

## Report: Lack of sleep hurts readiness

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS

*Stars and Stripes*

Sleep deprivation hinders military readiness, yet service members are twice as likely as civilians to experience it, according to a recent Defense Department report.

The “Study on Effects of Sleep Deprivation on Readiness of Members in the Armed Forces,” published Feb. 26, said sleep deprivation “may be the most important biological factor that determines service member health and combat readiness.”

The report was compiled by Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for Manpower and Reserve Affairs Virginia Penrod after a comprehensive review of relevant scientific studies, several of which indicated that 64% of service members lack enough sleep compared to 28-37% of civilians.

Sleep deprivation causes “reduced ability to execute complex cognitive tasks, communicate effectively, quickly make appropriate decisions, maintain vigilance and sustain a level of alertness required to carry out assigned duties,” according to the re-

port.

Sleep-deprived service members face a significantly higher accident risk in “training, operational and combat environments,” it said.

Congress required the Pentagon to produce the report as part of the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act. Lawmakers’ interest in sleep-deprivation stems from earlier reports that showed it factored into two separate collisions in 2017 between U.S. destroyers and commercial vessels that killed 17 sailors. Those studies found watch standers experienced poor sleeping patterns and exhaustion before both accidents.

Seven sailors died in June 2017 when the USS Fitzgerald collided with a Philippine container ship; two months later, 10 sailors died when the USS John S. McCain ran into a Liberian merchant vessel. Both destroyers sustained millions of dollars in damages.

In response, the Navy changed its policy on duty schedules to accommodate better circadian rhythms, but “anecdotal feed-

back” indicates the policy is not always followed, Adm. William Moran, at the time the vice chief of naval operations, told Congress in 2019.

The sleep deprivation report recommended leaders across all branches arrange duty schedules to ensure service members receive a full eight hours of uninterrupted sleep and reduce “environmental disruption,” such as noise, in sleeping areas.

According to the report, “Army surveys indicate that only 26 percent of leaders encourage service members to get adequate sleep.”

But while sleep is crucial, it’s not always compatible with mission needs. In these circumstances, the report’s authors suggested “tactical naps” when sleep deprivation is operationally necessary.

These planned naptimes should last about 20 minutes and happen about two-thirds of the way through a period of sleep deprivation. To avoid post-nap grogginess, researchers found chewing about 100 milligrams of caffeinated gum can help.

## US civilian contractor dies in attack on Iraq air base

By CHAD GARLAND

*Stars and Stripes*

An American contractor died Wednesday after a barrage of at least 10 rockets rained down on an air base housing U.S. and coalition forces in western Iraq, the Pentagon said.

The contractor “suffered a cardiac episode while sheltering and sadly passed away shortly after” the attack, Defense Department spokesman John Kirby said in a statement. There were no immediate reports of injuries to U.S. service members, he said.

Iraqi security forces and coalition officials were on the scene investigating, a military official told Stars and Stripes. The launch pad used to fire the missiles was found about 5 miles from the base, The Associated Press reported, citing an unnamed official.

Images shared on social media showed a burned-out truck with a raised flatbed that had concealed rocket tubes. It’s typical of launchers used in previous attacks, which

are often triggered by electrical timers.

No one has claimed responsibility for the attack “and we do not have a complete picture of the extent of the damage,” Kirby said, adding that counter-rocket air defense systems “engaged in defense of our forces.”

The attack occurred at the same base where Iran a year ago launched a missile attack that military officials said left more than 110 personnel with traumatic brain injuries, and drew Washington and Tehran closer to a larger conflict at the time.

The latest attack also came two days before Pope Francis was scheduled to visit Iraq in a trip that will include Baghdad, southern Iraq and the northern city of Irbil.

It follows a U.S. airstrike on a compound in Syria last week, which President Joe Biden ordered in response to a series of rocket attacks on American and coalition troops in Iraq that Washington has blamed on Shiite militias.

Two F-15E Strike Eagle jets destroyed

several buildings at a complex along the Iraq-Syria border that the U.S. believes Iran-backed paramilitary groups were using for operations in the region. At least one militia member was killed in the strike and two others were injured, Kirby told reporters Monday.

It was conducted the week after rockets fell on an airfield in the Kurdish region’s capital of Irbil that killed a contractor from the Philippines and wounded several others, including a U.S. service member and four American contractors.

The airstrike was a “proportionate military response,” the Pentagon spokesman said last week. It was meant to send a clear message that Biden would act to defend U.S. and allied troops, he said.

Militant groups have vowed revenge for the U.S. drone strike at Baghdad airport in January 2020 that killed Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the head of Iran’s elite Quds Force and the founder of an Iraqi militia.

# DOD report cites extremist ties in military

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — Domestic extremist groups pose a serious threat to the military by seeking to recruit service members into their ranks and, in some cases, joining the military to acquire combat experience, according to a Pentagon report released Tuesday.

The report, prepared last year at the request of Congress, did not assess whether the problem of extremism in the military is growing, but it cited a number of examples of service members with extremist affiliations. It said the number of current and former military members who ascribe to white supremacist ideology is unknown.

