

Study: Male special forces oppose unisex bathrooms

By **NIKKI WENTLING**
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A study of Special Forces service members found that male and female troops hold drastically different views on gender-neutral bathrooms, with many men firmly opposed to them.

About 33% of men who participated in the study said they would be willing to share a unisex bathroom with women, while 61% of women said they would be willing to share a unisex bathroom with men.

Male service members cited hygiene, risk and privacy as their main concerns.

The study, titled “Maintaining Male Exclusivity: Porcelain Privilege in the Military,” was published recently in the journal *Armed Forces and So-*

ciety. Researchers at the University of Kansas conducted focus groups with members of the U.S. Army Special Forces about their thoughts on women integrating into combat roles. Researchers didn’t ask service members about bathrooms, but the issue kept coming up, they said.

“We weren’t focused on bathrooms originally, but they kept coming up, more than 300 times,” said Shannon Portillo, associate dean for academic affairs at the university’s Edwards Campus. “We were focused on larger questions of military integration, but we saw a stark gender difference on this topic. The results clearly showed men were concerned about continuing a sex-

separated atmosphere.”

The researchers held 27 focus groups with a total of 198 participants at Fort Bragg in North Carolina and Fort Leavenworth in Kansas.

The study found that there is still resistance of women integrating into Special Forces positions. Bathrooms were often cited as a reason male service members were against the integration. Historically, researchers said, bathrooms have been used as a way to keep women out of certain workplaces, such as police stations, firehouses and Congress.

When male-dominated workplaces have been integrated, some workers attempted to fight back by “doubling

down on the existing sexist culture,” said Alesha Doan, a professor in KU’s department of women, gender and sexuality studies. The researchers found this same dynamic in their study of service members.

“Men’s discomfort with potentially sharing toilets and team room spaces with women, in contrast to the women’s readiness for such conditions, is an indication that the underlying logic of sexism needs to be addressed,” the study states.

The study did not include or ask about transgender service members because it was conducted when transgender people were barred from military service, the researchers wrote.

N. Korea, denuclearization top agenda in Seoul talks

By **SETH ROBSON**
Stars and Stripes

North Korea and denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula topped a list of issues the U.S. secretaries of state and defense tackled with their South Korean counterparts during meetings this week in Seoul.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin held a press conference with South Korea’s defense minister, Suh Wook, and foreign minister, Chung Eui-yong, following Thursday’s so-called 2+2 talks.

The allies’ goals are clear, Blinken said: the denuclearization of North Korea, reducing the threat that country presents and “improving

the lives of all Koreans, including North Koreans who suffer systematic abuses at the hands of their leaders.”

The ministers’ discussion also focused on diplomatic efforts to resolve the nuclear issue and the need for a strategy that includes Japan, Chung said.

There is potential for future diplomacy with North Korea, Blinken said, adding that China has a critical role to play in working to convince North Korea to denuclearize.

“Virtually all of North Korea’s economic relationships, its trade, go through China,” he said.

Readiness remains the top priority for U.S. forces on the peninsula, Austin told re-

porters.

Asked about the impact of scaled back joint military exercises on the peninsula, a change enacted in 2018 after former President Donald Trump’s first summit with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, Austin said the military is always looking for ways to make training better.

“We have looked to be flexible; we have looked to be adaptive and we have always been effective,” he said, adding that future training on the peninsula will be determined in coordination with South Korea.

Meanwhile, North Korea announced it would disregard any U.S. offer of dialogue unless it changes its “hostile policy,” after Wash-

ington contacted Pyongyang in an effort to restart nuclear talks.

North Korea’s foreign minister, Choe Son Hui, issued a statement rejecting the offer Thursday as the U.S. and South Korean officials met in Seoul.

“What has been heard from the U.S. since the emergence of the new regime is only a lunatic theory of ‘threat from North Korea’ and groundless rhetoric about ‘complete denuclearization,’” Choe said, calling the offer for talks a “time-delaying trick.”

He repeated Pyongyang’s position that no “dialogue of any kind” is possible unless the U.S. dials back its hostility.

More whites nominated to academies

BY NIKKI WENTLING
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Members of Congress nominate white students to military service academies at disproportionately high rates, leading to an underrepresentation of minorities there and among the military's pool of general officers.

The Connecticut Veterans Legal Center explained the discrepancy Wednesday in a report titled, "Gatekeepers to Opportunity." Researchers analyzed data from 1994 to 2020 using congressional nominations to the country's three largest service academies: U.S. Air Force Academy, U.S. Naval Academy and U.S. Military Academy at West Point.

White students received 74% of nominations from lawmakers, despite comprising only

54% of the total U.S. population age 18 to 24, researchers found. Only 6% of the nominations went to Black students, and 8% went to Hispanic students.

"The congressional nominations system is leaving Black and Latinx students behind," said Liam Brennan, executive director of the Connecticut Veterans Legal Center. "[The] bottleneck ultimately impacts diversity at the highest levels of military leadership."

