three nuclear attack submarines, two littoral combat ships and one expeditionary fast

transport. Two nuclear attack submarines and three mine warfare ships will be retired.

The retirement of the USS Harry S. Truman aircraft carrier was confirmed Tuesday, with Crites saying the Navy’s decision was based on reinvesting the money into other capabilities instead of spending it on the ship’s planned refueling complex overhaul in fiscal 2024. Crites said the Navy still has time to reassess its decision on the ship’s retirement, considering analysis from an ongoing force structure assessment, for example.

Twelve battle force ships would be purchased with the Navy’s \$23.8 billion shipbuilding procurement request: a Ford class aircraft carrier, a FFG(X) guided-missile frigate, two John Lewis class oilers, three Virginia class submarines, three Arleigh Burke class destroyers and two T-ATS towing, salvage and rescue ships. Additionally, two large unmanned surface vessels would be funded.

Request would boost Marines’ end strength

BY CLAUDIA GRISALES
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The annual Marine Corps budget would rise by about 6 percent, and end strength would also grow under a proposal released Tuesday.

The Marines would see its budget go to \$45.9 billion in fiscal year 2020 if Congress approves the plan.

The service would add 100 spots for a total of 186,200 personnel — 21,512 will be officers, and 164,688 will be enlisted.

“This increase supports the Marine Corps Operation Concept that focuses on the changes necessary to operate successfully in an increasingly complex global environment,”

the budget request reads. “This growth supports building a more experienced, better trained and more capable force by increasing the number of Marines with special skills, like those required for special operations, intelligence operations, electronic, information and cyber warfare.”

The Marine Corps request was part of President Donald Trump’s budget proposal for fiscal year 2020, which begins Oct. 1. It’s part of an overall Navy request for \$205.6 billion, which is up about 5 percent from fiscal year 2019, which ends Sept. 30.

Overall, the Trump administration is requesting \$750 billion for the 2020 defense

budget, which covers the Pentagon and other defense-related programs.

However, a significant portion of that request, \$174 billion, has been placed in the war fund known as the Overseas Contingency Operations account, or OCO, to avoid budget caps requiring defense spending to fall under \$576 billion.

Leaders in the Democratic-controlled House have said shifting large amounts of spending into OCO is not acceptable. Republicans have cheered the overall defense number, however.

That leaves an uphill battle for Democratic and Republican lawmakers to agree on the budget.

Manafort gets more jail time, then gets hit with new charges

Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON — Paul Manafort, President Donald Trump's former campaign chairman, had his prison term extended by 43 months Wednesday at his second sentencing in the case prosecuted by special counsel Robert Mueller.

The new sentence means the former globe-trotting political consultant and Republican campaign stalwart, who turns 70 next month, will spend nearly seven years in prison with the time he already has served.

Minutes after U.S. District Judge Amy Berman Jackson imposed the sentence, Manhattan District Attorney Cyrus Vance announced a 16-count indictment against Manafort alleging a yearslong mortgage fraud scheme in New York.

Because Trump's power to pardon people only extends to federal crimes, the new state charges mean Manafort is guaranteed to serve prison time if he's convicted in the latest indictment.

During the lengthy sentencing hearing in Washington, Manafort offered an emotional apology to Jackson and pleaded for leniency so he could "be together" with his wife.

"I am sorry for what I have done," Manafort said from a wheelchair.

But Jackson scolded Manafort before she ruled, saying he "isn't being straight with me now" about his crimes and had not shown any remorse until his final sentencing.

In the earlier case, U.S. District Judge T.S. Ellis III last week sentenced Manafort to 47 months in prison for conducting a multimillion-dollar financial fraud. The criminal scheme extended through the 2016 presidential race but did not involve the Trump campaign that Manafort managed for about three months. Nor did the case directly involve the Kremlin-backed effort to sway the 2016 election, the primary focus of Mueller's investigation.

In September, a month after Manafort was convicted in Ellis' court, he pleaded guilty to two related counts of conspiracy in Jackson's court in a plea deal to avoid a second trial. He faced a maximum of 10 additional years in prison for those crimes.

Jackson may have viewed Manafort's conduct more harshly than Ellis. She ordered Manafort to jail in June for reaching out to potential witnesses in his case, and one of his conspiracy counts involved witness tampering.