“Military members are high-

ly prized by these groups as they bring legitimacy to their causes and enhance their ability to carry out attacks,” the report said. “In addition to potential violence, white supremacy and white nationalism pose a threat to the good order and discipline within the military.”

For example, the report noted that a Marine was discharged in 2018 for having ties to a neo-Nazi group called Atomwaffen Division, and it said the group’s co-founder served in the Army National Guard in Florida.

Another Marine was determined to be the founder of a different white supremacist group, called AIM, which stands for American Identity Movement. The group spread

propaganda through an operation it called “Project Siege” and as of March 2019 had about 500 members.

The group’s founder was a former Marine sergeant and a former leader was an Army veteran. Several other members of the military and the Reserves were identified as being associated with the group, and the report noted that some were either demoted or discharged.

The report described a social media post, reported by a service member, who claimed to “see plenty of our kind” in combat arms.

The message recommended ways to identify fellow group members, saying “simply wear a shirt with some obscure fas-

cist logo.”

The military has long been aware of small numbers of white supremacists and other extremists in its ranks, but the problem burst into public awareness after the Jan. 6 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, where an outsized number of military veterans and some current military members were present.

It quickly fell to a new Pentagon chief, Lloyd Austin, to determine the scale of the problem and try to fix it.

On Feb. 5, Austin directed all commanders and supervisors at every level of the military to conduct a one-day “stand down” by early April to discuss extremism in the ranks.

## Academy wants midshipmen to start vaccines by end of March

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY

*Stars and Stripes*

WASHINGTON — Midshipmen at the Naval Academy need to start receiving their coronavirus vaccines by the last week of March in order to participate in summer training with the fleet, the school’s superintendent said Tuesday.

The summer training “is such an important aspect to the development of a midshipman,” Vice Adm. Sean Buck said during a hearing of the House Appropriations Committee’s sub-panel on defense.

The military academies are following the Defense Department vaccination plan, which prioritizes front-line workers, essential personnel and troops about to deploy for doses of the coronavirus vaccine. The cadet and midshipmen populations are younger and considered healthier than the rest of the military force and thus viewed as a lower priority for receiving the vaccines, said Lt. Gen. Richard Clark, the superintendent for the Air Force Academy in Colorado.

Buck has told the Navy that he needs most of his students to be vaccinated soon because the students will be sent to operational ships, sub-

marines and units. Depending on their academic year, students spend between one to two months with Navy and Marine Corps units. The Naval Academy, based in Annapolis, Md., has more than 4,500 students, according to U.S. News and World Report.

“Our Navy has prioritized the operational forces first. They’re getting vaccinated, they have a very safe and healthy bubble,” Buck said. “And for them to be willing to accept our midshipmen from the academy, as well as midshipmen from ROTC universities around the country, we need to vaccinate them prior to the summer training starting.”

The initial group of midshipmen who would begin their training about May 15 need to start their first dose by the last week of March, according to Buck. After that, the rest of the students need to start their vaccinations in the first three weeks of April in order to receive both doses and build up their immunity before they go to their assignments.

Clark and Lt. Gen. Darryl Williams, the superintendent of the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y., did not say whether they were planning to vaccinate their students early.

## Seabee dead, 5 service members injured in crash

*Associated Press*

OCEANSIDE, Calif. — A Navy sailor was killed and five other service members were injured when five military trucks were involved in a chain-reaction crash Tuesday morning on a Southern California highway, authorities said.

The convoy was heading south on Interstate 5 near Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton in San Diego County when the pileup happened shortly before 7 a.m., the California Highway Patrol said.

The collision occurred as the convoy began to slow, causing one of the truck trailers to be pushed into its cab, killing the driver, the Highway Patrol said.

A 26-year-old service member died at the scene, Fox 5 San Diego reported. Another sailor in his early 20s was rushed to a hospital with severe injuries and four other service members, two women and two men in their early 20s, were hospitalized with minor injuries, according to the news station.

The Orange County Register identified the dead and injured as Seabees from the Naval Mobile Construction Battalion.

# General: DOD delayed sending Guard to riot

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — The Defense Department took more than three hours to dispatch the National Guard to the deadly riot at the U.S. Capitol despite a frantic request for reinforcement from police, according to testimony Wednesday that added to the finger-pointing about the government response.

Maj. Gen. William Walker, commanding general of the District of Columbia National Guard, told senators that the then-chief of the Capitol Police requested military support in a 1:49 p.m. call, but the Defense Department's approval for that support was not relayed to him until after 5 p.m., according to prepared testimony. Guard troops who had been waiting on buses were then rushed to the Capitol.

That delay stood in contrast to the immediate approval for National Guard support granted in response to the civil unrest that

roiled American cities last spring as an outgrowth of racial justice protests, Walker said. As local officials pleaded for help, Army officials raised concerns about the optics of a substantial National Guard presence at the Capitol, he said.

"The Army senior leadership" expressed to officials on the call "that it would not be their best military advice to have uniformed Guardsmen on the Capitol," Walker said.

