

STARS AND STRIPES®

Saturday, November 18, 2017

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Investigation into phallic skywriting launched

The San Diego Union-Tribune

SAN DIEGO — The Navy has launched an investigation into the jet that sky-painted a giant penis over western Washington on Thursday.

“The actions of this air crew were wholly unacceptable. These actions were irresponsible, inexcusable, immature and antithetical to the core values of naval aviation and the Navy,” said Cmdr. Ron Flanders, spokesman of the San Diego-based Naval Air Forces.

Authorities have not named the crew of the EA-18G Growler crafting the phallic contrails, but Flanders indicated that the pilot was a lieutenant assigned to Electronic Attack Squadron 130, the “Zappers” out of Naval Air Station Whidbey Island, Wash.

Although the two-seater aircraft often includes a naval flight officer tasked with suppressing enemy radar and communications, the Navy has not said whether two sailors were involved in the incident or just the pilot, who has been grounded.

Both the Navy’s “Air Boss,” Vice Adm. Mike “Shoe” Shoemaker in Coronado and Adm. John Richardson, the Chief of Naval Operations at the Pentagon, have been briefed on the controversy, Flanders said.

Flanders apologized “to anyone who was offended by this” and said any aviators or ground crew found to have engaged in wrongdoing by investigators will be held accountable.

Typically, the Navy will convene a special board to determine the fates of aviators involved in aerial tomfoolery.

Often convened at the wing level, these boards can end the careers of naval pilots and flight officers.

Neither the U.S. Pacific Fleet’s Electronic Attack Wing at Whidbey Island nor Carrier Air Wing 3 in Virginia has announced the convening of a board, however, and the decisions often are secret.

Despite Trump’s call to expand fleet, Navy yet to release plan

Foreign Policy

In 2016, then-presidential candidate Donald Trump made the idea of building up a 350-ship Navy a cornerstone of his stump speech, complaining that the U.S. military was failing to meet the threat of potential adversaries and was increasingly vulnerable in the face of new generations of ship-killing missiles and stealthy submarines.

ANALYSIS Unsurprisingly, just a month after Trump’s election, the Navy released a brand-new plan calling for a 355-ship fleet — a massive leap from the 308 ships it was planning on building by 2021. The new number is now the “minimum force structure” required to keep up with demand, the Navy said in its new assessment.

But a year after releasing that assessment, the Pentagon still has not released an outline or a budget for how it plans to add those 47 new ships, or what those ships might do. More ships requires more money, and with current budget caps that don’t expire until 2022 and a scheduled modernization of the submarine fleet already on the books, it will be difficult to undertake any sort of buildup.

“I think it’s going to be very hard for them to work this into the budget in any sort of realistic way,” said Todd Harrison, a budget analyst at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Internal Pentagon doubts about the larger Navy spilled into the public eye last month when acting Navy Undersecretary Thomas Dee told a conference in Washington that a 355-ship Navy would take at least another 30 years to build.

His boss, Navy Secretary Richard Spencer, appeared on MSNBC days later to chide Dee, calling him “an acting placeholder” who didn’t speak for the administration. “I need to get my team there who are aligned with our vision,” he said. (On Nov. 13, the Senate Armed Services Committee approved the nomination of Thomas Modly for Navy undersecretary, sending his name to the full Senate for final confirmation.)

Spencer wouldn’t commit to a timeline for getting to 355, saying that a decade is “pretty aggressive.” The Congressional Budget Office has suggested it would take 18 years to reach 355, while the House Armed Services Com-

mittee thinks it could take 25 to 30 years.

The push for more ships comes as policy-makers in Washington worry over rapidly advancing Chinese and Russian military capabilities. The U.S. Navy also has blamed the twin collisions of the USS Fitzgerald and USS John S. McCain in the Western Pacific this past summer on tired crews who hadn’t received the necessary training due to constant deployments.

“There’s so much riding on the upcoming National Defense Strategy,” said one congressional staffer, referring to a review that is expected to spell out how and where the military will operate. The service is waiting for the document, which Pentagon analysts are readying for release early next year, before announcing its plans, he said.