Jackson also later agreed with prosecutors that Manafort voided his plea arrangement by repeatedly lying to Mueller's team and a federal grand jury investigating Russia's meddling in the 2016 election.

Compromise seeks a limit on emergency declarations

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The White House and Republican senators sought compromise on limiting presidents' powers to unilaterally declare national emergencies as chances improved that President Donald Trump might avoid a long-expected rejection by Congress of his effort to divert billions more for building barriers along the Mexican border.

As a Thursday showdown vote in the Senate neared, GOP Sens. Mike Lee, of Utah; Thom Tillis, of North Carolina; and others were talking with the White House about related legislation that would curb the ability of presidents to declare national emergencies. If Trump would commit to signing a bill handcuffing future emergency declarations, more GOP senators might support his border emergency declaration in Thursday's crucial vote.

Lee and Tillis were among five GOP senators who met privately Tuesday at the Capitol with Vice President Mike Pence as Republicans sought a way to bolster support for Trump. Since the Democratic-run House voted last month to block Trump, Senate passage of the resolution rejecting the border emergency would send it to the White House, where it would face a certain veto — Trump's first.

By late Tuesday, there were indications that GOP opposition to Trump's emergency along the Mexican border was softening. If it stands, the declaration would let Trump

divert \$3.6 billion from military construction projects to build border barriers, even though Congress had voted to limit him to less than \$1.4 billion for barrier construction in the budget.

Tillis is among four Senate Republicans who have said they would vote with Democrats to oppose Trump's border emergency. At a closed-door lunch Tuesday, Tillis suggested he could be open to backing the president, said two people familiar with his comments. One said Tillis told his colleagues he could change his vote if Trump was indeed ready to curb presidential powers to declare emergencies without Congress' approval.

The two spoke on condition of anonymity to reveal private conversations. A Tillis aide did not return messages left for him. Tillis faces a potentially tough re-election fight next year.

Republicans control the Senate 53-47, meaning that four GOP defections would be enough to send the resolution blocking Trump's border emergency to the White House. The others are Sens. Susan Collins, of Maine; Lisa Murkowski, of Alaska; and Rand Paul, of Kentucky.

Paul said earlier this month that there were "at least 10" GOP senators prepared to oppose Trump's emergency. But he told reporters Tuesday that he now expects fewer defections. GOP senators are "being beaten up right now" to fall in line, he said.

Trump grounds all Boeing 737 Max 8s

The Washington Post

President Donald Trump on Wednesday grounded all Boeing 737 Max 8 planes, effective immediately.

"Any planes that are currently in the air will be grounded upon landing at the destination," Trump said at a news conference.

"Boeing is an incredible company," the president said. "They are working very, very hard right now, and hopefully they'll very quickly come up with the answer, but until they do, the planes are grounded."

Trump's announcement followed one by Canada's transportation minister grounding all the jets, saying a review of satellite-tracking data by his country's experts found similarities between Sunday's crash of an Ethiopian Airlines jet and an October Lion Air crash.

The news had left the United States and its carriers as the last major users of the aircraft.

Trump said he has spoken with Transportation Secretary Elaine Chao, acting FAA Administrator Daniel K. Elwell and Boeing CEO Dennis Muilenburg, "and they'll be available shortly after our conference today. They are all in agreement with the action."

"Pilots have been notified. Airlines have been all notified. Airlines are agreeing with us. The safety of the American people — and all people — is our paramount concern," the president said. "Our hearts go out to all of those who lost loved ones, to their friends, to their families, in both the Ethiopian and Lion Airlines that involved the 737 Max aircraft. It's a terrible, terrible thing."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

'Meatless Mondays' program expands

NY NEW YORK — There will be no mystery meat (or any other meat) on Mondays at New York City public schools.

That's because the city is expanding its "Meatless Mondays" program in the fall.

The initiative will provide the system's 1 million students with all-vegetarian breakfast and lunch menus every Monday.

Advocates say it promotes healthy, environmentally friendly meal options.

School nutrition experts will get students' feedback before the menus are finalized.

Deputies: Man shot in fight over snoring

FL COCOA BEACH — Authorities in Florida said a woman shot her boyfriend during an argument about his loud snoring.

News outlets reported that when the Brevard County sheriff's deputies arrived at the couple's home recently they were told the shooting was accidental.