Meanwhile, the Capitol Police disclosed the existence of intelligence of a "possible plot" by a militia group to breach the U.S. Capitol on Thursday. The revelation, coming as the acting police chief was testifying before a House subcommittee, differed from an earlier advisory from the House sergeant-at-arms that said Capitol Police had "no indication that groups will travel to Washington D.C. to protest or commit acts of violence."

The Senate hearing is the second about what went wrong on Jan. 6, with national security officials facing questions about misused intelligence and botched efforts to quickly gather National Guard troops that day as a violent mob laid siege to the U.S. Capitol. Even as Walker detailed the National Guard delay, another military official noted that local officials in Washington had said days earlier that no such support was needed.

The hearing comes as thousands of National Guard troops are still patrolling the fenced-in Capitol and as multiple committees across Congress are launching investigations into mistakes made on Jan. 6. The probes are largely focused on security missteps and the origins of the extremism that led hundreds of Trump supporters to break through the doors and windows of the Capitol, hunt for lawmakers and temporarily stop the counting of electoral votes.

## Official: Dems OK tighter income limits in relief bill

*Associated Press*

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden and Democrats agreed Wednesday to tighten the upper income limits at which people could qualify for stimulus checks, a Democratic official said, a major concession to moderates as party leaders prepared to move their \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief bill through the Senate.

The COVID-19 relief measure Senate Democrats planned to unveil will also retain the \$400 weekly emergency jobless benefits that were included in a House-approved version of the legislation, the official said. The person spoke on the condition of anonymity to describe internal Democratic conversations.

The changes came with Republicans, who may unanimously oppose the legislation, lashing the bill as an overpriced Democratic wish list that lavishes help on many who don't really need it.

In a 50-50 Senate where Democrats must remain united, party moderates have been pushing to refocus the bill's spending more closely on those hurt by the pandemic and resulting economic slowdown.

As part of Democrats' legislative thrust on what is Biden's top initial legislative priority, individuals earning up to \$75,000 — and couples up to \$150,000 — would get \$1,400 checks per person.

The version the House approved last Saturday would gradually phase down those

amounts and reach zero for individuals making \$100,000 and couples earning \$200,000.

But under Wednesday's agreement, those checks would end for individuals making \$80,000 and couples earning \$160,000, the official said.

But Biden and party leaders stood firm to retain the \$400 weekly emergency jobless benefits, which are paid on top of regular state payments. Moderates have wanted to trim those payments to \$300 per week, with some saying the higher amount could discourage people from returning to their jobs.

The Senate bill was expected to largely mirror the House-approved package.

## Frustration rises as water crisis continues in Miss.

*Associated Press*

JACKSON, Miss. — Frustrations are mounting in Mississippi's largest city more than two weeks since winter storms and freezing weather ravaged the city's water system, knocking out water for drinking and making it impossible for many to even flush their toilets.

In that time, residents in the city of 160,000 have been warned to boil any water that does come out of kitchen taps

before using it.

"I pray it comes back on," Jackson resident Nita Smith said. "I'm not sure how much more of this we can take."

Smith has not had water at her house for nearly three weeks now, she said. She's concerned about her mother who has diabetes, since not having water makes it difficult to take her medicine.

A key focus of city crews this week is filling the system's water tanks to an optimal level, officials said in an update

late Tuesday. Workers are also continuing to fix dozens of water main breaks and leaks throughout the capital city.

On Wednesday, city officials planned to continue distributing water for flushing toilets at several pick-up points. But they have given no specific timeline for when the crisis will be resolved.

The system has not been able to provide a sustainable flow of water throughout the city since the mid-February storms, city officials have said.



# Calif. clinics decry vaccine equity issues

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Teresa Parada is exactly the kind of person equity-minded California officials say they want to vaccinate: She's a retired factory worker who speaks little English and lives in a hard-hit part of Los Angeles County.

Parada, 70, has waited weeks while others her age flock to Dodger Stadium or get the coronavirus shot through large hospital networks. The place where she normally gets medical care, AltaMed, is just now receiving enough supply to vaccinate her later this month.

Parada said TV reports show people lining up to get shots, but "I see only vaccines going to Anglos."

"It's rare that I see a Latino there for the vaccine. When will it be our turn?" she said.

Gov. Gavin Newsom has repeatedly called equity his "North Star" for vaccinating a diverse state of nearly 40 million. He partnered with the federal government to set up mass vaccination sites in working-class neighborhoods in Oakland and Los Angeles. And it's a big part of why he tasked insurer Blue Shield with centralizing California's patchwork vaccine system, asking the hospital chain Kaiser Permanente to assist.

Yet officials at community health centers that are considered the backbone of the safety net for the poor in the United States, focused on health equity, have said they are not receiving enough doses for their patients — the very at-risk residents the state needs to vaccinate.

In California, nearly 1,400 such centers offer free or low-cost services to about 7 million people, many in communities with a higher concentration of low-income families and few providers who take Medicaid, which is known in California as Medi-Cal. Many of their cli-

ents speak a language other than English, work long hours, lack transportation and want to go to the medical care professionals they trust.