Admission to a service academy is highly competitive, and all applications must secure a nomination from a member of Congress or another source, such as the president, vice president, secretaries of each military branch or the superintendents of the academies. Lawmakers account for most nominations — resulting in 60% to 70%

of the student populations.

Researchers heard from lawmakers that students of color applied for the nominations at lower rates, contributing to the underrepresentation. However, there is no data available about the races of students who applied. That information is only sporadically collected and isn't subject to the Freedom of Information Act, said Sarah Purtill, a law student intern at the center.

A measure passed by Congress in the National Defense Authorization Act of 2021 will change that. The Panorama Act requires the Department of Defense to report data on the race, ethnicity and gender of applicants to service academies.

A 2019 report by the Connecticut Veterans Legal Center showed that lawmakers nominated more than three times as

many male students as female.

In the newest report, researchers included a list of recommendations to Congress that they believe would help boost diversity at the academies. They asked that lawmakers reach out to Title I schools, which enroll large numbers of students from underrepresented backgrounds. They also want Congress to require the Defense Department to expand its Junior Reserve Officers' Training Course program into more Title I schools.

The Connecticut Veterans Legal Center also recommended that the Pentagon allow some lawmakers to nominate more students. The supplementary nominations would be given to lawmakers who are shown to equitably nominate minority students.

USAF chaplain cleanses Yokota base homes of spirits

BY ERICA EARL
Stars and Stripes

YOKOTA AIR BASE, Japan — The headquarters of U.S. Forces Japan may also be home to supernatural activity, according to a couple who claim to help anyone dealing with paranormal disturbances to rid their homes of unwanted spirits.

Chaplain (Capt.) Lance Brown, of Yokota's 374th Wing Staff Agency, and his wife, Karen Brown, who is working on a master's in counseling, have been performing home cleanses, or anointings, for the past eight years in homes where "odd things occur."

Supernatural activity is reported so often at this base in western Tokyo that it inspired a Facebook group, Yokota Ghost Hunter Club. Its members post about paranormal phenomena they've experienced at their homes and workplaces.

Lance Brown is endorsed by the Pentecostal Church of God, and the home cleanses are not officially sanctioned by the Air Force, he told Stars and Stripes in an interview earlier this month.

"Ghosts or spiritual demonic activity, things of an evil nature, God combats that," he said. "We have the ability to be that beacon of hope as people invite us."

The Browns said their cleansings are sometimes about helping someone cope with anxiety, heartbreak or a troubled past than about literal evil spirits, though Lance said they are not suggesting the supposed presence of spirits is "all in the person's head."

Laurie Pope, who lives in one of Yokota's garden units, said she started to feel uncomfortable in her home last year.

"My 3-year-old daughter has been experiencing sleep regression the past year," she told Stars and Stripes. "There have been several times when I would be watching her video monitor and I would see orbs of light in her room. There have been a few instances where I'd be in my bedroom and I would see a white streak of light run past the foot of my bed. And, more recently, my daughter has been saying she's seeing monsters and that she's scared."

"I know it won't happen overnight, but I'm hoping we can all live more comfortably in our home regardless if there was a spirit existing here," Laurie Pope said.

The Pops, who had their home anointed March 1, are hopeful that the process worked for their family.

"My daughter still isn't sleeping through the night," Laurie Pope said. "But I feel a much greater sense of peace being home alone, especially at night."

The Browns do the cleanses free of cost, judgment or disclosure, they said. People need not be religious to have a home cleansing, and the Browns said their objective is not to convert anyone's belief systems.

The couple said they received more calls at Yokota over the past year than they did at their previous assignment in Fort McConnell Air Force Base, Kan. The Browns weren't certain exactly how many calls they have received on Yokota but explained that they receive a steady flow of requests, and had a cleansing arranged for right after their interview with Stars and Stripes.

Jobless claims rise to 770K; layoffs still high

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of Americans seeking unemployment benefits rose last week to 770,000, a sign that layoffs remain high even as much of the U.S. economy is steadily recovering from the coronavirus recession.

Thursday's report from the Labor Department showed that jobless claims climbed from 725,000 the week before. The numbers have dropped sharply since the depths of the recession last spring but still show that employers in some industries continue to lay off workers. Before the pandemic struck, applications for unemployment aid had never topped 700,000 in any one week.

The four-week average of claims, which smooths out weekly variations, dropped to 746,000, the lowest since late November.

A total of 4.1 million people are continuing to collect traditional state unemployment benefits,

down 18,000 from the previous week. Including separate federal programs that are intended to help workers displaced by the health crisis, 18.2 million Americans were receiving some form of jobless aid in the week of Feb. 27, down by 1.9 million from the week before.

The continuing layoffs are occurring even as the overall job market has shown solid improvement. Last month, U.S. employers added a robust 379,000 jobs, the most since October and a sign that the economy is strengthening as consumers spend more and states and cities ease business restrictions.

With vaccinations accelerating, hopes are rising that Americans will increasingly travel, shop, eat out and spend freely after a year of virus-induced restraint.

