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Pentagon to pay for trans soldier's surgery

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon for the first time will pay for a U.S. servicemember's gender reassignment surgery Tuesday after the operation was deemed "medically necessary," a spokeswoman said.

The servicemember underwent the surgery at a private hospital because military health facilities are not prepared to conduct such procedures, Pentagon spokeswoman Dana White said late Tuesday. It comes as debate continues about whether transgender men and women should be allowed to serve openly in the military and whether the Pentagon should foot the bill for their health care.

President Donald Trump announced in July that transgender men and women would no longer be allowed to serve in the military. He cited, among other concerns, the cost of their health care.

Trump gave military officials until March to implement his new policy. Until then, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis has ordered that transgender servicemembers continue serving as they had under then-President Barack Obama's policy allowing them to serve openly since June 2016.

"Because this servicemember had already begun a sex-reassignment course of

treatment, and the treating doctor deemed this surgery medically necessary, a waiver was approved by the director of the Defense Health Agency," White said in a statement. "The Supplemental Health Care Program will cover this surgery in accordance with the Department's interim guidance on transgender servicemembers."

The active-duty soldier underwent the operation in a Pennsylvania hospital, Acting Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy said Wednesday. The soldier's identity was not released, citing privacy laws. McCarthy said the soldier in August 2016 declared to the Army he was transgender and began the medical process, which an Army doctor determined would include sex-reassignment surgery to treat gender dysphoria.

NBC News, first to report the procedure, described the patient as an infantry soldier who earned a Combat Infantry Badge in Afghanistan in 2003 and identifies as a woman. The organization cited unnamed sources close to the soldier.

On July 27, Trump announced on Twitter a ban on transgender men and women serving in the military "in any capacity." The president wrote he had consulted with generals and military experts before reaching his conclusion. His announcement — made official by a White House memorandum about a month later — cited "tremendous

medical costs and disruption" to military units, but it caught top Pentagon officials by surprise.

That order reversed a year-old Obama administration policy allowing transgender individuals to serve openly and approving payments for surgeries and treatments deemed medically necessary. The White House order seeks to halt transgender individuals from enlisting in the military and to discharge those on active duty by March.

Mattis and Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told lawmakers they would support retaining transgender servicemembers who are qualified to serve in the military.

"I believe any individual who meets the physical and mental standards and is worldwide deployable and who is currently serving should be afforded the opportunity to continue to serve," Dunford told the Senate Armed Services Committee in September.

Mattis has convened a panel of experts to study the impact of transgender people in the military. That panel is due to make its recommendations by early next year, Mattis told reporters Monday.

A federal judge last month temporarily blocked Trump's ban, ruling the White House order was not based on facts and was meant only to discriminate against transgender people.

Army: No waivers for serious mental health issues

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Army has not and will not approve enlistment waivers for individuals with a history of self-mutilation or other documented serious mental health conditions, the Army's top general said Wednesday.

Gen. Mark Milley, the Army's chief of staff, said recruitment standards have not been adjusted to meet hefty ascension goals as the service looks to grow its force for the second consecutive year, calling a USA Today report that indicated the service would accept some indi-

viduals with past mental health issues "mischaracterized." The report cited internal Army documents and listed conditions including self-mutilation, bipolar disorder, depression or drug or alcohol abuse.

"The bottom line is there has been no change in standards," Milley said during a breakfast with reporters. "Since 2017, there has been no one to come into the Army that has not met the Department of Defense standards for behavioral health and/or personal conduct. When it says we are letting people in with a history of cutting themselves, of self-mutilation, that is not true. When it says we are

letting people in with serious mental health conditions, with bipolar disorder, that is not true."

The only change the Army has made is to lower the level at which ascension waivers for most issues must be approved, the service said in a statement following the USA Today report published Sunday. That change, moving the level of authorization from Army headquarters to U.S. Army Recruiting Command, was quietly implemented in August.

On Wednesday, Milley clarified it was not changing any categories of waivers that would be approved.

Acting Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy said he and Milley spoke Tuesday with Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., to clarify the issue. He said the Army had been assured by the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee that civilian nominees would not be held up over the reports. McCain earlier Tuesday had threatened such action, citing the USA Today report.

The Army is looking to recruit 18,000 new soldiers by September, but Milley said he has made clear that the quality of applicants is the priority over meeting recruiting goals.

Marines' Helmand success a template?

Los Angeles Times

LASHKAR GAH, Afghanistan — When U.S. Marines entered the Afghan military's operations control center at an airfield here in April, they found a scene of confusion.

Afghan officers were coordinating operations against Taliban insurgents using paper maps taped to the walls. They were uncertain of the locations of key mosques, hospitals, bridges — even their own ground troops.

The war was going badly in Helmand, one of Afghanistan's most volatile provinces and the deadliest for international forces in 16 years of hostilities. Since the Marines left in 2014 as part of a U.S. military drawdown, Afghan forces were losing scores of troops every month and had watched the Taliban march up to the outskirts of the provincial capital of Lashkar Gah, lobbing rockets inside the airfield.

Seven months after a Marine-led task force returned, Helmand has become one of the few bright spots in the Afghan War, offering a blueprint for President Donald Trump's troop surge, which will raise the number of American servicemembers training and advising Afghan soldiers and police from 11,000 to about 15,000.