Dr. Efrain Talamantes, chief operating officer for AltaMed Health Services, said it was disheartening to watch initial doses go elsewhere while his patients continued to test positive for the virus.

"There is a clear disparity every single time there's a resource that's limited," he said.

## Illinois

CHICAGO — Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot announced Tuesday that bars and restaurants will be allowed to open at 50% capacity, loosening restrictions put into place due to the coronavirus pandemic as vaccinations ramp up.

Lightfoot's decision comes as the city's public health officials said Illinois residents 65 or older can start making appointments Thursday for the United Center vaccination site. The site on the city's West Side will open March 9.

Leaders of Chicago's restaurant industry remain unhappy about Lightfoot's capacity decision. Illinois Restaurant Association President Sam Toia said he wants Lightfoot to increase the capacity for each restaurant room or designated area separated by a plexiglass divider from 50 people to 100 or 150.

## Nevada

LAS VEGAS — Lacrosse was reclassified from a full-contact to minimal-contact sport in Nevada's coronavirus playbook Tuesday, as Gov. Steve Sisolak moved to let indoor and outdoor practices and competitions resume with social distancing and other requirements.

Sisolak said he followed medical advisers in also classifying ice hockey as a full-contact sport and field hockey as a

minimal-contact sport.

The governor signed new guidelines that will let adult and youth tournaments begin March 15 for Nevada Interscholastic Activities Association sports after approval for a COVID-19 safety plan. Full-contact club sports and private leagues remain prohibited.

## Mississippi

JACKSON — Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves said that as of Wednesday, he is getting rid of most mask mandates that he had imposed to try to slow the spread of the coronavirus. The Republican is also lifting most other restrictions, including limits on seating in restaurants.

"The governor's office is getting out of the business of telling people what they can and cannot do," Reeves said during a news conference Tuesday.

It's been nearly a year since Mississippi reported its first confirmed case of the virus. During that time, Reeves has set varying degrees of restrictions on businesses and social gatherings. He frequently said his goal was to avoid stretching the health care system beyond its capacity — even as he repeated that he opposes government having a heavy hand in regulation.

## Arkansas

LITTLE ROCK — Workers at Arkansas' poultry plants and other food manufacturing facilities are now eligible for the coronavirus vaccine, Gov. Asa Hutchinson said Tuesday, in a move that opens up access to the vaccine for an additional 49,000 people.

Arkansas has already made the vaccine available to people at least 65 years old, teachers, health care workers, law enforcement, and nursing home employees and residents.

## Missouri

LEBANON — The family of

a Lebanon police officer who died of COVID-19 has been denied workers' compensation, city officials said.

Officer Kendle Blackburn died Dec. 28 after a long battle with the virus. A release from Gov. Mike Parson's office at the time said Blackburn contracted the virus while on duty in November.

Lebanon officials were told last week that the city's workers' compensation insurance provider, Missouri Employers Mutual, determined Blackburn's COVID-19 exposure and death "is not compensable under workers' compensation," The Springfield News-Leader reported.

Police Chief Byran Arnold said the decision seems to violate an emergency rule Parson signed in April last year that allows first responders to receive workers' compensation if they are diagnosed with COVID-19 or if they are quarantined because of it.

## Ohio

COLUMBUS — An outdated reporting system that led to the undercount of more than 4,200 COVID-19 deaths in Ohio has been retired, the state's health department director said Tuesday.

The Ohio Department of Health retired the manual system it used to provide a real-time death toll from the pandemic over the last year after a breakdown in the system led to a massive adjustment last month to the state's documented death toll.

"We have been building the plane as we fly it," Health Director Stephanie McCloud said Tuesday. "And unfortunately, we weren't given all new parts to build it well."

The department switched Tuesday to rely exclusively on a slower but more reliable and accurate system to count virus-related deaths, McCloud said.

## AMERICAN ROUNDUP

### Worker charged with taking deceased's ring

**ME** ALFRED — A funeral home worker in Maine was charged with stealing a wedding ring from the body of a 102-year-old woman after she died in a nursing home.

Stuart Weston, 51, of Sanford, stole the ring from Laura Wood, who died at Seal Rock Healthcare in Saco on Jan. 21, police said. Weston, who worked at Autumn Green Funeral Home in Alfred, was arrested on Feb. 23.

The arrest came after police obtained video evidence that he sold the ring to Maine Gold & Silver in South Portland, the Portland Press Herald reported.

The wedding ring has been recovered.

### Plan would fund over \$500K for 6 condors

**CA** LOS ANGELES — Federal wildlife authorities will take an unprecedented step in helping a wind energy company breed endangered California condors to replace the ones that have been killed by wind turbines.

The energy company Avangrid's proposed mitigation project predicts that up to two adult condors and each of their two chicks or two eggs will die by a fatal injury over a 30-year period.

Scott Sobiech, field supervisor for the wildlife service's Carlsbad and Palm Springs offices, said in a statement that a draft plan for Avangrid Renewables' Manzana Wind Power Project includes "working with a captive breeding facility to fund the breeding of additional condors for release into the wild."