President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion relief package is also expected to help accelerate growth, es-

pecially with most adults this week receiving \$1,400 stimulus checks that should fuel more spending. An extension of \$300 weekly unemployment benefits into early September will provide support, too, along with money for vaccines and treatments, school reopenings, state and local governments and ailing industries ranging from airlines to concert halls.

"Labor market strains are ongoing, but we expect filings (for unemployment aid) to start declining as restrictions are lifted and more normal operations resume," Rubeela Farooqi, chief U.S. economist at High Frequency Economics, said in a research note. "As businesses return to full capacity, job and income prospects will improve and, combined with fiscal support, will provide a powerful lift to the economy."

At the same time, the nation is still roughly 9.5 million short of

the number of jobs it had in February 2020. And Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell suggested Wednesday after the Fed's latest policy meeting that the overall economic outlook remained cloudy.

"The state of the economy in two or three years is highly uncertain," Powell said at a news conference after the Fed signaled that it expects to keep its key interest rate near zero through 2023 despite some solid economic gains and concerns about rising inflation pressures.

By most barometers, business activity in the economy's vast and hard-hit service sector is still far from normal. The data firm Womply said, for example, that as of early last week 63% of movie theaters, galleries and other entertainment venues were closed. So were 39% of bars, 32% of gyms and other sports and recreation businesses and 30% of restaurants.

Treasury Department says \$242B in new relief payments already sent

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Treasury Department says it has sent out 90 million economic impact payments totaling \$242 billion since President Joe Biden signed a \$1.9 trillion pandemic relief plan last week.

The bulk of those payments were made by the IRS as direct deposits, which recipients starting seeing in their bank accounts last weekend, officials said Wednesday.

In addition, Treasury has mailed out roughly 150,000 checks worth about \$442 million.

Processing of the payments began last Friday, the day after Biden signed the American Rescue Plan, which authorized direct payments of up to \$1,400 to qualifying individuals.

Treasury said the first batch of

payments went to eligible taxpayers who provided direct-deposit information on their 2019 or 2020 tax returns. Included were people who don't typically file a return but who used a non-filers tool at IRS.gov last year to be included in two earlier rounds of COVID-19 relief payments. Officials said additional batches of payments will be sent in coming weeks by direct deposit and through the mail.

No action is needed by most taxpayers to receive the payments, which will be automatic and similar to how people received their first and second round of economic impact payments in 2020. The payments, which are being made to cushion the blow from the coronavirus pandemic, started with \$1,200 payments last spring and \$600 payments in a second round approved by Congress in December.

GAO: Having troops in Japan, South Korea also benefits US

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

The roughly \$8.5 billion spent each year by the Pentagon to house tens of thousands of American troops in Japan and South Korea benefits the Asia-Pacific region and the U.S. homeland, according to congressional watchdog group.

The U.S. military spent approximately \$34.3 billion between 2016 and 2019 to station more than 83,000 troops permanently in Japan and South Korea, which paid dividends by maintaining strong alliances with those nations, deterring aggression of potential enemies, and ensuring stability in the broader region, according to a Government Accountability Office report published Wednesday. The report was mandated by Congress in the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act as then-President Donald Trump's administration considered removing some U.S. troops from countries around the

world, including South Korea.

The GAO said its new report leaned largely on nongovernment experts and reviewed Defense and State Department policies. It was released as Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Wednesday visited Seoul, the South Korean capital, as part of his first international trip as the Pentagon's leader. Austin visited Japan earlier this week.

The long-standing alliances with Japan and South Korea, Austin said this week, contribute to "a free and open Indo-Pacific" region. The GAO report reached the same conclusion, including analysis that American troops in Japan and South Korea were important to maintain supply lines and trade routes through the region.

GAO found permanent U.S. military presences in Japan and South Korea had other benefits, including regular assurances those country's military forces could fight alongside U.S. troops.

Biden labels Putin 'killer' and draws fire

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russian President Vladimir Putin said Thursday that U.S. President Joe Biden's remarks about him reflect America's own past and current problems.

Biden was asked in an interview whether he thought Russian President Vladimir Putin is a killer and said "I do." Russia on Wednesday announced it's recalling its ambassador in Washington for consultations.

Asked about Biden's remarks during a video call with residents of Crimea marking the anniversary of its 2014 annexation from Ukraine, Putin charged that they reflect the United States' own troubled past.

The Russian leader pointed at America's

past history of slaughtering Native Americans and slavery, arguing that the painful legacy has weighed on the U.S.

"Otherwise where would the Black Lives Matter movement come from," he said.

He added that Russia would still cooperate with the U.S. where it answers Moscow's interests.

Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov explored what he called "very bad remarks by the U.S. president" that made it clear that "he doesn't want to normalize relations."

"We will proceed accordingly," Peskov said in a conference call with reporters, noting that "there was nothing like that in history." He wouldn't answer if Russia could go

as far as to rupture diplomatic ties with the U.S.

Commenting on the Russian move Wednesday, White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki emphasized that "we will be direct, we will speak out on areas where we have concerns, and it will certainly be, as the president said last night — certainly, the Russians will be held accountable for the actions that they have taken."