A spokesperson for the Navy also told Foreign Policy that there are no immediate plans to release a 30-year shipbuilding plan, which was updated last in May 2016. The Navy normally releases the plan with each annual budget request, but it skipped 2017 with little explanation. The 2016 document laid out the strategy for increasing the fleet to 308 ships.

Spencer has been looking at options, like bringing as many as 10 Perry-class frigates out of retirement for a quick boost in fleet size. But an internal memo reported on by Defense News earlier this month found that bringing those ships back would cost more than \$4 billion, sucking up limited dollars the service needs to modernize the Navy’s existing cruisers and destroyers.

The more likely path is using those billions of dollars to modernize up to 11 Ticonderoga-class cruisers currently slated for retirement beginning next year, while building dozens of smaller, less expensive ships to fill gaps, according to several analysts.

Without retaining existing vessels and with little help coming from Congress to build dozens of large, new ships, the other option is simply to stop sailing in some areas, said Jerry Hendrix, a retired U.S. Navy captain who is now at the Center for a New American Security.

“If you start gapping these regions, you create a power vacuum, and just like what happened in the South China Sea when we did not pay a lot of attention to it, and the Chinese started to build these artificial islands,” he said.

Trump inconsistent on harassment charges

The Washington Post

President Donald Trump's decision to mock Sen. Al Franken, D-Minn., for groping a sleeping woman while posing for a photo once again has made him a central figure in the national discussion about sexual assault, harassment and misconduct — and again has brought attention to past accusations against the president, himself.

As a growing number of prominent men have faced accusations publicly, Trump has been selective in responding, largely on the basis of whether the accused is an ally or a foe and focusing relatively little on the reputed victims.

Trump called his own accusers “horrible, horrible liars” and threatened to sue them, while coming to the defense of friends such as political commentator Bill O'Reilly and former Fox News CEO Roger

Ailes, accused of harassment or assault. Trump also has been mostly silent on Republican U.S. Senate candidate Roy Moore, of Alabama, who has been accused of initiating a sexual encounter with a 14-year-old girl when he was in his 30s, sexually assaulting a 16-year-old waitress and pursuing relationships with at least five other teenagers who were much younger than he.

Trump's responses have been notably different for some Democrats. Late Thursday night, the president tweeted about Franken, saying that a photograph of Franken appearing to grope a woman “is really bad, speaks a thousand words” and chastising the Minnesotan for “lecturing anyone who would listen about sexual harassment and respect for women.” Trump also has said he was not surprised by accusations against film producer

Harvey Weinstein, a major Democratic donor, released an ad during the presidential campaign calling former New York congressman Anthony Weiner a “pervert” and hosted a campaign news conference with three women who had accused former president Bill Clinton of sexual assault or misconduct, calling those women “very courageous.”

Liz Mair, a Republican communications consultant who has been critical of the president, said Friday that Trump appears to be trying to egg on Democrats to react and, in the process, to muddy distinctions between allegations against him and others accused of wrongdoing.

“Even if he's totally loathed, as long as he's a little less loathed by comparison, he's good” with that, Mair said.

But White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sand-

ers on Friday pushed back against the idea that Trump treats Democrats differently from Republicans, pointing to Trump's comments of concern over the Moore allegations. Sanders also said there was a key difference between the accusations against Franken and those against Trump.

“Senator Franken has admitted wrongdoing, and the president hasn't,” Sanders said. “I think that's a very clear distinction.”

During Trump's trip to Asia, Sanders told reporters that “like most Americans, the president does not believe we can allow a mere allegation, in this case one from many years ago, to destroy a person's life. However, the president also believes that if these allegations are true, Judge Moore will do the right thing and step aside.”

Moore sexual misconduct claims divide GOP, women

Associated Press

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — Standing on the white marble steps of Alabama's Capitol, Kayla Moore surrounded herself with two dozen other women to defend husband Roy Moore against accusations of sexual misconduct that are dividing Republicans — and women, in particular.

“He will not step down. He will not stop fighting for the people of Alabama,” Kayla Moore said Friday at a “Women for Moore” rally. Acting as her husband's lead defender, she lashed out at the news media and thanked people who were sticking behind her husband.

“To the people of Alabama, thank you for being smarter than they think you are,” Moore said.

Not everyone is sticking with Roy Moore, however, and certainly not all women.