At the outset, a few dozen Marines moved into a series of low-slung buildings at Bost airfield outside Lashkar Gah, which houses an Afghan army brigade, the provincial police headquarters and the regional military control center. The Marines converted a storage room into a mess hall where they dine on military rations or eggs and instant noodles. Afghans bring from a local market. Next door, separated by a chain-link fence, is the control center where Marines have helped Afghan officers replace static maps with Google Earth, plot civilian buildings and ground troops with multicolored icons, and process intelligence from the field.

"We've seen them exponentially increase their ability to manage the battle space because they can visualize it," said Maj. Paul Rivera, a Marine adviser

from Houston.

The U.S. military's Task Force Southwest, led by 300 Marine advisers, has revitalized Afghan forces and increased airstrikes during a sustained government offensive that has pushed the Taliban away from major towns and highways and eliminated the threat to Lashkar Gah, according to U.S. and Afghan officials.

While the Marines' deployment to Helmand took shape in the last months of the Obama administration, their mission encompasses one of the main goals of Trump's troop surge, which Pentagon officials say is to get U.S. mentors out of large bases and closer to where Afghans are fighting in order to have a greater impact on the battlefield.

"I think we're doing what's in the new strategy now, within the capability and capacity we have," said Brig. Gen. Roger Turner, commander of the task force based at Camp Shorab, a small outpost next to the sprawling emptiness of Camp Leatherneck, an abandoned base that once housed more than 20,000 NATO troops.

Roughly one-third of Turner's troops have previously served in the province, etched in Marine lore for the bloody battles fought here in 2010 and 2011. Some 350 Americans lost their lives helping Afghan forces secure key districts — only to see many fall back under Taliban influence after they withdrew.

The new mission is different. While U.S. special operations forces still conduct secret raids, the Marines in Helmand, like the rest of conventional U.S. troops in Afghanistan, don't patrol highways or visit mud-walled villages anymore. They advise government troops from inside military bases, provincial offices and operations centers lined with monitors streaming surveillance footage. That has meant far fewer U.S. military fatalities in Afghanistan — 13 this year compared with nearly 500 in 2010, when there were 10 times as many GIs here.

But in a bid to break what Pentagon officials have described as a stalemate in the 16-year war,

the Trump administration has expanded military commanders' authorities, potentially putting them at greater risk.

Trump has set no end date for the troop commitment, and Pentagon planners have declined to specify the numbers or destinations of the extra U.S. forces. That is a reversal from the Obama administration, which announced its intention to pull all U.S. troops out by 2014 before abandoning that plan when security deteriorated.

"The enduring commitment to Afghanistan is hugely impactful to our partners, and I think to the population it's the same thing," Turner said.

"I think they want us to be here and they want us to help make things better here. And I think it's had an impact on the enemy too, because now they can't just wait us out."

When Marines and British troops departed Helmand in October 2014, the Afghan army and police proved incapable of holding the Taliban at bay. Resources were slow to arrive from Kabul, and security forces complained of not being paid on time. Morale sank and desertions soared.

Crucially, without U.S. trainers, the Afghans could not request U.S. airstrikes. Holed up inside checkpoints, they were easy targets for insurgents who see Helmand as their cash cow: home to the poppy fields that produce more than three-quarters of the world's opium, the Taliban's most important source of revenue.

The month before the Marines withdrew in 2014, 39 soldiers from the Afghan army's 215th Corps in Helmand were killed in action, according to U.S. military figures. During the same month of the following year, that number soared to 115.

The commander of Afghan police in the province, Maj. Gen. Ghulam Daoud Tarakhel, saw his headquarters at Bost come under a steady barrage of rocket fire from insurgents poised at the city limits.

"We couldn't even stand outside," Tarakhel said. "Mortars would hit this spot from every

side."

A small Army-led task force deployed to Helmand last year and began re-establishing links with Afghan soldiers based next to Shorab. It soon became clear that the Afghan commander was a big part of the problem. Appointed to purge the ranks of "ghost soldiers" — who existed only on paper so that corrupt officials could pocket their salaries — the commander, Maj. Gen. M. Moein Faqir, was arrested early this year on charges including stealing money meant to buy food for his men.

The Marines rotated in with a simple mission: Keep Lashkar Gah from falling to the Taliban. They came just as a new Afghan commander was installed. Maj. Gen. Wali Mohammad Ahmadzai, a burly, no-nonsense officer, quickly forged a close relationship with Turner. He sometimes joined the blue-eyed, square-jawed general for strategy sessions over dinner at the Marines' cafeteria.

In May, Ahmadzai impressed the Marines when he rode at the front of a convoy of Afghan troops as they fought to dislodge insurgents from Marjah, the poppy-growing town where nearly 50 Americans died in a major 2010 battle. In the months that followed, Marines advised Afghan operations to push Taliban fighters out of districts surrounding Lashkar Gah.

In July, with American F-16 jets and Apache attack helicopters supplying airstrikes, Afghan soldiers and police recaptured Nawa, a large town south of Bost airfield. They took down Taliban flags and presented them to their Marine advisers as gifts.

"We have seen some good changes under my leadership," Ahmadzai said. "... And because the Marines have come back and supported us, we have been able to clear all the main roads in the province."

"The focus is security and defeating the Taliban," said Col. Matthew Reid, the task force's deputy commander. "(Fixing) governance, corruption, narcotics — that comes later. First you need to win the fight."