The exchange of tough statements comes on the heels of a declassified report from the U.S. national intelligence director's office that finds Putin authorized influence operations to help then-President Donald Trump in November's presidential election.

Storms move on, leaving a trail of damage in South

Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — Storms that left splintered homes and broken trees across Alabama and Mississippi moved into Georgia and Florida on Thursday, rousing residents with early morning warnings as forecasters said the threat of dangerous weather would move up the south Atlantic seaboard.

About 20,000 homes and business were without power and the weather service said at least two people were hurt when an apparent tornado struck southwest Alabama, destroying a house, but the region appeared to escape the kind of horrific toll many feared after ominous predictions of monster twisters and huge hail.

"Overall, we have a lot to be grateful for, as it could have been much worse," Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey said in a statement.

Forecasters issued a string of tornado warnings around the region where Alabama, Georgia and Florida intersect, but there were no immediate reports of major damage.

The National Weather Service office in central Alabama said teams were fanning out Thursday to assess damage in at least 12 counties where tornadoes may have touched down.

Scattered severe thunderstorms were expected to spread into portions of eastern Georgia, through the Carolinas into extreme southeast Virginia, according to the National Weather Service's Storm Prediction Center. Other isolated severe storms were possible from southern Ohio into the central Appalachians.

"Significant tornadoes, wind damage and large hail will be possible from morning into afternoon," the Storm Prediction

Center said. "Severe thunderstorms will also be possible from parts of the eastern Gulf Coast into the southern and central Appalachians."

Damage was reported in Louisiana, Tennessee and Mississippi, where video showed an apparent tornado at Brookhaven. High winds blew down signs and trees in northeast Texas, and hailstones the size of baseballs were reported near the Alabama-Mississippi line, the weather service said.

More than 70,000 homes and businesses were without power at one point from Texas to Alabama, and radar showed additional storms moving across the region as initial cleanup work began.

Alabama was under a state of emergency, and communities across the South used social media to share the location of tornado shelters.

Chauvin's jury back at 9 despite \$27 million settlement

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Concern appears to be fading that a massive settlement for George Floyd's family will derail the trial of a former police officer accused in his death, with most potential jurors saying they avoided news of the settlement or could set it aside.

Two jurors seated before news of the city's \$27 million settlement broke last week were dismissed Wednesday after being re-questioned by Hennepin County Judge Peter Cahill, but five oth-

ers were retained.

One of those who was retained, a Black man, told Cahill he heard about the settlement on the radio Friday but that he could put it aside and decide the case only on the evidence that was presented.

"It hasn't affected me at all because I don't know the details," he said.

Two new jurors were seated later in the day, putting the jury back at nine. Five are men and four are women. According to the court, four are white, two

are multiracial and three are Black, and their ages range from 20s to 50s.

Cahill has set March 29 for opening statements if the jury is complete by then. Chauvin attorney Eric Nelson, who requested jurors be recalled for re-questioning because of the settlement, has also asked that the trial be delayed or moved elsewhere. Cahill said he would rule Friday on those motions, but he has previously rejected moving it, saying publicity about Floyd's death has reached every corner of the state.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Tesla on autopilot drives into trooper's patrol car

MI LANSING — A Tesla on autopilot crashed into a Lansing-area state trooper's patrol car early Wednesday, Michigan State Police said.

Neither the trooper nor the 22-year-old Lansing man who was driving the Tesla were injured in the 1:10 a.m. crash on Interstate 96 in Eaton County, police said.

The crash occurred as the trooper was investigating a collision between a car and a deer, WLNS-TV reported. The patrol car's emergency lights were activated when the Tesla drove into it, police said. The Tesla's driver was issued citations for failure to move over and driving with a license suspended.

Tesla has said previously that its autopilot and "full self-driving" are driver-assistance systems and that the driver must be ready to intervene at all times.

Police: Man threw Molotov cocktail at day care

PA PHILADELPHIA — A man threw a Molotov cocktail at a north Philadelphia day care center, breaking a window, but no children were present and there were no injuries, police said.

The fire resulting from the incendiary device thrown just after 9 a.m. Tuesday at the Germantown Avenue day care center burned only outside the building and didn't reach inside, police said.

Police said the man, who was wearing a black mask, got into the passenger side of a vehicle and fled but was apprehended nearby. The driver of the vehicle wasn't found at the location.

The fire marshal declared the blaze an arson. The suspect was

arrested and was being processed, police said.

Rescuers save 2 from truck dangling over gorge

ID BOISE — Authorities say a set of camp trailer safety chains and quick, careful work by emergency crews saved two people after their pickup truck plunged off a bridge, leaving them dangling above a deep gorge in southern Idaho.

Idaho State Police responded to the accident at about 2:45 p.m. Monday, said ISP spokeswoman Lynn Hightower. A trooper found a man and a woman inside the pickup truck that was dangling, nose-down, off the side of the bridge spanning the Malad Gorge. The gorge is narrow but is roughly 100 feet deep below the bridge.