“I was going to vote for him. I was going to be one of his voters. I just don't know that I can vote for him anymore,” said Laura Payne, a Trump delegate to the 2016 Republican National Convention.

“I have not found any reason not to believe them. ... They risked a whole lot to come forward,” Payne said of the accusers.

Alabama Gov. Kay Ivey said she also has no reason to disbelieve the women and is bothered by their allegations. But Ivey said she will vote for Moore anyway for the sake of GOP power in Congress.

A Fox News poll released Thursday, a week after the first accusations, showed Jones leading Moore by eight points. Support from women was helping to give Jones the edge, with 68 percent for Jones compared to 32 percent for Moore.

Allegations revive scrutiny of Bill Clinton, roil Democrats

The Washington Post

A torrent of sexual abuse allegations against powerful figures in politics and media has reignited the defining political fight of the 1990s.

But this time, the battle is being waged within the ranks of Democrats and their allies, including leaders of the feminist movement. A growing number now say they were wrong to have so stridently defended former President Bill Clinton against the women who over the years accused him of offenses that ranged from groping to exposing his genitals to rape.

The uncomfortable question is whether Democrats then were guilty of the sin they accuse Republicans of committing now by continuing to support President Trump and Alabama GOP Senate nominee Roy Moore, despite allegations of sexual offenses: Were they also putting parti-

sanship and their desire to hold onto power above the principles they claim to hold dear?

A remarkable exchange of fire began Thursday when Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand — Hillary Clinton's successor as senator from New York and a staunch backer of her presidential campaign — told The New York Times that by today's standards, the “appropriate response” for Bill Clinton would have been to resign when his affair with White House intern Monica Lewinsky was revealed in 1998.

That brought a retort from longtime Hillary Clinton aide Philippe Reines on Twitter, in which he dismissed the president's affair with a subordinate as a “consensual” sex act. Reines lobbed an additional shot at Gillibrand: “Over 20 yrs you took the Clintons' endorsements, money, and seat. Hypocrite. Interesting strategy for 2020 primaries. Best of luck.”

Violations cost Congress \$17M since '97

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The government has paid more than \$17 million in taxpayer money during the past 20 years to resolve claims of sexual harassment, overtime pay disputes and other workplace violations filed by employees of Congress.

The Office of Compliance released the numbers amid a wave of revelations of sexual misconduct in the worlds of entertainment, business and politics that consumed Capitol Hill this past week. Two female lawmakers described incidents of sexual harassment, one in explicit detail, and Minnesota Sen. Al Franken apologized to a woman who said he forcibly kissed her and groped her during a 2006 USO tour.

In a statement on the office's website on Friday, it said "based on the volume of recent inquiries about settlements reached under the Congressional Accountability Act, the

executive director is releasing awards and settlement figures for 2015, 2016 and 2017 that would have been released as part of the OOC Annual Report early."

The independent office doesn't break the figures down, meaning there's no way to determine how many of the 264 settlements and awards dealt specifically with cases of sexual misconduct brought by legislative branch employees. The office, which was created in 1995 by the Congressional Accountability Act, said the cases may involve violations of multiple statutes.

The claims range from sexual harassment complaints, allegations of religious and racial discrimination, and overtime disputes, according to the office. The money has been paid out between 1997 and 2017. The largest number of settlements, 25, occurred in 2007 when just over \$4 million was paid out, according to the figures. The money comes from an account in the U.S. Treasury.

Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., testified that two sitting members of Congress have engaged in sexual harassment. But she refused to identify them because the victims don't want the lawmakers named publicly. Speier said she is barred from identifying one member because of a nondisclosure agreement, and isn't identifying the second lawmaker at the victim's request.

At the same House hearing on sexual harassment prevention, Rep. Barbara Comstock, R-Va., said she recently was told about a staffer who quit her job after a lawmaker asked her to bring work material to his house, then exposed himself.

Speier and Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., have introduced legislation to overhaul the process of reporting sexual harassment. Victims of sexual misconduct currently are required to undergo counseling, mediation and a 30-day "cooling off period" before filing a formal complaint.