The plan calls for providing over \$500,000 over three years to

produce six condors at the Oregon Zoo's Jonsson Center for Wildlife Conservation. That facility is one of four that raise captive-bred condors to increase the size of the free-flying population, the Los Angeles Times reported.

### Kangaroo gets away and hops along to freedom

**AL** WINFIELD — Authorities were searching for a young kangaroo who slipped away from his keepers as he was being hauled through Alabama on its way to a new home.

The 3 1/2-year-old kangaroo escaped in Winfield, Al.com reported. He was seen in cellphone video heartily hopping down a country road.

The animal was being taken from south Mississippi to its new home in Tennessee, said Braxton Basinger of B & H Livestock.

Basinger stopped at his home in Winfield and planned to keep the kangaroo there until he made the final delivery. A worker let go of the kangaroo while taking it out of the trailer, he said.

### Man reports break-in but winds up being arrested

**AZ** PHOENIX — A Phoenix man who called to report a possible break-in at his apartment wound up getting arrested instead, according to police.

They said while officers were searching the home of John Harbinson, 42, for the alleged burglar, they found a large stash of drugs and drug paraphernalia in plain view.

According to court documents, police reported finding 6,000 Fentanyl pills, 392 grams of methamphetamine, needles,

digital scales, a handgun and more than \$4,600.

They also found no signs of a break-in at Harbinson's place.

### Golfer searching for his ball drowns in a pond

**FL** OLDSMAR — A 74-year-old man who went to search for his golf ball near a pond at a Florida course was found dead of an apparent drowning, authorities said.

A dive team recovered the body of Hermilo Jazmines from the pond at the Oldsmar country club, according to a statement from the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office. Witnesses told authorities the golfer went off to search for his ball near hole three. His golf cart was discovered on the path and his putter was found lying near the water.

Investigators said they believe Jazmines fell into the pond and drowned.

### 5 crews enact high-angle rescue after hiker falls

**NC** DANBURY — Fire crews preformed a "high angle rescue" of a hiker who fell at North Carolina's Hanging Rock State Park.

The Stokes County Fire & Rescue Association said the fall occurred at the park's Lower Cascades. The park is north of Winston-Salem and near the Virginia state line.

WNCT reported that the male fell up to 40 feet and then "slid" another 70 feet. The station reported that he was hospitalized in "serious condition."

"Team members assisted with splinting and packaging the patient, as well as setting up rigging for the safety line," the fire department said in a Facebook post.

### Sandwich-making facility gets destroyed in fire

**IA** MARENGO — The Pride of Iowa sandwich-making facility in east-central Iowa was destroyed in a fire last weekend, authorities said.

Officials said the facility was closed and that no one was working in the building at the time of the fire, and no injuries were reported.

Crews were able to salvage one freezer, but the rest of the plant was destroyed, fire officials said.

The Pride of Iowa makes sandwiches for sale in vending machines and at convenience stores.

### Mandatory 10-digit dialing set to begin

**IN** INDIANAPOLIS — Callers in northern Indiana's 219 and 574 telephone area codes will soon be required to dial with 10 digits, rather than seven, when making local phone calls.

Beginning April 24, callers in the 219 or 574 area codes should use 10 digits whenever placing local calls. Seven-digit dialing will still be completed until Oct. 24 to give people time to adjust to the new dialing pattern and make any required system changes before 10-digit dialing becomes mandatory.

But after Oct. 24, calls without 10 digits will not be completed in the two area codes.

The change to 10-digit calling is necessary to accommodate the national "988" National Suicide Prevention Lifeline, according to the Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission.

— From wire reports

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# Mariners' Kikuchi facing pivotal season

Associated Press

It feels very much like Yusei Kikuchi just arrived in the majors after his highly anticipated move from Japan.

Yet, the left-hander is already about to start his third season with the Seattle Mariners and easily his most important to date.

"I feel that he's kind of got his arms around where he's at as a pitcher and hopefully it starts playing out on the field more consistently," manager Scott Servais said. "We've seen it. We've seen it in flashes, we just haven't seen consistent stretches of it."

Kikuchi got in his first work of spring training Tuesday, throwing two innings, allowing one hit, one run and striking out three against the Cleveland Indians. His plan is to build up to five or six innings prior to the start of the season, when Kikuchi seems likely to fit into the six-man rotation behind staff ace Marco Gonzales.

And when the season begins, so will the analysis of how and

whether the Mariners will move forward with Kikuchi.

Kikuchi's contract is structured so that he and the Mariners will have to make major decisions following the conclusion of the 2021 season. Seattle holds a club option on Kikuchi to be exercised within three days of the conclusion of the World Series. This isn't just a one-year option, but a commitment for four years that would keep Kikuchi tied to the Mariners through the 2025 season.

That option would cost Seattle \$66 million over the life of the deal.

Should the Mariners decline the four-year option, Kikuchi has control over his future. He could exercise a player option to remain in Seattle for the 2022 season and be paid \$13 million. Or he could opt out of the deal entirely and become a free agent at age 30.