The only thing keeping the 2004 Ford F-305 pickup from falling was the set of "safety chains" attaching it to the 30-foot camper trailer, which remained on the bridge. A state trooper and local sheriff's deputy first used an additional set of chains from a nearby semi-truck to help support the dangling pickup truck until additional rescuers with cranes and rope rescue gear could arrive.

Emergency crews rappelled to the hanging truck and attached a harness to each occupant, who were taken to hospitals with nonlife-threatening injuries, Hightower said. Two small dogs inside the pickup were also rescued.

Cemetery with presidents, Confederates is damaged

VA RICHMOND — Gravestones and memorials were toppled and spray-painted at a cemetery in Virginia that holds the graves of two U.S.

presidents as well as Confederate soldiers and generals.

The Richmond Times-Dispatch reported that \$200,000 worth of damage was done Saturday at the Hollywood Cemetery.

The cemetery spans 135 acres and overlooks the James River in Richmond. More than 18,000 Confederate soldiers and generals are buried there.

The damage was done in the Presidents Circle section of the cemetery. That's where Presidents James Monroe and John Tyler are buried. Their graves weren't disturbed.

Mom sentenced after daughter's hit-and-run

NE LINCOLN — A Lincoln woman has been sentenced to jail but may be able to avoid time behind bars for helping her daughter dump her car after she was involved in a hit-and-run crash that killed a pedestrian.

The Lincoln Journal Star reported that Kimberly Cowell, 52, said at her sentencing Tuesday that she responded "in the worst way possible" after the Oct. 18 crash that left Tina Mortensen dead.

Court documents said police found the car that was involved in the crash partially submerged in a creek. Surveillance video showed a car belonging to Cowell's daughter, Casey Maxfield, and a car that police said was Cowell's pulling into a parking lot in the area.

"I mistakenly thought what I could do to help my daughter instead of thinking about the person she hit," she said.

Lancaster County District Judge Robert Otte sentenced Cowell to 360 days in the county

jail but allowed her to get into a program that will allow her to stay out of jail and be monitored.

Man sentenced for lying about hurricane damage

FL ORLANDO — A Florida man has been sentenced to three years in federal prison for lying about damage caused by Hurricane Irma.

Steven Rembert, 49, of Orange County, was sentenced Monday in Orlando federal court, according to court records. He pleaded guilty in December to disaster assistance fraud.

In September 2017, Rembert falsified records concerning his primary residence when submitting an application for assistance to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, according to an indictment.

Woman with stowaway history arrested again

IL CHICAGO — A woman with a history of stowing away on airliners was arrested Tuesday for attempting to sneak onto a flight at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport, authorities said.

The arrest of Marilyn Hartman, 69, came two weeks after a judge rejected a plea deal that would have given her probation for a previous attempt to stow-away on a flight. Hartman is being held on a trespassing charge.

Hartman allegedly left the facility where she had been staying while on electronic monitoring. The device allowed Cook County sheriff's deputies to track her as she headed for O'Hare. Deputies activated an alarm on Hartman's device as she neared Terminal 1, where she was arrested.

— From wire reports

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Teams driven by 2020 disappointment

Associated Press

Winthrop coach Pat Kelsey smiles as he considered the nearly two-year journey to play in the NCAA Tournament.

"We did it the hard way," Kelsey said.

Kelsey and the Eagles won the Big South Conference tournament in 2020 and were among a dozen teams that earned bids and were eagerly awaiting their chance to play. Instead, the start of the coronavirus pandemic robbed those teams of that opportunity — leaving them a full year to dream, scheme and hope for another opportunity.

Just four schools — Gonzaga, Liberty, Utah State and the Eagles — from that group of 12 reached this year's field of 68.

"To have the disappointment that we had a year ago and to not be deterred, to have the type of focus, determination and approach they had since they got out of quarantine," Kelsey said Tuesday. "This is a very driven team."

The Bulldogs, who've built themselves into a modern-day college basketball powerhouse, are the tournament's No. 1 overall seed and, at 26-0, are seeking to become the sport's first undefeated champion since Indiana did it in 1976.

There was little chance Gonzaga would've missed this year's Big Dance even if it hadn't won the Western Coast Conference Tournament crown again.

Not so for the other three.

"Nothing is a given," Utah State forward

Justin Bean said.

There were even fewer prospects after the Aggies started their season losing three of their first four games. Instead, the team called on the bonds forged in winning Mountain West Conference Tournament titles in 2019 and 2020.

Utah State rolled off winning streaks of 11 and six games following the slow start. The road back hit a speed bump when the Aggies lost to top seed San Diego State in the championship game, and Bean said there were a few moments of worry Sunday while wondering if they'd see their name called. But there were the Aggies, seeded 11th and facing No. 6 seed Texas Tech on Friday.

"We knew we had the pieces to make something special and to be something special," Bean said. "It was just up to us to work extra hard and put in the time to earn that spot."

Liberty also earned its berth with a third consecutive Atlantic Sun Conference Tournament title in as many years in the league. The regrets of a season ago, Flames coach Ritchie McKay said, didn't keep this group from pointing toward its next opportunity to play in the NCAA Tournament.