But as they investigated, they found that the shooting happened during an argument between Lorie Morin, 47, and her boyfriend. As the argument escalated, deputies said Morin got a shotgun and fired at her boyfriend. Deputies said the two were fighting about his snoring.

The man was taken to a hospital, where he was listed in stable condition.

Officers, K-9s visit girl with brain tumor

WI HARTLAND — A 7-year-old girl with a potentially fatal brain tumor got a boost of support from some furry law enforcement officers.

Emma Mertens loves dogs, so more than 30 human officers with their K-9 partners paid Emma a visit at her home in Hartland. The officers came from across southeastern Wisconsin to surprise the girl over the weekend.

West Allis Police Officer Rick Orlovski told WTMJ-TV that Emma's eyes "were the size of saucers" when the officers pulled up.

A family friend posted a request on social media for people to send photos of their dogs. Emma's family said she has since received thousands of letters and photos from around the world.

Mayor's beloved dog dies after trip

MA ATTLEBORO — A Massachusetts mayor's dog that became known for her cross-country journey after a cancer diagnosis has died.

The Sun Chronicle reported Attleboro Mayor Paul Heroux announced on Facebook that Mura the Japanese wolf dog died Saturday. Mura's death prompted an outpouring of sympathy online, with more than 1,600 users posting messages of condolences.

Heroux and Mura gained international attention when he took her on the cross-country trip last year.

Bronze sculptures, artist's tools stolen

LA NEW ORLEANS — Nearly a dozen bronze sculptures were stolen from a Louisiana artist.

NOLA.com/the Times-Picayune reported that Covington artist Bill Binnings said he discovered the art missing and the tools stolen Saturday. The original pieces were taken from his studio and foundry in Waldheim.

Binnings said the sculptures were valued at around \$47,000. He said about \$2,000 worth of tools were missing.

Binnings said the stolen pieces show dancers, a mother and child and others. Each piece is about 2 feet or less and has his signature carved into it.

Eatery chain marks 50th with redesign

WY CHEYENNE — A Wyoming-based fast-food franchise is acknowledging its roots for its 50th anniversary.

Taco John's has grown to nearly 400 locations in 26 states since two businessmen bought the franchise rights to a food-trailer business in 1969.

CEO Jim Creel told the Wyoming Tribune-Eagle the company will introduce a food truck. Taco John's got started as a taco trailer at Cheyenne Frontier Days in 1968.

Authority demolishes Civil War-era log cabin

MI DETROIT — The Detroit Land Bank Authority demolished a log cabin just outside the city that archaeologists recently discovered and believe may have been built before the Civil War.

The Detroit News reported that the authority tore down the cabin in Hamtramck on Feb. 22.

Greg Kowalski, chairman of the Hamtramck Historical Museum, said he'd hoped to relocate the cabin to a park in front of City Hall.

Land bank spokeswoman Alyssa Strickland said the authority was following procedure. She said the preservationists' plans for the cabin were incomplete and the authority was protecting taxpayer investments.

Truck in crash was carrying missiles

WA SPOKANE — Idaho State Police said a semitruck that crashed on Interstate 90 on Friday night was carrying 16 2,000-pound missiles.

The Spokesman Review reported the driver, Mark W. Dearing, 47, of Chickasha, Okla., was cited for inattentive driving. He was not injured in the crash.

State police said Dearing drove through an eastbound Idaho Transportation Department checkpoint and drove into a hazmat containment area by accident instead of merging back on to I-90. He drove to the end of the containment area and over a large snowbank.

Fairchild Air Force Base sent explosive ordnance disposal technicians to the scene although the truck had no direct relationship with the base.

Agency probes video of attack on pelican

MD DAVIDSONVILLE — The Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission is working to determine what charges might be appropriate to bring against a Maryland man who was videotaped tackling a federally protected pelican.

The Baltimore Sun reported Hunter Hardesty, of Davidsonville, posted the video of the incident online. Commission officer and spokesman Bobby Dube said authorities are considering animal cruelty charges.

The video shows Hardesty leaning over the water near the edge of a harbor that's geo-tagged to the Florida Keys. It shows him then jumping off the harbor and landing on top of the pelican.