It's a massive decision that could lock Kikuchi in long-term or leave both sides searching for other options.

"It's obviously a big year con-

tract-wise personally, but I'm more focused on how big of a year it is for our team. This year and next year," Kikuchi said through an interpreter. "We truly believe that this year, next year, we're going to make a good run for the playoffs and more. And so I'm just really focused on being able to be a big factor."

Part of the issue with analyzing Kikuchi is the oddity of the past two seasons. In 2019, Kikuchi was spending his first year away from Japan, making the adjustment to the majors. At times, he looked the part of an ace. At other times, he struggled badly and appeared stubborn about making adjustments.

He made just nine starts during the shortened 2020 season, but the results led to optimism about Kikuchi moving forward, even with numbers — 2-4, 5.17 ERA — that overall didn't look great. He pitched at least six innings in four of his starts.

In two starts against division rival Oakland, Kikuchi allowed no earned runs in 12 innings. He added a cutter to go along with

his excellent slider.

And he seemed to find comfort with Seattle's six-man rotation, which almost duplicated the frequency with which he pitched in Japan. Seattle intends to use the six-man rotation this season and possibly beyond.

"We all saw the stuff last spring training had changed from 2019. He kind of spent last year figuring out what that stuff is and how to use it and how to play with it," pitching coach Pete Woodworth said. "I think we saw in the second half the confidence in knowing that this stuff is real, and I can wreak havoc on a handful of lineups, it doesn't really matter who's in the box."

Servais said Kikuchi has taken a very analytical approach to understanding the value of being ahead in the count and what pitches work best in those situations. Having altered his repertoire of pitches last year, Kikuchi said his offseason was focused on pitch command and simplifying his mechanics.

## Francona: Indians didn't cover up for Callaway

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Responding to claims the team protected Mickey Callaway, Indians manager Terry Francona said no one in the Cleveland organization "covered up" for the former pitching coach who's under investigation by Major League Baseball following allegations of sexual harassment.

Callaway is currently suspended as the Los Angeles Angels pitching coach, pending the MLB inquiry.

The Athletic reported Tuesday that 12 current and former Indians employees came forward in the last month to say Callaway's actions were so obvious inside the team that "it would have been difficult for top officials to not be aware of his behavior."

Callaway's alleged lewd behavior while he was with Cleveland from 2013-17 included sending inappropriate photos, requesting nude photos in return and making women "feel uncomfortable."

"Nobody's ever deliberately covered up for

anybody, I can tell you that," Francona said on a Zoom call from the team's spring training complex in Goodyear, Ariz.

The Indians followed with a statement a few hours later.

"Our organization continues to actively cooperate with MLB on their investigation into Mickey Callaway," it said. "It is important we honor the confidentiality and integrity of that investigation. While we don't believe the reporting to date reflects who we are as an organization, we will not comment further on the specifics of this matter."

"We remain committed to creating an inclusive work environment where everyone, regardless of gender, can feel safe and comfortable at all times. We will let our actions — not just our words — reflect our commitment."

Shortly before Francona spoke to the media, his son, Nick, posted on Twitter that he had read the new story on Callaway and confronted his father. The younger Francona said the Indians "are clearly in the wrong."

"Their behavior is unacceptable, and even worse, it's hard to have faith in them to improve and learn when they seem more concerned about covering up wrongdoings that addressing them honestly," Nick Francona wrote.

The 61-year-old Francona, who managed only 14 games last season because of health issues, said his son's comments were painful.

"I love all my children unconditionally," he said. "As you can imagine, that's a very difficult thing to see. So to deal with it publicly is hurtful."

According to The Athletic report, some of the employees found it difficult to believe the team was caught off-guard by the Callaway accusations.

"I laughed out loud when I saw the quote (in the original report) that said it was the worst-kept secret in baseball, because it was," one unidentified former employee told The Athletic. "It was the worst-kept secret in the organization."



# Celtics roll past Leonard-less Clippers

Associated Press

BOSTON — The Celtics have had trouble at times this season holding on to leads late in games.

Boston benefited from the surprise absence of one of the league's top stars to avoid that and post its first winning streak in a month.

Kemba Walker had 25 points and six assists, and the Celtics took advantage of a late scratch of All-Star Kawhi Leonard and held off the Los Angeles Clippers 117-112 on Tuesday night.

Jaylen Brown finished with 18 points. Jayson Tatum and Payton Pritchard each added 14 as Boston posted three straight victories for the first time since January.

"I'm just playing the right way. Taking whatever the defense gives me. The shots are just falling. That's it," Walker said. "At the end of the day, the overall goal is to win. We've been doing that."

Coach Brad Stevens said he's proud of how his team has responded after a stretch that saw them lose nine of 14.

"They've stayed together when they could have been pulled apart by the noise," he said.

The Clippers, who have lost five of eight, played without Leonard after he was ruled out shortly before the game due to back spasms.

Paul George led Los Angeles with 32 points. Reggie Jackson took Leonard's

place in the starting lineup and finished with 25 points and seven assists.