McKay got an early glimpse of that resolve when the Flames defeated a pair of Southeastern Conference teams in Mississippi State and South Carolina back-to-back in late November.

"I think we have a sense of confidence that

is reflective of how hard they've worked and how united they are," said McKay, whose 13th-seeded team faces Oklahoma State on Friday.

Darius McGhee, the Atlantic Sun player of the year, said Liberty has used last year's loss of its tournament trip as inspiration this time around: "There's a lot of motivation. Guys are super excited to see how far we can go."

Winthrop believes the same thing. Kelsey, the team's ninth-year coach, could see this past spring that players weren't hanging their heads about what they lost, but looking forward to what was possible.

The Eagles won their first 16 games before falling, 57-55, to UNC Asheville on Jan. 29. Winthrop ran off seven straight wins heading into the NCAAs, including an 80-53 victory over Campbell for the Big South Tournament crown.

Winthrop (23-1), the 12th seed in the South Region, faces No. 5 seed Villanova on Friday night.

The Eagles' Chandler Vaudrin, a 6-foot-7 point guard who leads the NCAA with three triple-doubles, believes his team's latest run was fueled as much by its lone loss as all its victories. "That loss, I think, really propelled us in the second half of the year to continue to grow and continue to play good basketball"

"Now we're at the same place" as last year, Vaudrin said. "We did what we needed to do."

Road to March Madness fraught with adversity

Associated Press

Two days apart in late December, West Virginia coach Bob Huggins got a double dose of bad news: A promising freshman was lost for the season with a torn Achilles tendon. Then one of the few five-star recruits in program history quit the team.

Huggins needed to make some fast adjustments. The ensuing roster tweaks helped the Mountaineers get through a rugged Big 12 season and has put them on solid ground entering the NCAA Tournament.

In a season full of adversity and challenges, in addition to dodging the usual stops and starts of the coronavirus pandemic, West Virginia didn't just survive — it got better.

"It changed the way we played," Huggins said Wednesday. "But I think it changed the way we played for a positive."

The Mountaineers (18-9) earned a No. 3

seed and will play 14th-seeded Morehead State (23-7) on Friday in Indianapolis.

West Virginia wasn't alone in adapting on the fly. Look at Florida's resolve after losing Keyontae Johnson to a health scare, Drake losing two key players to injury in February or Ohio University pushing through a long pandemic pause to win the Mid-American Conference tournament.

Johnson, the Southeastern Conference preseason player of the year, collapsed on the court during a Dec. 12 game. The Gators postponed their next four contests and Johnson was released from a hospital 10 days later.

With Johnson out for the season, the Gators went 11-8 the rest of the way. Sophomore Tre Mann took over the team scoring lead, including four of his top five performances heading into the NCAA Tournament.

Florida (19-12) is a No. 7 seed and will meet 10th-seeded Virginia Tech (15-6) Friday.

Drake (25-4) won its first 18 games, then lost leading scorer and rebounder ShanQuan Hemphill and point guard Roman Penn to foot injuries two weeks apart. The Bulldogs lost three of their final nine games yet still made the tournament.

For Ohio, the problem wasn't a grueling stretch of games, but simply a lack of them.

With fresh legs, the Bobcats won their first MAC championship since 2012 after playing three times over 36 days prior to the league tournament due to pandemic-related postponements or cancellations.

Don't count them out in the Big Dance, either. The Bobcats lost at Illinois by a basket, 77-75, on Nov. 27. They're a 13 seed and will meet fourth-seeded Virginia (18-6) on Saturday night.

Talented trio helps Bears earn top seed

Associated Press

There really are no tougher matchups for Baylor guards Jared Butler, Davion Mitchell and MaCio Teague than in those long hours they spend in the gym going 1-on-1 against each other.

It is a difficult matchup for opposing teams when that trio is on the court together for the Bears, the Big 12 champions and a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament for the first time.

"I think that it comes from chemistry. Just off the court, we want to see one another do great," Mitchell said. "We all knew we had to sacrifice just because we all knew how good we could be. Each one of us could score 20 (points) every night. That's what makes our team great. Everyone had to sacrifice something."

Butler is the first Baylor player ever to be a first-team AP All-American and was also the AP Big 12 player of the year. The 6-foot-3 junior, who bypassed the chance for early entry in last year's NBA Draft, averages 17.1 points a game while leading the conference in three-point shooting and steals.

Teague, who averages 16.2 points, is the fifth-year senior who in his final home game tied a

school record with 10 made three-pointers while scoring 35 points. He is also the nation's only player with more than 1,500 career points, 500 rebounds, 250 assists, 125 steals and 250 made threes.

Mitchell, a third-team AP All-American, is the lightning-quick guard who averages 14.1 points a game and leads the Big 12 with his 51.5% field-goal shooting; Butler and Teague both shoot nearly 49% from the field to rank fourth and fifth. Mitchell has also earned the nickname "Off Night" for his reputation as a defender and making it tough on whoever he is going against in a game.