Winners and losers under Senate's tax plan

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The ultra-wealthy, especially those with dynastic businesses — like President Donald Trump and his family — do very well under a major Republican tax bill moving in the Senate, as they do under legislation passed this week by the House.

Want to toast the anticipated tax win with champagne or a beer — or maybe you're feeling Shakespearean and prefer to quaff mead from a pewter mug? That would cheer producers of beer, wine, liquor — and mead, the ancient beverage fermented from honey. Tax rates on their sales would be reduced under the Senate bill.

On the other hand, people living in high-tax states, who deduct their local property, income and sales taxes from what they owe Uncle Sam, could lose out from the complete or partial repeal of the deductions. And an estimated 13 million Americans could lose health insurance coverage over 10 years under the Senate bill.

Winners

■ Wealthy individuals and their heirs win big. The hottest class-warfare debate around the

tax overhaul legislation involves the inheritance tax on multimillion-dollar estates. Democrats wave the legislation's targeting of the tax as a red flag in the face of Republicans, as proof that they're out to benefit wealthy donors. The House bill initially doubles the limits — to \$11 million for individuals and \$22 million for couples — on how much money in the estate can be exempted from the inheritance tax, then repeals it entirely after 2023. The Senate version also doubles the limits but doesn't repeal the tax.

Then there's the alternative minimum tax, a levy aimed at ensuring that higher-earning people pay at least some tax. It disappears in both bills.

And the House measure cuts tax rates for many of the millions of "pass-through" businesses big and small — including partnerships and specially organized corporations — whose profits are taxed at the owners' personal income rate. That's potential cha-ching for Trump's far-flung property empire and the holdings of his daughter Ivanka and her husband, Jared Kushner.

The Senate bill lets pass-through owners deduct some of the earnings and then pay at

their personal income rate on the remainder.

■ Corporations win all around, with a tax rate slashed from 35 percent to 20 percent in both bills — though they'd have to wait a year for it under the Senate measure. Trump and the administration view it as an untouchable centerpiece of the legislation.

■ U.S. oil companies with foreign operations would pay reduced taxes under the Senate bill on their income from sales of oil and natural gas abroad.

■ Beer, wine and liquor producers would reap tax reductions under the Senate measure.

■ Companies that provide management services like maintenance for aircraft get an updated win. The Senate bill clarifies that under current law, the management companies would be exempt from paying taxes on payments they receive from owners of private jets as well as from commercial airlines. That was a request from Ohio Sens. Rob Portman, a Republican, and Sherrod Brown, a Democrat, whose state is home to NetJets, a big aircraft management company.

Portman voted for the overall bill. Brown opposed it.

Losers

■ An estimated 13 million Americans could lose health insurance coverage under the Senate bill, which would repeal the "Obamacare" requirement that everyone in the U.S. have health insurance. The projection comes from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office. Eliminating the fines is expected to mean fewer people would obtain federally subsidized health policies.

■ People living in high-tax states would be hit by repeal of federal deductions for state and local taxes under the Senate bill, and partial repeal under the House measure. That result of a compromise allows the deduction for up to \$10,000 in property taxes.

■ Many families making less than \$30,000 a year would face tax increases starting in 2021 under the Senate bill, according to Congress' nonpartisan Joint Committee on Taxation. By 2027, families earning less than \$75,000 would see their tax bills rise while those making more would enjoy reductions, the analysts find. The individual income-tax reductions in the Senate bill would end in 2026.

Russia again vetoes UN resolution on Syria

Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS — Russia again vetoed a U.N. resolution Friday that would extend the mandate of the expert body charged with determining responsibility for chemical weapons attacks in Syria, dooming its operation and making it exceedingly difficult to hold anyone accountable for the deaths of hundreds of civilian victims.

It was Russia's second veto in 24 hours of a resolution to keep the Joint Investigative Mechanism, or JIM, in operation. And it was Russia's 11th veto of a Security Council resolution dealing with Syria, its close ally.

Russia cast its latest veto Friday night on a last-ditch resolution by Japan to extend the mandate for 30 days for further discussions. It was supported by 12 of the 15 council members, with Bolivia joining Russia in voting "no" and China abstaining.

The first Russian veto on a

U.S.-sponsored resolution, and Russia's failure to get the minimum nine "yes" votes on its rival resolution during a highly contentious, three-hour council meeting Thursday, reflected the deterioration of U.S.-Russian relations.