GOP targets health care mandate in revised tax bill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON—The Obama health care law's requirement that Americans get insurance coverage is now pinned as a target of Republican lawmakers, as they look to end the individual mandate to help pay for deep cuts in their tax legislation.

Senate Republicans showed Tuesday they're intent on scrapping the Affordable Care Act's insurance mandate, and the idea was endorsed by scores of GOP lawmakers in the House.

Sen. Orrin Hatch, chairman of the Finance Committee, confirmed late Tuesday he was revising the bill to include repeal of the insurance mandate "to help provide additional relief to low- and middle-income families."

The surprise renewal of the failed effort to eliminate the health care law's mandate came a day after President Donald Trump renewed pressure on Republican lawmakers to include the repeal in their sweeping legislation to revamp the tax system. It carries high political stakes for Trump, who lacks a major legislative achievement after nearly 10 months in office.

The move by Republicans on the Senate Finance Committee upended the debate over the tax measure just as it was inching closer to passage following months of fine-tuning and compromise. It turned the debate into an angry partisan referendum on health care and President Barack Obama's signature law, the Affordable Care Act.

The completed House tax bill, pointed toward a vote in that chamber Thursday, does not include repeal of the health insurance mandate. Trump plans an in-person appeal to House Republicans before the vote.

Promoted as needed relief for the middle class, the House and Senate tax overhaul bills would deeply cut corporate rates, double the standard deduction used by most Americans and limit or repeal completely the federal deduction for state and local property, income and sales taxes. Republican leaders deem passage of the tax overhaul as imperative for the GOP.

End to 2011 budget caps is needed for \$700B defense bill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Republicans and Democrats joined forces Tuesday to decisively approve a defense policy bill that authorizes \$700 billion to restock what lawmakers have described as a depleted U.S. military and counter North Korea's advancing nuclear weapons program.

Lawmakers voted 356-70 to pass the legislation, with 127 Democrats backing it. Once the defense bill clears the Senate, which is expected this week, the bill will be sent to President Donald Trump for his signature.

The policy bill grants U.S. troops a 2.4 percent pay raise, which is slightly higher than the wage increase the Pentagon had proposed. Lawmakers also

approved an increase of more than 20,000 active-duty and reserve troops from last year's level. The Army gets the largest boost: 7,500 more active-duty soldiers and 1,000 additional reserve troops.

The defense bill for the 2018 fiscal year allots some \$634 billion for core Pentagon operations and nearly \$66 billion for wartime missions in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and elsewhere. The funding boost pays for more troops, jet fighters, ships and other weapons needed to halt an erosion of combat readiness, according to the bill's backers.

Trump's 2018 request sought \$603 billion for basic functions and \$65 billion for overseas missions. But securing the higher amounts remains contingent upon Congress agreeing to roll back a 2011 law that set strict

limits on most federal spending. Lifting the budget caps will face resistance from Democrats who also are seeking to increase the budgets for domestic agencies.

The defense legislation includes \$12.3 billion for the Pentagon's Missile Defense Agency and orders a more rapid buildup of the nation's missile defenses as Pyongyang has refused to back away from developing nuclear missiles capable of striking the U.S. The bill includes money for as many as 28 additional Ground-Based Interceptors, anti-missile missiles that would be launched from underground silos in Alaska in the event the U.S. decided to try to shoot down a North Korean missile heading toward the U.S. outside the Earth's atmosphere.

Study finds negative effects of military's abortion policy

BY WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

The U.S. military's restrictive abortion policy has had negative effects on servicewomen's health, careers, finances and emotional wellbeing, according to a study released this week.

The study — published Wednesday in the journal *Perspectives on Sexual and Reproductive Health* — conducted in-depth interviews in 2015 and 2016 with 21 women who had abortions while on active duty within the previous two years. The women, both officers and enlisted personnel, ranged from ages 19 to 34 and were in the Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps.

Federal law allows military medical facilities to provide abortions only in cases of rape, incest or when a woman's life is in danger. Tricare, the

military's health program for servicemembers and their families, covers abortions only for those same circumstances.

"Many of the women we spoke with had expected that the military would provide abortion care or at least counseling and had been surprised — and in some cases angered — when they were turned away," said Kate Grindlay, co-author of the study and a researcher at Ibis Reproductive Health in Cambridge, Mass.

The lack of awareness of the policy in some cases led to delays in care.

Experiences of active-duty women with abortion have been little studied, Grindlay said.

It's all the more important because U.S. servicewomen have a higher rate of unintended pregnancy than their civilian counterparts.

A previous study based on statistics from 2011 found the unintended pregnancy rate for active-duty women was 72 per 1,000 women ages 18 to 44, compared with a civilian rate of 45 per 1,000 for ages 15 to 44.

While a study of this type, based on interviews with a small group of women, can't be generalized across the military, "it does speak to some common experiences that women do face," Grindlay said.

Many of the women interviewed "felt a lack of support from the military when they were seeking an abortion, often expressing that they felt abandoned or were left to navigate on their own during what is perhaps one of the most challenging times in their lives," Grindlay said.

Ala. GOP gets more heat for Moore stance

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — D.C. Republicans are tightening pressure on Alabama's GOP to keep a defiant Roy Moore from being elected to the Senate next month. Many are voicing hope that President Donald Trump could use his clout to resolve a problem that Republicans say leaves them with no easy options.