Leonard was listed as a starter before the game, but never took the floor during warmups. The team announced late in the first quarter that he had been ruled out.

Coach Tyrone Lue said he didn't know Leonard's status for Thursday's game against the Wizards.

Leonard has missed seven previous games this season, including two for a mouth laceration, two while in the health and safety protocols and three for a bruised leg.

His absence comes with the Clippers on the tail end of a five-game road trip, which concludes Thursday at Washington. He was coming off a game in which he played 37 minutes in a loss at Milwaukee on Sunday.

Jackson said with Leonard out, the Celtics used their length to their advantage.

"They were comfortable switching and also comfortable playing one-on-one defense," Jackson said. "A lot of teams right now have been hurting us with the switching."

**Suns 114, Lakers:** Dario Šarić scored 10 of his 21 points in the fourth quarter, Mikal Bridges added 19 and Phoenix overcame Devin Booker's ejection for a victory at Los Angeles.

Booker scored 17 points before getting ejected for arguing with 7:10 left in the third quarter. The Suns (23-11) still took charge down the stretch and cruised to their 15th

victory in 18 games while also moving past the defending champions (24-12) into second place in the Western Conference by winning percentage.

LeBron James scored 38 points for the Lakers, who have lost five of seven with mounting injury problems. Dennis Schröder added 17 points, but the team couldn't keep up without regulars Anthony Davis, Kyle Kuzma and Marc Gasol.

Kuzma was a late scratch with a bruised right heel, while Gasol missed his first game under the NBA's health and safety protocols.

**Hawks 94, Heat 80:** Trae Young scored 18 points, including 13 straight for his team in the fourth quarter, and visiting Atlanta snapped Miami's six-game winning streak.

**Nuggets 128, Bucks 97:** Nikola Jokić had 37 points, 11 assists and 10 rebounds for his ninth triple-double of the season and 50th of his career, and Denver won at Milwaukee to snap the Bucks' five-game winning streak.

**Grizzlies 125, Wizards 111:** Ja Morant had 35 points and 10 assists, De'Anthony Melton and Dillon Brooks each added 20 points, and visiting Memphis routed Washington.

**Spurs 119, Knicks 83:** Trey Lyles scored a season-high 18 points, Dejounte Murray added 17 and host San Antonio used a balanced effort to end New York's three-game winning streak.

## Illinois makes statement, drubs No. 2 Michigan

Associated Press

ANN ARBOR, Mich. — Trent Frazier, Andre Curbelo and No. 4 Illinois arrived at Crisler Center ready to make a point.

"We're the hardest-playing team in the country. That's our statement," Frazier said. "Even without our best player, we've got a lot of guys on this team."

Duly noted.

Frazier led the way with 22 points, Curbelo scored 11 of his 17 in the first half, and the Illini dismantled No. 2 Michigan with a smothering defensive performance, routing the Wolverines 76-53 on Tuesday night.

Kofi Cockburn added 12 points for Illinois. Playing again without injured star Ayo Dosunmu, Illinois (19-6, 15-4 Big Ten) kept Michigan from clinching the conference title and boosted its chances at a No. 1 seed in

the NCAA Tournament.

"I would be challenged to find a better win in college basketball this year — a better road win anyway. I mean, in all the analytics, they're up there," Illini coach Brad Underwood said.

**No. 3 Baylor, No. 6 West Virginia 89:** Jared Butler scored 25 points before fouling out, Davion Mitchell hit the go-ahead basket in overtime and the third-ranked Bears beat No. 6 West Virginia 94-89 Tuesday for Baylor's first Big 12 regular-season title.

The Bears (19-1, 11-1 Big 12) bounced back in a big way from their only loss of the season at No. 13 Kansas on Saturday. They struggled in their two previous games coming off a three-week layoff because of COVID-19 issues in the program.

After managing just 58 points against the Jayhawks, Baylor maintained its energy

and scoring touch until the very end against the Mountaineers (17-7, 10-5).

Butler finished with 25 points. Mitchell scored four of the Bears' 13 points in overtime and finished with 20.

**No. 8 Alabama 70, Auburn 58:** Jaden Shackelford scored 23 points, made five three-pointers and helped the host Tide quash a second-half threat and beat the Tigers.

Shackelford helped Alabama (20-6, 15-2 Southeastern Conference) score 10 straight points after Auburn (12-14, 6-11) pulled to within five late.

Herbert Jones had 10 points, nine rebounds and six assists for the Tide.

**No. 12 Arkansas 101, South Carolina 73:** Moses Moody tied his career high with 28 points and the visiting Razorbacks earned their 10th straight SEC win.

# Pens welcome back fans with victory

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — The arena wasn't completely full for Pittsburgh's game against visiting Philadelphia, yet it felt that way to Penguins forward Kasper Kapanen.

Kapanen scored two goals and the Penguins defeated the Flyers 5-2 on Tuesday night.

Pittsburgh won in front of their fans for the first time in almost a year, as state coronavirus restrictions were eased at the beginning of the month and spectators were allowed into the building. Penguins' players raised their sticks and saluted the fans in attendance following the win.