From wire reports

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Beckham, Bell find new NFL homes

Associated Press

While the free agency spending frenzy runs wild, the Giants and Browns found a way to overshadow it Tuesday night: a trade of Odell Beckham Jr.

Not to be outdone, however, the Jets got the guy at the top of their free agency list, agreeing with former Steelers running back Le'Veon Bell on a deal early Wednesday morning.

The Giants are sending their star receiver to Cleveland for first- and second-round draft picks in April and safety Jabrill Peppers in the second blockbuster trade in four days. On Saturday, Pittsburgh sent unhappy wideout Antonio Brown to Oakland, a deal Brown forced.

Beckham is the NFL's highest-paid receiver; he got a five-year, \$90 million extension last August. He comes off two injury-plagued seasons, but when healthy is a game-breaking target, just like Brown.

The two deals became official Wednesday when the league's business year began. People with knowledge of the moves told The Associated Press of the trades, speaking anonymously

because the transactions weren't announced until after 4 p.m. EDT.

The mega-trade came hours after another busy day of dealmaking.

The money flowed out of New Jersey, with the Jets agreeing Tuesday to contracts with three players: wide receivers Jamison Crowder and Josh Bellamy, and linebacker C.J. Mosley. The team also will resign cornerback Darryl Roberts and defensive end Henry Anderson.

But the big news came when the Jets and Bell agreed on a deal. ESPN first reported the signing, saying the contract is for four years and \$52.5 million.

The deal gives new coach Adam Gase and second-year quarterback Sam Darnold a big-time playmaker, arguably the best player at his position before Bell opted to sit out all of last season rather than sign a franchise tender with Pittsburgh.

Bell has rushed for 5,336 yards and 35 touchdowns, and has 312 catches for 2,660 yards and seven scores as one of the

most versatile and dangerous offensive players in the NFL.

Jets

The Jets had more than \$82.5 million to spend in free agency, and they are spending it. They thought they also had an agreement with Vikings linebacker Anthony Barr, but he opted instead to return to Minnesota.

Not that the Jets fell short in adding talent. The 26-year-old Mosley is a four-time Pro Bowl linebacker who will get a reported five years and \$85 million, including a whopping \$51 million guaranteed. Mosley has had at least 100 tackles in every season but 2016, when he missed two games with an injury and finished with 92. He will be a centerpiece of new defensive coordinator Gregg Williams' unit.

In dire need of receivers for Darnold, New York is adding the 26-year-old Crowder as a playmaking slot receiver. Crowder, whose deal reportedly is for three years and \$28.5 million, had 221 catches for 2,628 yards and 14 touchdowns in four seasons with Washington. He was limited to nine

games last season because of an ankle injury.

Bellamy has 76 career catches for 999 yards and five touchdowns, and is also a special teams contributor. He spent the last five years with Chicago.

Packers

The defensive signings should improve a unit that ranked 18th in the NFL in 2018. Edge rusher Za'Darius Smith is getting the biggest deal: \$66 million over four years with \$34.5 million in the first two years, according to his agency, SportsTrust Advisors. The 28-year-old Smith led the Ravens with 8½ sacks last season — including three in one game against Tennessee — and has 18½ in his 58-game career.

Linebacker Preston Smith agreed to a \$52 million, four-year contract with \$16 million guaranteed. For safety Adrian Amos, it is a \$37 million, four-year contract. Amos, 25, started all 16 games for the NFC North rival Chicago Bears last season and had two interceptions.

Offensive lineman Billy Turner gets a \$28 million, four-year contract.

Saint Mary's knocks off No. 1 Gonzaga in WCC final

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Saint Mary's heard for weeks about the NCAA Tournament bubble. Last four in, first four out, fortunate to be in the discussion to be included in the field of 68.

Tired of all the chatter, the Gaels put an emphatic end to it, popping the bubble by taking down a team no one outside their program thought they could beat.

Saint Mary's ended the nation's longest winning streak and Gonzaga's six-year reign as West Coast Conference Tournament champions, grinding out a 60-47 victory in the title game on Tuesday night.

"We were told to pull off a miracle by people who don't

know us," said Saint Mary's guard Jordan Hunter, who had 12 points and 15 rebounds. "We didn't need a miracle. We knew we could beat them."

Saint Mary's (22-11) all but shut down the nation's highest-scoring team by slowing the game and forcing Gonzaga to grind out possessions instead of playing fast and free.