"I think it's the most sacrificial group of guys I've been around. Sacrificing their time in the gym to be better for the team, sacrificing stats for the betterment of the team, just sacrificing egos, and that's a hard thing to do among 20 and 21-year-old men," Butler said. "Everybody across the board has had to sacrifice something, and we've all done that. ... It's truly a blessing to be around this group of guys."

All three guards got to Baylor after starting college at other schools, and all are expected to be playing their final games for the

Bears (22-2) in the NCAA Tournament. Their first-round game is Friday against Hartford (15-8) at Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis.

Butler initially signed with Alabama, and enrolled in school there during the summer of 2018, but never took part in any off-season workouts before getting released from his letter of intent and going to Baylor.

While Butler was able to play immediately for the Bears, and averaged 10.2 points as a freshman, the other guards had to red-shirt that 2018-19 season after transferring. Mitchell played 34 games as a freshman at Auburn, and Teague had started 66 of his 67 games over two seasons at UNC Asheville.

The Bears are 48-6 in the two seasons since Mitchell and Teague became eligible to play. Baylor set a Big 12 record with a 23-game winning streak last year, and its 18-0 start this season was the best in school history on the way to the school's first conference title in any league since 1950.

"It really goes back to the character and makeup of them individually because they do care about the team, they care about

winning. It's not about their stats, their accolades," coach Scott Drew said. "Knowing one guy gets to bring the ball up, they all do a great job sharing, rotating and making sure everybody has a feel. ... They're concerned for each other, and concerned for winning, and knowing we're a much better team when all three are clicking."

During that season when Mitchell and Teague were having to red-shirt, and unable to play for the Bears, they were constantly going against each other in ultracompetitive 1-on-1 matchups after hard workouts with coaches. Every shot taken by the 6-foot-2 Mitchell was contested by Teague's impressive 6-11 wing span — seven inches more than how tall he is.

"It's definitely helped me offensively to be able to create my shot off the bounce," Mitchell said. "And for him, I mean, I think I'm a pretty good defender, so I just make it hard for him. And you can see he can do things off the bounce. He became a better defender, just by those 1-on-1 sessions. He made it hard for me sometimes just keeping me away from the basket.... Just playing MaCio 1-on-1 help me."

Do Winthrop, Colgate need a change of pace?

Associated Press

Winthrop coach Pat Kelsey says he learned his philosophy of basketball while playing for the late Skip Prosser at Xavier in the 1990s.

"He had a famous quote that he said all the time," Kelsey recalled. "The older he got, the faster he wanted to play. I think that applies to me."

The 45-year-old Kelsey watched his Winthrop squad win the Big South while ranking 11th among all Division I teams in adjusted tempo, according to college basketball stats guru Ken Pomeroy. Adjusted tempo measures the number of pos-

sessions a team would have per 40 minutes against an opponent with an average tempo. The only NCAA Tournament teams ranked higher in that category are Gonzaga and Alabama.

Winthrop (23-1) and Colgate (14-1), which ranks second nationally in scoring, are two of the more exciting NCAA Tournament teams from one-bid leagues because they play fast. Now they're ready to see how they fare against quality teams from stronger conferences.

Their first-round matchups suggest that Winthrop's best hope for success against Villanova (16-6) is to keep doing

what it's done all season. Colgate may have to adapt its style to knock off Arkansas (22-6).

If Colgate tries to run, it could be playing right into the Razorbacks' hands. Although Colgate ranks fifth among all NCAA Tournament teams in adjusted tempo, Arkansas is fourth in the same category.

"During the Patriot League schedule ... it benefited us to play faster, get more shots up and try to run the score up," Colgate guard Jordan Burns said. "We didn't believe that a lot of teams had guys like ours, where we could score in a bunch of different ways every

single night. Going against Arkansas, obviously, we're going to have a different game plan. It's not a Patriot League team. It's not to say we won't do what we do, but it just may look a little different."

Colgate is one of the more mysterious teams in this tournament because it has faced only five opponents all season and hasn't played anyone outside its league. The Raiders do have some confidence based on their 2019 NCAA Tournament experience, when Burns scored 32 points as Colgate was tied midway through the second half before falling 77-70 to Tennessee.

Doncic, Mavs gain split with Clippers

Associated Press

DALLAS — Luka Doncic thrilled the crowd early with a four-point play after getting fouled by Kawhi Leonard, then turned for a lengthy acknowledgement of those fans after one of several late buckets that helped keep Dallas comfortably in front.

In a two-game set with the feel of a playoff series, the Mavericks got the split behind their young sensation.

Doncic scored 42 points, and Dallas answered a loss against its first-round playoff opponent from last season, beating the Los Angeles Clippers 105-89 on Wednesday night.

Josh Richardson scored 14 points and was a defensive spark as the Mavericks followed a 109-99 defeat two nights earlier and won the season series, 2-1. The other Dallas victory was by 51 points in LA three games into the season in December, about four months after the Clippers finished off the Mavs in six games in the NBA's playoff bubble.