With Alabama Republicans reluctant to block Moore and enrage his legions of loyal conservative supporters, national GOP leaders were turning to Trump as their best chance of somehow turning the tide. Two women by name have said Moore molested them in the 1970s when one was 14 and the other 16 and he was a local district attorney, and three others said he pursued romantic relationships with them around the same time.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, in all-out political warfare with Moore, said there'd be conversations about the anti-establishment firebrand now that Trump is back from Asia.

"He's obviously not fit to be in the United States Senate and we've looked at all the options to try to prevent that from happening," said McConnell, who said on Monday that he believed Moore's accusers.

At the "God Save America" Conference on Tuesday in Jackson, Ala., Moore said there is a "spiritual battle" going on in American politics.

"Why do you think they're giving me this trouble?" he asked the Baptist church audience. "Why do you think I'm being harassed in the media and people (are) pushing for an allegation in the last 28 days of the election?"

Twice removed from the state Supreme Court chief justice post, Moore's candidacy in the Dec. 12 special election confronts Republicans with two damaging outcomes: A victory saddles GOP senators with a colleague accused of abusing and harassing teenagers, a liability heading into the 2018 congressional elections; a victory by Democrat Doug Jones would slice the already-narrow GOP Senate majority to an unwieldy 51-49.

'Bloodless correction' looks like military coup in Zimbabwe

Associated Press

HARARE, Zimbabwe — Zimbabwe's army said Wednesday it has President Robert Mugabe and his wife in custody and was securing government offices and patrolling the capital's streets following a night of unrest that included a military takeover of the state broadcaster.

The night's action triggered speculation of a coup, but the military's supporters praised it as a "bloodless correction." South Africa's president said he spoke with Mugabe, who was "fine" but confined to his home.

For the first time, this southern African nation is seeing the military oppose Mugabe, 93,

the world's oldest head of state and one of the longest-serving authoritarian rulers. Mugabe has been in power since Zimbabwe's independence from white minority rule in 1980.

The whiplash developments followed Mugabe's firing of his deputy, which had appeared to position the first lady, Grace Mugabe, to replace Emmerson Mnangagwa as one of the country's two vice presidents at a party conference next month. But the first lady has proved unpopular among some Zimbabweans, and Mnangagwa had significant support from the military. It was not clear Wednesday where Mnangagwa was though he fled the country

last week, citing threats to him and his family.

Armed soldiers in armored personnel carriers stationed themselves at key points in Harare, while Zimbabweans formed long lines at banks to draw the limited cash available, a routine chore in the country's ongoing financial crisis. People looked at their phones to read about the army takeover, and others went to work or to shops.

In an address after taking control of Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corp., Maj. Gen. Sibusiso Moyo said early Wednesday the military is targeting "criminals" around Mugabe, and sought to reassure the country that order will be restored.

Calif. gunman who killed 4 was out on bail

Associated Press

RANCHO TEHAMA, Calif. — The gunman behind a rampage in Northern California was out on bail charged with stabbing a neighbor, others had complained about him firing hundreds of rounds from his house, and he had been the subject of a domestic violence call the day before the attack.

Yet Kevin Neal was free and able to use a semiautomatic rifle and two handguns Tuesday to shoot 14 people, killing four, in seven locations across his rural community, including an elementary school, before he died in a shootout with police.

It's not yet clear what the terms of Neal's bail were and whether he would have been allowed to possess and fire the weapons on his property at the end of a dirt road in Rancho Tehama. Nor did sheriff's officials give details on the domestic violence call.

But his many contacts with authorities raised questions of why he was out of custody and able to go on the 45-minute rampage that began with the killing of two neighbors in an

apparent act of revenge before he went looking for random victims.

The gunman's sister, Sheridan Orr, said her brother had struggled with mental illness throughout his life and at times had a violent temper.

She said Neal had "no business" owning firearms.

Tehama County Assistant Sheriff Phil Johnston said the shooter was facing charges of assaulting one of the feuding neighbors in January and that she had a restraining order against him.

Johnston did not comment on the shooter's access to firearms.

Neal's mother told The Associated Press her son, who was a marijuana grower, was in a long-running dispute with neighbors he believed were cooking methamphetamine.

The mother, who spoke on condition she be named only as Anne because she fears for her safety, lives in Raleigh, N.C., where she raised Neal. She said she posted his \$160,000 bail and spent \$10,000 on a lawyer after he was arrested in January for stabbing a neighbor.

Neal's mother said the neighbor was slightly cut after Neal grabbed a steak knife out of the hand of the neighbor who was threatening him with it.

She wept as she told the AP she spoke to Neal on the phone on Monday.

"Mom it's all over now," she said he told her. "I have done everything I could do and I am fighting against everyone who lives in this area."

Police said surveillance video shows the shooter unsuccessfully trying to enter a nearby elementary school after quick-thinking staff members locked the outside doors and barricaded themselves inside when they heard gunshots.

Johnston said the gunman spent about six minutes shooting into Rancho Tehama Elementary School before driving off to continue shooting elsewhere. Johnston said one student was shot but is expected to survive.

He said the 45-minute rampage ended when a patrol car rammed the stolen vehicle the shooter was driving and an officer killed him in a shootout

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Woman, 82, rescued from sinking vehicle

FL PLANT CITY — Two deputies rescued an elderly Florida woman from a sinking car that had landed in a pond.

News outlets reported that Hillsborough County sheriff's deputies Benjamin Thompson and Trent Miguez responded to the scene Saturday evening and pulled Leona Evans, 82, from her SUV. The Florida Highway Patrol said Evans had veered off the road, hit a traffic marker, flown across an embankment through a fence and landed in the pond.