The Gaels held Gonzaga's leading scorer Rui Hachimura in check and limited the Zags (30-3) to 2-for-17 shooting from three-point range to end the nation's longest winning streak at 21 games.

Gonzaga's 18-game WCC tournament winning streak, dating to the 2012 title game,

also came to an end, and so too could its bid for a No. 1 seed in

the NCAA Tournament.

Instead of waiting for Selection Sunday, Saint Mary's left no doubt, getting back to the NCAA Tournament after a one-year absence with its first WCC title in nine years.

Jordan Ford had 17 points and Tanner Krebs scored 13 for the Gaels.

"The way we did it, from where we were at the beginning of the year until now, I get a lot of satisfaction out of that," Saint Mary's coach Randy Bennett said.

Gonzaga steamrolled its way to the regular-season title and through the WCC semifinals by getting out in transition, knocking down open shots.

The Zags did neither against Saint Mary's, held to a season-

low in points and 37 percent shooting. Gonzaga had six assists after finishing with 26 in the WCC semifinals against Pepperdine.

Brandon Clarke led Gonzaga with 16 points and Hachimura was held to nine, nearly 12 under his average.

"It was our worst offensive game of the year and give them credit for that," Gonzaga coach Mark Few said.

Gonzaga dominated the WCC during the regular season, finishing 16-0 while winning by a conference-record 27 points per game.

The Bulldogs cruised into their 20th straight title game under Few — and 22nd overall — by crushing Pepperdine 100-74 in Monday's semifinals.

Court reinstates Hernandez conviction

Associated Press

BOSTON — Aaron Hernandez's murder conviction was reinstated Wednesday in a sweeping ruling from Massachusetts' highest court that does away with the legal principle that made the former NFL star innocent in the eyes of the law after he killed himself in prison.

The Supreme Judicial Court unanimously found that the legal rule that erased Hernandez's conviction is "outdated and no longer consonant with the circumstances of contemporary life." It ordered that Hernandez's conviction be restored and that the practice be abolished for future cases. The ruling does not affect past cases.

Hernandez was convicted in 2015 of killing semi-professional football player Odin Lloyd. Two years later, the 27-year-old killed himself in his prison cell days after being acquitted of most charges in a separate double-murder case.

A judge threw out Hernandez's conviction that year, citing the legal principle that holds that a defendant convicted at trial who dies before an appeal is heard should no lon-

ger be considered guilty in the eyes of the law, thereby returning the case to its pre-trial status. The prosecution then appealed, seeking to have the conviction reinstated.

Under the doctrine, rooted in centuries of English law, a conviction should not be considered final until an appeal can determine whether mistakes were made that deprived the defendant of a fair trial, legal experts say.

How states handle cases such as Hernandez's varies widely. Some, like Massachusetts, toss the convictions, while other states dismiss the defendant's appeal and the conviction stands. Others allow appellate courts to consider a dead defendant's case, prosecutors said.

The district attorney whose office prosecuted Hernandez's case applauded the court's decision.

"We are pleased justice is served in this case, the antiquated practice of vacating a valid conviction is being eliminated and the victim's family can get the closure they deserve," Bristol County District Attorney Thomas M. Quinn III said in a tweet.

Prosecutors argued that the legal doctrine is outdated and unfair to victims. Quinn told the court that the defendant's estate should be allowed to appeal the case, if they wish. Otherwise, the conviction should stand, he argued.

Under the new rule laid out by the court, the conviction will stand, but the court record will note the conviction was neither affirmed nor reversed because the defendant died while the appeal was pending.

Other high-profile Massachusetts criminals whose convictions have been erased after their deaths include John Salvi, who was convicted of killing two abortion clinic workers and wounding five other people during a shooting rampage in Brookline in 1994.

Roman Catholic priest John Geohan, a key figure in the clergy sex abuse scandal, also had his child molestation conviction vacated after he was beaten to death in 2003 in his cell at the same Massachusetts maximum-security prison where Hernandez died.

College basketball roundup

Northeastern clinches Colonial's NCAA bid

Associated Press

NORTH CHARLESTON, S.C. — When Northeastern saw its large lead fading in the Colonial Athletic Association Tournament finals again, the Huskies flashed back to their failure from a year ago and all the hard work they had put in since.