At the heart of the dispute is the demand by Russia for major changes in the way the JIM operates, and the U.S.'s insistence that the current mandate be extended and the JIM's independence be preserved.

U.S. Ambassador Nikki Haley told the council after the vote the veto "shows us that Russia has no interest in finding common ground with the rest of this council to save the JIM."

"Russia will not agree to any mechanism that might shine a spotlight on the use of chemical weapons by its ally, the Syrian regime," she said. "It's as simple and sinful as that."

White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said

that by vetoing the JIM's renewal, "Russia has sent a clear message that it does not value the lives of the victims of chemical weapons attacks."

Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia shot back that the JIM for two years "has rubber-stamped baseless accusations against Syria," stressing that the failure to eradicate its "fundamental flaws" brought about its downfall.

He said Thursday's heated council meeting "left behind a very unpleasant sludge, and it focused on political content which is far from the issue of Syrian chemical weapons."

"What is taking place here is akin to a bad theater production," Nebenzia said. "Russia is being accused of having shut down the JIM" by the U.S. and its supporters.

He said they are really responsible for shutting the JIM down by refusing to support the Russian resolution on Thursday. It remains on the table,

Nebenzia said, but any extension of the JIM's mandate is only possible if its flaws are fixed and it is made "stronger and more robust."

The JIM is a joint investigative body of the U.N. and the international chemical weapons watchdog, the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons or OPCW.

The Japanese draft asked Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and the head of the OPCW to submit proposals for the structure and working methods of the JIM within 20 days. It said the proposals should reflect the views of Security Council members.

Nebenzia said the draft placed "a completely impossible challenge" for the secretary-general because Thursday's heated council meeting demonstrated that council members on many issues "are diametrically opposed."

Commander praises US special ops forces in Iraq, Syria

The Fayetteville (N.C.) Observer

In a small town in Syria, Islamic State prepared for the end of the world.

Dabiq, with a few thousand residents just south of the border with Turkey, had an importance that far outweighed the size of the town, itself.

According to legend, Dabiq was to be the site of one last epic battle that would end in victory for ISIS and start the end of times.

But in the fall of 2016, more than two years after ISIS took control of the town, a group of more than 30 Special Forces soldiers and 150 tribal militants armed with AK-47 rifles systematically cleared Dabiq and the surrounding area of ISIS fighters in a little more than a month.

"It did not cause the end of days," said Maj. Gen. James Kraft Jr., who spent more than a year as commander of special operations forces fighting

ISIS in Iraq and Syria.

Kraft, the current deputy commander of U.S. Army Special Operations Command, spoke of Dabiq and other recent operations involving Army special operators while visiting with the Cape Fear Chapter of the Military Officers Association of America in Fayetteville, N.C., on Friday.

USASOC — which includes Special Forces, civil affairs, psychological operations, Rangers, special operations aviation and a sustainment brigade — has several thousand soldiers in more than 70 countries, Kraft said.

Kraft told several vignettes about some of the roughly 34,000 Army special operators who make up more than half of the nation's special operations forces. He said USASOC soldiers are in the Pacific and across Central and South America. They are fighting in Afghanistan, where they have been since 2001.

"Every single night, to include, I guarantee right now as we're speaking, we have Special Forces teams in contact with the enemy," Kraft said. "Against the Taliban and against ISIS. Right now." And they are in Africa, where groups like Al Shabaab and Boko Haram are trying to tear apart countries like Niger.

"We're standing watch there," Kraft said, referring to the country where four 3rd Special Forces Group soldiers were killed last month.

Kraft said the soldiers in Africa are living on the edge, where help is not always close by.

"It is inherently a dangerous business," he said. "Our folks are out there on the edge every single day because if it matters to the United States, it matters to me, it matters to us and we're going to be there."

Kraft said USASOC soldiers are a special breed.

They are selected from the best the Army has. And often

take more than two years to train up to the skillsets required of them.

While USASOC accounts for just 1.4 percent of the U.S. military's budget, Kraft said they have a far larger impact.

"That's a heck of a return on investment," he said.