The deputies spoke with witnesses who were trying to help Evans, and Thompson jumped into the water and smashed a car window with his baton. The car went under, but Miguez and bystanders were able to pull Thompson and Evans out of the water.

Evans was hospitalized with serious injuries. Thompson sustained minor cuts.

Man gets his 11th DWI hours after jail release

NM SANTA FE — A New Mexico man is facing his 11th drunken-driving charge after police said he led them in a high-speed chase — 10 hours after his release from jail on another DWI conviction.

The Santa Fe New Mexican reported that police said Henry Gonzales, 43, led officers on a chase that reached 75 mph on city streets in the early-morning hours of Nov. 4. Police said officers had to use a stun gun during the arrest. According to a criminal complaint, there was an open bottle of Crown Royal on the passenger seat of Gonzales' car.

Gonzales last was convicted

of DWI for an incident in May 2016. In that case, records show, he also led city police on a high-speed chase.

Car hits musher's dogs, then flees the scene

AK ANCHORAGE — Six-time Iditarod finisher Wade Marrs said one of his dogs suffered a broken leg after a car hit his team and then drove away.

KTUU-TV reported that rookie Iditarod musher Andrew Nolan was running Marrs' team on Friday when an oncoming vehicle hit the dogs. Marrs said his 2-year-old lead dog, Sockeye, was taken to an emergency clinic by passers-by while Nolan drove the rest of the team home.

Marrs said Sockeye's X-rays show she suffered an oblique displaced fracture, which usually can be surgically repaired. He said Sockeye will be out for the rest of the season but might be able to return next year.

Students quizzed on 'boy toys,' 'trophy wives'

VA HOPEWELL — Middle school students in a Virginia home-economics class were mistakenly given a worksheet that quizzed them on what an extramarital affair is as well as "boy toy" and "trophy wife."

WTVR reported Monday that the teacher at the school outside Richmond had downloaded the worksheet from the internet. The superintendent for Hopewell city schools said it was never part of the curriculum.

Parents at Carter G. Woodson Middle School were angry. The "Family Quiz" worksheet was assigned Friday in a Family & Consumer Sciences class.

It began with questions such as, "What do you call the father of your father?"

But questions also asked: "What do you call it when a married person has a relationship with someone else?" and "What do you call the much younger boyfriend of an older woman?"

Aggravated assault charge in fry pan attack

SD SIOUX FALLS — A Sioux Falls woman is facing an aggravated assault charge after police said she hit a man in the head with a frying pan.

Police say the 49-year-old woman apparently didn't like the man's singing and struck him at her home Saturday afternoon. The victim and a friend left and called police.

KSFY-TV said his injuries weren't serious. Authorities said drugs or alcohol were not involved.

Police in fatal shooting called 'trigger happy'

RI PROVIDENCE — The brother of a man shot dead by police on a busy stretch of Interstate 95 said the officers were "trigger happy" and "screwed up" when they shot him.

Lucas Tiberio told The Providence Journal that he thinks his older brother, Joseph Santos, 32, was scared after turning a corner in his life.

Santos was driving a white pickup truck Thursday when he led police on a high-speed chase through Providence. At the time, police were looking for another man who had stolen a state police cruiser, and they had a report that the man was seen getting into the bed of a white pickup.

Trial begins in case of beating death over beer

PA PITTSBURGH — A nonjury homicide trial has begun in the case of a western Pennsylvania man accused of having beaten his roommate to death a year ago for stealing some beer.

Justin Vankirk, 35, is on trial before an Allegheny County judge in the November 2016 death of Charles Parker, 58.

Police said the Brentwood resident told investigators that he confronted his roommate about stolen beer and fought with him, then left him lying on the floor and went to bed.

He said he returned home the next afternoon and found Parker not breathing. Police said they also found a picture of the beaten victim on Vankirk's cellphone.

10th person at sheriff's office arrested this year

FL JACKSONVILLE — Authorities said a veteran Jacksonville Sheriff's Office deputy has been charged in a domestic violence case, the 10th sheriff's office employee to be arrested this year.

The Florida Times-Union reported that patrol officer Lenell Boyer, 51, was charged with domestic battery after allegedly biting his wife on her wrist and fingers. Officials said Boyer has been reassigned to a desk job.

Boyer's arrest comes just weeks after the sheriff's office wrapped up its Domestic Violence Awareness Month campaign.

From wire reports

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Allen sparks Duke against Spartans

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Forget about Marvin Bagley III and the rest of Duke's talented freshmen for a moment.

Grayson Allen can play a little, too.

Allen scored a career-high 37 points, Trevon Duval had 17 points and 10 assists, and the top-ranked Blue Devils beat No. 2 Michigan State 88-81 in the Champions Classic on Tuesday night.

On a court full of some of college basketball's brightest stars, Allen — Duke's only senior, who was joined by four freshmen in the starting lineup — stepped up whenever his team needed a big play. The Blue Devils (3-0) lost Bagley to a right eye injury midway through the first half, but Allen made five three-pointers and scored 23 points in the second half to help make up for the missing phenom.

"I've played in 90 more games than the four teammates that are out there with me," Allen said. "I feel a little more comfortable and calm and confident out there. Watching a lot of film of me my last two years, it's good sometimes to go 100 mph, but it's also good to slow it down a few times, so

that's the adjustment I've tried to make and I think it makes me more comfortable out there."