"We learned from that situation," Huskies guard Shawn Oceus said. "And now we're sitting here today."

Northeastern is sitting once more as CAA Tournament champions after Vasa Pusica had 21 points off seven three-pointers and helped his team regroup after blowing a double-digit lead to defeat top-seeded Hofstra 82-74 on Tuesday night.

The situation was eerily similar to the 2018 finals. Northeastern led College of Charleston by 17 in the second half, then watched the Cougars cut down the nets after an 83-76 loss.

"Without that loss maybe

we wouldn't be in this position right now," said Pusica, named the tournament's Most Outstanding Player.

The second-seeded Huskies (23-10) won the league's automatic NCAA Tournament berth for the second time in five seasons and ninth time in school history.

"Are we off the one line?" Northeastern coach Bill Coen joked when asked about possible seeding.

"We're so excited to be included and so excited to play wherever they send us," he said.

It didn't appear Northeastern was heading anywhere but back home with another disappointment when Hofstra (26-8) opened the second half with a 28-12 run to tie things at 54-all on Jacquil Taylor's two foul shots with more than nine minutes left.

That's when the senior Pusica took charge.

His fourth three-pointer put

the Huskies back in front. Pusica added another long-range basket three minutes later for a 66-58 lead. By the time he made his sixth 3, Northeastern led 71-60. Pusica screamed in celebration, one he and his teammates held in for almost a year.

"I'm not sure I have the words to describe tonight," Coen said.

Northern Kentucky 77, Wright State 66: Northern Kentucky earned an NCAA Tournament bid for the second time in three years.

Dantez Walton had 15 points and 14 rebounds for his first double-double, leading the second-seeded Norse to the Horizon League Tournament championship.

The Norse (26-8) had control of the entire league tournament final with four starters and a reserve scoring in double figures, less than 24 hours after Horizon League Tournament MVP Drew McDonald made a game-winning, buzzer-beating three-

pointer against Oakland..

Fairleigh Dickinson 85, St. Francis (Pa.) 76: Darnell Edge scored 21 points, Kaleb Bishop and Jahlil Jenkins added 20 points apiece, and Fairleigh Dickinson earned its second trip to the NCAA tournament in four years by winning the Northeastern Conference Tournament championship.

The second-seeded Knights (20-13) shot 64 percent (30-for-47) from the field and beat the top-seeded Red Flash (18-14) on the road for the second time this season.

North Dakota State 73, Omaha 63: Vinnie Shahid heeded his teammates' advice after a rough first half and helped North Dakota State back to the NCAA Tournament.

Shahid scored 20 of his 22 points after halftime, and the Bison won the Summit League Tournament to earn their first NCAA Tournament bid since 2015.

NBA roundup

Murray leads Nuggets past T-wolves

Associated Press

DENVER — Jamal Murray scored 19 of his 30 points in the second half, Mason Plumlee dished out eight of Denver's season-high 40 assists and the Nuggets cruised to a 133-107 victory over the banged-up Minnesota Timberwolves on Tuesday night.

Called out by coach Michael Malone after a lackadaisical performance at Golden State last week, the Nuggets' starting unit responded by playing with more intensity.

Paul Millsap finished with 23 points, including a buzzer-beater from half-court to end the third quarter. Nikola Jokic added 18 points, eight rebounds and seven assists to help Denver snap a two-game slide at Pepsi Center.

The Nuggets are hanging on to the No. 2 seed in the Western Conference.

Karl-Anthony Towns had 34 points and 10 rebounds to pace a Timberwolves team that's fading from playoff contention. Towns did a little bit of every-

thing to keep the Timberwolves close until Denver pulled away in the third quarter. He had one play where he quickly applied the brakes to shake free from Jokic and then stepped back to hit a long jumper. Towns grinned on his way back down the floor.

Minnesota was light on guards with Derrick Rose (right elbow), Jeff Teague (left foot) and Andrew Wiggins (left quadriceps) all sidelined. The depleted guard situation meant more court time for Cameron Reynolds, a rookie out of Tulane who recently signed a second 10-day contract. He had 12 points in 25 minutes.

Lakers 123, Bulls 107: LeBron James had 36 points and 10 rebounds, and Los Angeles overcame a 20-point deficit to beat host Chicago and end a five-game losing streak.