The ongoing efforts in Iraq and Syria are a testament to that impact.

Instead of fighting ISIS head-on, Kraft said, USASOC soldiers are working by, with and through local partners who are fighting ISIS on their own turf.

ISIS is an evil enemy, he said, one that inspires devotion and a radical mindset whose adherents won't rest until all in the U.S. are dead and the American way of life is destroyed.

"We have an uncompromising enemy. It's total war," Kraft said. "There is no negotiating. There is no surrender on an aircraft carrier."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

'Cone Weed' gets Christmas makeover

NC HUNTERSVILLE — At first, it was an orange traffic cone with a weed growing out of it. Now, the roadside attraction dubbed "Cone Weed" is something of a Christmas miracle to locals.

WBTV reported someone decorated the "Cone Weed" with tinsel and ornaments last week. The weed has been growing across from the Huntersville Fire Station for a year and has amassed a cult following. The fire station tweeted pictures of Cone Weed in tinsel and ornaments last week.

Property owner Madeline Phillips said her son mowed around "Cone Weed" during the summer, and calls it "a beacon of hope."

A graphic designer has created a line of Christmas clothes and has sold more than 200 shirts, with proceeds helping local families through Hope-Match.org. There's also a Facebook fan page.

Man shoots at squirrel, causes school lockdown

FL COCOA — Authorities said a Florida man shooting a BB gun at a squirrel prompted police to swarm a neighborhood and place a nearby school on lockdown.

Florida Today reported that Cocoa police responded Thursday following a 911 call about a man pointing a rifle at a house. Officials locked down Cambridge Elementary School as a precaution.

Police said about half a dozen officers surrounded the home and ordered the man to step outside. He explained that a squirrel had been "wreaking havoc" in his attic and showed officers the BB gun.

No charges were filed. The squirrel's fate wasn't known.

Suspect surrenders in drive-thru break-in

MD COLUMBIA — A suspect surrendered in a McDonald's break-in in which a woman squeezed her way through a drive-thru window.

Police said in a statement that Jessica Marie Cross, 27, of Springdale, Md., turned herself in to officers Thursday in Maryland's Howard County. She is charged with burglary and theft.

Surveillance video of the Nov. 5 burglary shows a woman worming into a McDonald's in Columbia, Md., through the unlocked window.

Police said Cross stole \$1,400 in cash, a purse, food and Happy Meal toys. According to investigators, Cross is seen on video attempting to remove her fingerprints and disable the surveillance system.

Woman leads police on second chase in 2 days

CA LOS ANGELES — Authorities said the same woman led officers on vehicle chases through Southern California on back-to-back days.

The Orange County Register reported a day after leading officers from Orange County into the Los Feliz area, a woman Wednesday morning led officers on a second chase from the Pacoima area to Valencia where she became stuck in traffic and was pulled from the car.

The Los Angeles Police Department said officers tried to pull over the driver Wednesday for possibly being under the influence.

Authorities said they also chased the same woman Tuesday for allegedly violating a restraining order, but called off the pursuit for safety reasons.

Officials plan to herd whale out of channel

NY LONG BEACH — Officials said they will try to herd a wayward humpback whale that has been seen swimming in a Long Island channel back to the Atlantic Ocean.

Atlantic Marine Conservation Society scientist Rob DiGiovanni said the 28-foot teenage humpback whale was spotted a week ago in Reynolds Channel. The whale has travelled from East Rockaway to Point Lookout.

DiGiovanni said the young whale's behavior isn't unusual. But he worries the whale could be frightened by human interaction or struck by boat propellers.

Authorities were to try to herd the whale into open water Saturday, provided weather conditions are favorable. The Coast Guard, state Department of Environmental Conservation and local officials are coordinating in the effort.

Woman rescued after falling into septic tank

NJ MULLICA TOWNSHIP — A New Jersey woman has been rescued after falling into an empty septic tank behind her home.

Police told the Press of Atlantic City that Tami Camp's son called 911 Thursday afternoon after he heard his mother's screams from the bottom of the septic tank. Authorities said she fell 10 feet when a rotted tank cover gave way.

Police and emergency technicians arrived at the home.

Atlantic City Fire Chief Scott Evans said crews used a special board attached to a fire truck ladder with ropes and braces to hoist the woman out of the hole.