Wendell Carter Jr. added 12 points and 12 rebounds, helping Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski improve to 12-1 in his career against Michigan State.

"It's not a thing. You don't get any banners for a record against one school or against another coach," Krzyzewski said, brushing away any talk about his record against the Spartans. "Our program is about winning against everybody if we can."

Miles Bridges, Jaren Jackson Jr. and Nick Ward each scored 19 points for Michigan State, which blocked 12 shots — just one shy of the school record. The Spartans (1-1) shot 51 percent from the field, but were outrebounded 46-34 by the long and athletic Blue Devils. They also struggled at times with Duke's 2-3 zone.

"Never in a million years did I think we would get outrebounded like that," coach Tom Izzo said.

The 42nd meeting of the top two schools in The Associated Press poll since 1949 lived up to its pregame hype, with Duke

and Michigan State exchanging runs for most of the night at the home of the NBA's Chicago Bulls. Each team had its sloppy moments typical of a mid-November game, but they also brought the crowd to its feet several times with an array of impressive jams and emphatic rejections at the rim.

Cassius Winston drove the lane and passed to Kenny Goins for a dunk that gave Michigan State a 75-73 lead with 4:12 left. But Carter responded with a rebound slam at the other end and Allen set up Gary Trent Jr.'s tiebreaking three-pointer with 3:11 to go.

Allen added two more threes in the final 2½ minutes and Javin DeLaurier's break-away dunk made it 86-77 with 50 seconds left, putting the Spartans away for good.

"We just got killed on the rebounds and that's unacceptable for a team with our size," Bridges said.

Bagley began his college career with a pair of impressive performances, but he had a short stay in his first game against a marquee opponent. He was held out after he was swiped in the face by DeLaurier with 10:09 left in the first half.

Top 25 basketball roundup

KU holds off Kentucky for Self's 418th win

Associated Press

CHICAGO — A chance to build some Self-awareness was too much for Kansas to pass up. Beating a marquee program was a nice little bonus.

Svi Mykhailiuk scored 17 points, and Devonte Graham hit the clinching free throws to give No. 4 Kansas a 65-61 victory over No. 7 Kentucky on Tuesday night that put Coach Bill Self in a tie for second with Roy Williams on the Jayhawks' all-time wins list.

"It's an all win and no lose game cause nobody is going to look at it and say well, you lost to Kentucky or you lost to Duke or Michigan State and have it be a negative," Self said after his team scrapped for the win in a seesaw game. "I think what this game does early in the season — if you can stand to watch it, because I know that wasn't very pretty — I think what this game is it obviously gives you

confidence, but it makes you more aware of who you are and I think that's always good."

In a game that matched the two winningest Division I programs, the Jayhawks (2-0) prevailed after the two teams spent most of the second half trading baskets and leads.

Malik Newman had a key rebound in the closing seconds and hit two foul shots to help Kansas knock off the Wildcats (2-1).

Mykhailiuk hit three three-pointers. Udoka Azubuike scored 13 points. Newman scored 12 and Graham had 11, helping Self pick up his 418th win at Kansas to tie Williams for second behind Phog Allen (519).

"We had already discussed in the huddle, we needed three stops," Newman said. "I think that was like the second or third one, so I mean it was just all about getting stops like coach said and I mean we knew

we couldn't give up (any) second shots, so it was all out for all the rebounds and just went after it."

Kevin Knox scored 20 and nailed three threes for Kentucky (2-1). Hamidou Diallo added 14 points. But the Wildcats came up short after rallying to beat Utah Valley and hanging on for a four-point win against Vermont.

"We really fought tonight. A lot of people had us losing this game at least by 20, 30 points," Knox said. "But we said before the game it wasn't (going to) happen. They're a veteran team. We're a really young team. A lot of people thought they had the advantage. But tonight we really fought our butts off."

No. 5 Villanova 113, Nicholls 77: Mikal Bridges set career highs with 23 points and four blocks, and host Villanova swatted away a school-record 13 shots.

Donte DiVincenzo added 20 points, Jalen Brunson had 17 and the Wildcats (2-0) had six players in double figures while shooting 58 percent from the field in their second straight blowout of an inferior opponent.

No. 17 Gonzaga 106, Howard 69: Freshman Zach Norvell Jr. scored 18 points and freshman Corey Kispert added 13 for host Gonzaga.

Johnathan Williams and Rui Hachimura each scored 12 points for Gonzaga (2-0).

No. 19 Purdue 86, Marquette 71: Seven-foot-2 center Isaac Haas scored 22 points, and visiting Purdue capitalized on its size advantage in the paint.

Carsen Edwards had 15 points, while Vince Edwards added 10 points and eight rebounds for the Boilermakers (3-0).

Tide, Tigers sit atop latest CFP rankings

Associated Press

Alabama and Clemson are back on top of the College Football Playoff rankings, the ninth time in the past three seasons that the Crimson Tide and Tigers have held the first two spots in some order.

Alabama was the selection committee's new No. 1 on Tuesday night, with Clemson up two spots to No. 2. Miami and Oklahoma followed, joining the top four for the first time this season. Wisconsin was fifth and Auburn was up to sixth.

Alabama and Clemson have met in the past two national championship games, with each winning one. If they win out, there is a good chance they could enter the postseason positioned to make it three straight title game matchups.