James played 33 minutes and showed no signs of letting up with the Lakers barely hanging on in the playoff race. He took over after the Lakers' 14-point lead was cut to four with 8:38 left, making a jumper and then

on the next possession going through the lane for a thunderous dunk.

Bucks 130, Pelicans 113: Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 24 points and Milwaukee used a 45-point third quarter to pull away from host New Orleans.

Khris Middleton had 23 points, Malcolm Brogdon added 18, and Eric Bledsoe and former Pelicans forward Nikola Mirotic each scored 14 for the Bucks.

76ers 106, Cavaliers 99: Ben Simmons scored 26 points, Joel Embiid had 19 rebounds and made some big plays down the stretch, and host Philadelphia held off Cleveland.

Collin Sexton led the Cavaliers with 26 points, including a layup with 3:10 left that pulled Cleveland within one. Cedi Osman added 18 and put the Cavs ahead 97-96 with under 3 minutes to go as boos rained down in Philly.

Spurs 112, Mavericks 105: DeMar DeRozan scored 33 points, LaMarcus Aldridge added 28 and San Antonio beat host Dallas.

DeRozan and Aldridge had identical 11-for-19 shooting lines from the field and combined to go 17-for-17 from the foul line. The Spurs led from the middle of the first quarter on.

Pacers 103, Knicks 98: Bojan Bogdanovic scored 24 points and Darren Collison made two free throws 19.5 seconds left to help host Indiana slip past New York.

Indiana snapped its two-game losing streak and remained tied with Philadelphia for the No. 3 spot in the Eastern Conference. Collison finished with 16 points.

Trail Blazers 125, Clippers 104: CJ McCollum scored 35 points, Jusuf Nurkic and Damian Lillard added 20 apiece and Portland snapped host Los Angeles' five-game winning streak.

McCollum, who was 12-for-21 from the field and made six three-pointers, took control of the game during the fourth quarter as the Trail Blazers broke things open with a 21-5 run.

NHL roundup

Gaudreau scores hat trick to lead Flames past Devils

Associated Press

CALGARY, Alberta — Johnny Gaudreau had three goals and three assists, and the Calgary Flames scored six times in the third period on their way to a 9-4 victory over the New Jersey Devils on Tuesday night.

Derek Ryan added two goals for Calgary. Sam Bennett, Elias Lindholm, Matthew Tkachuk and Sean Monahan also scored.

The Flames went ahead to stay on Gaudreau's penalty shot 1:01 into the third. Gaudreau finished off his hat trick at 12:01, converting a setup from Monahan.

It was the NHL's first six-point game since Dallas' Jamie Benn on Nov. 14, 2013, at Calgary. Gaudreau became the first Flames player to accomplish the feat since Al MacInnis on March 20, 1994.

Blake Coleman, Travis Zajac, Kyle Palmieri and Kenny Agostino scored for New Jersey, which is winless in its last seven (0-6-1).

Penguins 5, Capitals 3: Sidney Crosby scored twice during a furious second-period rally and Evgeni Malkin picked up two assists to reach 1,000 career points, leading host Pittsburgh past Washington.

Crosby picked up his 32nd

and 33rd goals during a three-goal outburst over a span of 1:48 as Pittsburgh erased a two-goal deficit.

Canadiens 3, Red Wings 1: Carey Price made 20 saves and became the winningest goaltender in franchise history as host Montreal downed Detroit.

It was win No. 315 for Price, snapping a tie with Hall of Famer Jacques Plante atop the team leaderboard.

Blue Jackets 7, Bruins 4: Boone Jenner scored three times for his first career hat trick, powering host Columbus past Boston.

The Blue Jackets scored five unanswered goals to go up 5-1

before the Bruins came roaring back with three straight in a wild second period.

Sharks 5, Jets 4: Joe Pavelski scored with 4.3 seconds left, lifting visiting San Jose over Winnipeg to the victory in a matchup of division leaders.

Coyotes 3, Blues 1: Richard Panik and Vinnie Hinostroza scored to help visiting Arizona beat St. Louis.

Stars 2, Sabres 0: Ben Bishop made 35 saves for his third straight shutout, leading visiting Dallas past Buffalo.

Ducks 3, Predators 2: Daniel Sprong scored for the third consecutive game as host Anaheim edged Nashville.