"It was unbelievable," Kapanen said. "It's been a while since we played in front of fans. Even though there were only 2,800, it felt like there was 20,000. It feels like things are kind of going back to normal, so it was fun to see."

Bryan Rust scored his seventh, and Cody Ceci and Mike

Matheson added goals for Pittsburgh, which has won five of its last seven. Ceci's goal came just 1:08 after Philadelphia's Joel Farabee's second goal made it a 3-2 game. Tristan Jarry stopped 40 shots.

The Penguins, who are tied for the most home wins since the beginning of the 2019-20 season, rebounded from one of their worst performances of the season, a shutout loss to the New York Islanders on Sunday.

Farabee scored twice for the Flyers, who had a three-game winning streak halted. Carter Hart made 22 saves for Philadelphia.

"I thought mentally we were there," Farabee said. "I just think the execution was a bit off all over the ice, so we've got to regroup."

As evidence: Hart was heading to the bench for an extra attacker with just under four minutes remaining, when Matheson gained control of the puck just outside his own blue

line and shot past a sprawling Hart for the final goal.

The team received approval from Gov. Tom Wolf and the state health department to open PPG Paints Arena to 15% capacity, or 2,800 fans, on Tuesday. The Flyers will welcome fans back to the Wells Fargo Center on Sunday against Washington.

Tuesday's game was the first at PPG Paints Arena with fans since the Penguins hosted the Carolina Hurricanes on March 8, 2020. Fans sat in pockets of no more than four, spaced throughout the lower bowl and half of the upper section of the arena.

**Lightning 2, Stars 0:** Andrei Vasilevskiy stopped 28 shots for his third consecutive shutout, extending his scoreless streak to 200 minutes, and Stanley Cup champion Tampa Bay won at Dallas.

**Canadiens 3, Senators 1:** Carey Price made 26 saves and host Montreal beat Ottawa to

give rookie coach Dominique Ducharme his first NHL victory.

Jeff Petry and Brendan Gallagher each had a goal and an assist. Tyler Toffoli scored into an empty net for Montreal (10-6-5), which snapped a five-game losing streak.

**Rangers 3, Sabres 2:** Pavel Buchnevich had a goal and an assist, Igor Shesterkin stopped 22 shots and host New York beat Buffalo.

**Islanders 2, Devils 1:** Semyon Varlamov made 28 saves and came within 14 seconds of his fourth shutout, and New York beat the slumping Devils in New Jersey's first home game with fans in almost a year.

**Hurricanes 4, Predators 2:** Sebastian Aho scored twice to lead Carolina to a win at Nashville.

**Jets 5, Canucks 2:** Kyle Connor and Blake Wheeler each had a goal and two assists to lead host Winnipeg.

## Tokyo Olympics unlikely to allow fans from abroad

Associated Press

TOKYO — The new president of the Tokyo Olympic organizing committee stopped short of saying there would be no foreign fans at this year's games, but she certainly hinted at it Wednesday after online talks with IOC President Thomas Bach and others.

The Japanese newspaper Mainichi reported Wednesday that the decision had already been made to exclude foreign fans. It cited only unnamed sources "involved in the discussions."

"If the situation is tough and it would make the (Japanese) consumers concerned, that is a situation we need to avoid from happening," organizing committee president Seiko Hashimoto said.

The newspaper report came just before Hashimoto's meeting with Bach. She said a decision on foreign fans will come by the end of the month, and she wants one by March 25, when the torch relay begins from northeastern Japan.

The Olympics are scheduled to open on Ju-

ly 23.

"In the current situation, it is impossible to bring in foreign spectators," the Mainichi newspaper said, citing an unnamed government official.

Hashimoto was asked after the meeting how Japan could even consider letting in thousands of overseas fans, given how unpopular the idea is at home, where up to 80% want the Olympics canceled or postponed again. Japan has attributed about 8,000 deaths to COVID-19, but has controlled it much better than most countries.

Hashimoto confirmed that the subject of fans was a key part of the "five-party" talks with Bach, International Paralympic Committee President Andrew Parsons, Tokyo Governor Yuriko Koike and Olympic Minister Tamayo Marukawa.

Bach hinted at hard choices to be made in comments before the meeting was closed to reporters.

"We will focus on the essentials," Bach said. "That means mainly the competitions. This

has to be the clear focus. In this respect, we may have to set one or another priority."

The exclusion of foreign fans has been almost a foregone conclusion with the games being held during a pandemic. The Japanese public has been openly opposed to the games, and one sticking point has been the risk presented by visitors entering the country. The other has been the soaring costs.

The games will involve 11,000 Olympic athletes, and later 4,400 Paralympians, and tens of thousands of coaches, judges, sponsors, media and VIPs. Bach said he was encouraged at the number of national Olympic committees that were getting athletes vaccinated. The IOC said it encourages vaccinations but will not require them.

Bach said his hope was "to have as many participants as possible arriving vaccinated to Tokyo."

"There I can inform you that a considerable number of national Olympic committees has already secured this pre-Tokyo vaccination," Bach said.