The Crimson Tide had been second behind Georgia in the first two selection committee rankings, but the Bulldogs and previously No. 3 Notre Dame were beaten last weekend, opening up the top for changes.

Unbeaten Miami jumped from seventh to third and along with Clemson gave the Atlantic Coast Conference two top-four teams for the first time in

the four-year College Football Playoff era.

Oklahoma moved up one spot.

Unbeaten Wisconsin moved up from eighth and is the highest-ranked Big Ten team. Auburn is the highest-ranked team with two losses.

Georgia is seventh and Notre Dame is eighth.

Ohio State is back in the top 10 after an impressive victory against Michigan State, and Penn State is 10th. Southern California at 11th is the highest-ranked Pac-12 team.

Central Florida climbed to No. 15, making the undefeated Knights the highest-ranked team from a Group of Five conference. The highest-ranked conference champion from outside the Power Five is guaranteed a spot in the New Year's Six bowls.

Who's in control?

There were complaints from Miami and Oklahoma fans about being stuck behind Clemson. Committee chairman Kirby Hocutt, the athletic director at Texas Tech, said Clemson's six victories against teams with winning records gave the Ti-

gers the nod.

He added that the impact of Clemson's loss to Syracuse (4-6) has been mitigated by injuries hampering Tigers quarterback Kelly Bryant in that game. Bryant came into the game with a sore ankle that hobbled him and he missed the second half with a concussion.

"That continues to be a factor in our discussions of Clemson," Hocutt said.

He also pointed out that Miami not having a road win against a winning team worked against the Hurricanes and that Oklahoma's loss to Iowa State (6-4) at home was weighing down the Sooners a bit.

Argue about the order all you like but here's the bottom line: Clemson and Miami will play in the ACC title game on Dec. 2, and barring a big upset or two before they get there, it's a playoff play-in game.

Oklahoma can rest easy, too. The Sooners should be fine if they win out and are Big 12 champions.

And now Wisconsin has to be feeling better, too. If the ACC teams take care of each other, that should clear up a spot for the Badgers if they can keep

winning.

Auburn gets a crack at Alabama and, if it wins the Iron Bowl, another game against Georgia for the SEC title. So the Tigers don't have to worry about anyone but themselves.

Georgia can still win the SEC by either paying back Auburn or beating Alabama. The Bulldogs' path is clear.

After that it gets complicated. Notre Dame can finish 10-2 and add victories against Navy and Stanford to a résumé that is already solid with wins over USC, Michigan State and North Carolina State. But the Irish are going to need some upsets — maybe more than some — to jump back into the top four.

Then there is Ohio State. The Buckeyes can still win the Big Ten, and knocking off Wisconsin in the title game definitely gives Ohio State hope. But with two losses, including a lopsided one at Iowa, the Buckeyes could find themselves being compared to the losers of the SEC or ACC title game.

Still, considering how bad that debacle in Iowa City was two weeks ago, the Buckeyes have to like their situation.

Buffalo benches QB Taylor in favor of rookie Peterman

Associated Press

ORCHARD PARK, N.Y. — Rookie Nathan Peterman has replaced Tyrod Taylor as the Buffalo Bills' starting quarterback in an abrupt move coach Sean McDermott said he made in a bid to improve the team.

McDermott made the stunning announcement on Wednesday, when the Bills (5-4) returned to practice to prepare to play at the Los Angeles Chargers (3-6) on Sunday. The move comes after Peterman made his NFL debut in replacing Taylor for the final two drives of a 47-10 loss to New Orleans last weekend.

McDermott said he reached the decision on his own Tuesday in what became a change

of heart, after he backed Taylor as the starter immediately following the game and again on Monday.

"This is about becoming a better team," McDermott said. He would only say "we'll see," when asked if Peterman will remain the starter beyond this weekend.

It made no difference to McDermott in making a switch at the team's most important position at a time when Buffalo has a winning record while holding down the AFC's sixth and final playoff spot. The franchise is in the midst of a 17-year playoff drought — the longest active streak in North America's four major professional sports.

"We are 5-4, I understand that," McDermott said. "It is

always and will be for the time that I'm here about becoming the best team we can possibly become. We are made for more than 5-4, and I've come here to be more than 5-4."

Buffalo has lost two straight and Taylor has overseen an offense that ranks 28th in the NFL in yards offense and 30th in yards passing.

Taylor said he was shocked when informed of the decision, and acknowledged feeling somewhat betrayed, saying "that's one of the feelings."

"Obviously disappointed," Taylor said. "I don't agree with the decision, but ultimately coach McDermott has a vision for this team, what he feels is best for the team as well as the owner and GM. I have to move

forward and continue to be a teammate and a leader that I am in a different role."

Taylor has a 20-18 record since taking over as the Bills' starter in 2015. Though a dynamic runner, he's been inconsistent as a passer and is coming off the worst performance of his career.

He went 9-for-18 for 56 yards and an interception against the Saints. After Stephen Hauschka capped a nine-play, 57-yard opening drive with a 37-yard field goal, the Bills never crossed midfield over their next eight possessions.

The offense particularly sputtered during eight drives under Taylor in managing 99 net yards and four first downs.

NHL roundup

Sheary's OT goal lifts Pens over Sabres

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Sidney Crosby had been getting his chances. They just weren't going in the net.

That all changed against the Buffalo Sabres.