"They're a really good defen-

sive team," said Doncic, who was 16-for-28 from the field, including 6-for-11 from three-point range. "It's kind of tough, back-to-back games like the playoffs. That's why we've got to be ready for the playoffs if we make it."

Paul George had 28 points for Los Angeles, including a pair of three-pointers in the final minute of the third quarter that cut a 12-point deficit in half going to the fourth.

Bucks 109, 76ers 105: Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 10 of his 32 points in overtime to lead Milwaukee to a win in Philadelphia in a matchup of two of the Eastern Conference's best teams.

Antetokounmpo finished with 15 rebounds and five assists, ending a streak of three straight triple-doubles. The Bucks pulled within 1½ games of the East-leading 76ers.

Nets 125, Pacers 115: James Harden had 40 points, 15 assists and 10 rebounds for his 11th triple-double of the season, leading Brooklyn to a win at Indiana.

The Nets were without fellow All-Stars Kyrie Irving (groin) and Kevin Durant (hamstring) and newcomer Blake Griffin (knee).

Harden hit a runner in the lane to tie it at 96 early in the fourth. That started a 13-4 run that included Harden's three-pointer and another layup that pushed it to 109-100.

Warriors 108, Rockets 94: Draymond Green had 16 points, 12 rebounds and 10 assists for his third triple-double of the season and Golden State handed host Houston its franchise-record 18th straight loss.

The Rockets' skid surpasses the 17 straight losses by the San Diego Rockets in 1968, when they went 15-67 in their first year as a franchise. It's the first time Houston has lost nine consecutive home games since it dropped 11 straight in 1983.

Cavaliers 117, Celtics 110: Collin Sexton scored 29 points, Darius Garland added 25 and Cleveland's young guards made big plays down the stretch to beat visiting Boston.

The Cavs ended a four-game

losing streak and a nine-game skid against the Celtics.

Nuggets 129, Hornets 104: Nikola Jokic had 12 points, 10 rebounds and 10 assists for another triple-double, Michael Porter Jr. added 28 points and host Denver beat Charlotte.

Jokic has 10 triple-doubles this season and 51 overall.

Grizzlies 89, Heat 85: Ja Morant dribbled the length of the court for a tiebreaking layup with 1.2 seconds left to lift Memphis past visiting Miami.

Kings 121, Wizards 119: De'Aaron Fox scored 28 points and hit a jumper over Bradley Beal with 0.7 seconds remaining to lift Sacramento to a win at Washington.

Spurs 106, Bulls 99: Jakob Poeltl tied a career high with 20 points and set one with 16 rebounds and San Antonio used a huge fourth quarter to win at Chicago.

Pistons 116, Raptors: Sadiq Bey had 28 points and 12 rebounds and host Detroit overcame Norman Powell's 43 points to beat Toronto.

Rangers score 7 goals in second period, rout Flyers

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Mika Zibanejad had three goals and three assists in New York's seven-goal second period and the Rangers beat the Philadelphia Flyers 9-0 on Wednesday night.

Pavel Buchnevich had two goals and two assists — all in the second period — and Brendan Lemieux, Artemi Panarin, Jacob Trouba and Filip Chytil also scored in New York's most decisive victory since beating New Jersey 9-0 on March 31, 1986.

Alexandar Georgiev stopped 26 shots for his sixth career shutout.

The Rangers were without head coach David Quinn and assistants Jacques Martin, David Oliver and Greg Brown due to NHL COVID-19 protocols. Hartford Wolf Pack coach Kris Knoblauch and associate head coach Gord Murphy, and Rangers associate general manager Chris Drury were

behind the bench.

Brian Elliott started in goal for Philadelphia and allowed five goals on 13 shots before being replaced midway through the second period as the Flyers lost for the third time in four games.

Zibanejad scored three consecutive goals in a 10:10 span of the second for his fifth career hat trick.

Oilers 7, Flames 3: NHL scoring leader Connor McDavid had a goal and two assists and Edmonton won at Calgary to split the two-game series.

McDavid has 18 goals and leads the NHL with 38 assists and 56 points.

Kings 4, Blues 1: Drew Doughty, Carl Grundstrom and Trevor Moore scored in a dominant first period, leading host Los Angeles past St. Louis.

Moore had a goal and an assist for his first multipoint game of the season, while cap-

tain Anze Kopitar scored an empty-net goal from the opposite goal line and added an assist. Cal Petersen made 19 saves to end his five-start losing streak.

Jets 4, Canadiens 3 (OT): Nikolaj Ehlers scored at 55 seconds of overtime to push Winnipeg past visiting Montreal.

Kyle Connor scored twice, Blake Wheeler connected on the first shot of the game, and Connor Hellebuyck made 33 saves.

Knights 5, Sharks 4: Ryan Reaves broke a tie during a run of four straight Vegas goals in the third period in a defeat of visiting San Jose.

Canucks 3, Senators 2 (SO): Adam Gaudette scored in a shootout to lift Vancouver to a win at Ottawa.

Bo Horvat had a goal and an assist, Brock Boeser also scored in regulation and Thatcher Demko made 30 saves for the Canucks.