Crosby ended a long goal drought and assisted on Conor Sheary's game-winner 16 seconds into overtime as the Pittsburgh Penguins beat the Sabres 5-4 on Tuesday night.

"You're happy to see it go in the net," Crosby said. "There's a few more I probably could've had, but there were some good chances. As long as they're there, hopefully they'll start going in a little bit more."

Crosby scored his sixth of the season, Sheary had a pair of goals and Patric Hornqvist added one for Pittsburgh. Phil Kessel got his eighth of the season and has goals in four straight games. Kessel, the team's leading scorer, has at least one point in five consecutive games — and 16 of 20 this season.

Matt Murray made 28 saves for the Penguins, who won their sixth in a row at home.

Pittsburgh is 12-0-1 in its last 13 games against the Sabres, including seven straight wins at home.

Pittsburgh, which lost six of its previous eight games, played 13 of its first 19 on the road, including six back-to-backs, and is 4-7-2 away from home. The Penguins play 13 of their next 19 at home, where they have won six of their last seven.

"I thought it wasn't the prettiest game," Crosby said. "They're pretty skilled and can generate a lot, but I thought we stuck with it."

Wild 3, Flyers 0: Devan Dubnyk posted his third straight shutout with 30 saves and Nino Niederreiter scored 12 seconds into the game for host Minnesota in a win against Philadelphia.

Dubnyk's third shutout of the season stretched his scoreless streak to 195:05, breaking his mark of 183:16 set last season for the longest in team history. Dubnyk has stopped the last 103 shots he's faced.

Oilers 8, Golden Knights 2: Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Connor McDavid each had two goals for host Edmonton in a

victory over Vegas.

Oscar Klefbom, Patrick Maroon, Matt Benning and Mark Letestu also scored for the Oilers, who snapped a two-game skid. Cam Talbot stopped 22 shots.

Predators 6, Capitals 3: Mattias Ekholm and Kevin Fiala each had a goal and an assist to lead host Nashville past Washington for its fifth straight victory.

Craig Smith, Nick Bonino, Filip Forsberg and Miikka Salomaki also scored for Nashville. Pekka Rinne made 26 saves, and 12 players had at least one point for the Predators.

Blue Jackets 2, Canadiens 1 (OT): Zach Werenski scored 1:09 into overtime, lifting visiting Columbus over Montreal.

Josh Anderson had a goal 2:29 into the game for Columbus, and Sergei Bobrovsky made 28 saves, allowing only a goal to Paul Byron early in the third period.

Panthers 4, Stars 3 (SO): Jonathan Huberdeau had two power-play goals and Vincent Trocheck scored the winner in a shootout to lift host Florida over Dallas.

Aleksander Barkov scored in regulation and the shootout for the Panthers. Roberto Luongo stopped 40 shots, plus two more in the tiebreaker.

Jets 4, Coyotes 1: Connor Hellebuyck made 32 saves and host Winnipeg beat struggling Arizona for the second time in four days.

On a night when the Jets inducted Dale Hawerchuk into their Hall of Fame and lifted his No. 10 banner to the rafters, the home team easily handled the franchise that moved from Winnipeg to Arizona 21 years ago.

Canucks 3, Kings 2: Sven Baertschi scored the tiebreaking goal on a power play early in the third period and Vancouver wrapped up a four-game road trip by sending Los Angeles to its third consecutive loss.

Henrik Sedin and Bo Horvat scored second-period goals for the Canucks, who had lost two straight and five of seven. Anders Nilsson overcame a rough start to make 30 saves in his first appearance since Oct. 26 as Vancouver knocked off the Pacific Division leaders.

NBA roundup

Masked Irving leads Celtics to 13th straight victory

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Kyrie Irving really dislikes having to play in a mask.

On the other hand, he loves what comes next: Boston putting its 13-game winning streak on the line against the NBA champions.

"It's definitely an incredible streak we're on, and now comes the whole media frenzy of will the streak end, and what's going to happen on Thursday and the Golden State Warriors coming to Boston," Irving said. "So I'm looking forward to all

that hoopla."

Irving returned to the lineup and scored 25 points while wearing the mask, and the Celtics beat the Brooklyn Nets 109-102 on Tuesday night to remain unbeaten since an 0-2 start.

Marcus Morris added 21 points and 10 rebounds, and Jayson Tatum scored 19 points for the Celtics, who have the NBA's best record. Golden State is next at 11-3, and Boston got good preparation for the game against a persistent Brooklyn team.

"The way that they converted on us in transition after

our mistakes tonight, you can't have that against Golden State. You just get blown out of the gym," Celtics coach Brad Stevens said. "We just have to play really solid on both ends and do what we do as well as we can and see where we stand."

Irving missed one game with a minor facial fracture after he was hit by teammate Aron Baynes on Friday.

Raptors 129, Rockets 113: DeMar DeRozan scored 27 points and Toronto built a big lead in the first half and held on for a win over host Houston.

James Harden had 38 points

for the Rockets, who ended a six-game winning streak.

Spurs 97, Mavericks 91: LaMarcus Aldridge scored a season-high 32 points in his hometown and San Antonio beat host Dallas.

Aldridge, a product of Dallas' Seagoville High School, scored eight points during a decisive stretch of the fourth quarter. Patty Mills added a season-high 19 points for the Spurs.

Rookie Dennis Smith Jr. scored a career-high 27 points to lead Dallas, which is 2-13 for the second straight season.