Camp, 57, was airlifted to a hospital and treated for severe back pain.

Drone with phones, drugs crashes at prison

AZ BUCKEYE — Guards at the state prison in Buckeye recovered a crashed drone that was trying to deliver marijuana and cellphones to inmates.

Arizona Department of Corrections officials said the homemade drone crashed in a security zone at the Lewis prison that's not accessible to inmates.

The incident occurred on the night of Sept. 24, but authorities haven't discussed it until now.

Investigators have been unable to trace the origin of the drone or who was controlling it but will rely on DNA fingerprints that could lead to that person.

According to authorities, if anyone is caught, they will face a felony that carries a prison sentence of up to five years.

Police test system to detect gunshots

NV LAS VEGAS — Las Vegas police have begun testing a network of acoustic gunshot sensors in a section of the city to see if it helps cut the time officers take to arrive at shootings.

Department and elected officials announced Thursday the ShotSpotter system is being deployed in an area northeast of downtown where police are called most often to investigate gunfire reports.

The sensors part of a one-year pilot program designed to detect, locate and alert police of gunfire in less than a minute.

Officials said that could be faster than it would take for a person in the area to determine where the shots were fired and to decide to pick up the phone to call 911.

From wire reports

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Earnhardt set for final race of career

Associated Press

HOMESTEAD, Fla. — Dale Earnhardt Jr. bounded out of the media center and was instantly swarmed by fans snapping photos and shoving Sharpies in his face. Earnhardt was tailed until he walked up the steps to another TV interview.

“Did you see him?” a man yelled as more fans arrived a few steps too late to reach NASCAR’s most popular driver.

The chance to catch him is nearly gone.

Earnhardt will retire Sunday, ending a career that saw him emerge from his father’s intimidating shadow and grow into NASCAR’s favorite son over 18 full seasons. Hilarious and heartfelt, his folksy charm endeared him to the millions that comprised “Junior Nation” and made him a household name to the casual fan who recognized Earnhardt simply as NASCAR’s top pitchman.

Earnhardt has one final destination on his farewell tour, at Homestead-Miami Speedway, a track which over the last two years also helped the sport bid farewell to NASCAR greats Jeff Gordon and Tony Stewart. His legacy will be different from theirs, and not simply because Earnhardt never won a championship as they did. If anything, he was more beloved as an ambassador of the sport than any driver of his era.

The 20-something Earnhardt that retreated into his motorhome to play video games all night has matured into a 43-year-old man that will be flanked Sunday by his pregnant wife, his mother and sister before he slides into the No. 88 Chevrolet one last time.

“There’s a whole other world out there waiting for him,” sister Kelley Earnhardt Miller said. “There’s his marriage and having a baby and doing other things in life, either professionally or personally that he hasn’t been able to do. He’ll have time for them now. It’s exciting.”

Earnhardt’s finale hit a bump

Friday — he’ll start from the rear of the field because of an engine change in the Chevys. His one wish was to end the race on his terms.

“It would be a bit of a heartbreaker if we have the kind of issue that would take us out of an event and we couldn’t finish,” he said.

Earnhardt, dressed in a red T-shirt and red cap of his race sponsor, was at ease as he reflected on the end of career that started May 30, 1999, at Charlotte Motor Speedway. He finished 16th — dad was sixth — and he soon started his perpetual grip on NASCAR’s most popular driver award.

Earnhardt cracked jokes, quizzed his eligibility to race in an Xfinity race with a reporter and spoke with some regret on the misspent years early in his career.

“There were days when I would come into the garage to practice and everybody was in their cars pulling out of their stalls and I’m just walking in,” he said. “And, nothing was wrong with that, you know, in

my mind. That’s crazy. I mean, you’d be fired in this day and time if a driver was that care-free about it. It didn’t seem to matter.”

He maintained much of that spirit even though he shaped up and ditched the lazy habits and shirttail-hanging-out wardrobe he kept at Dale Earnhardt Inc. when he joined the more buttoned-down operation at Hendrick Motorsports.

Earnhardt has driven for team owner Rick Hendrick since 2008 after he split with DEI, the team founded by his father but run by his stepmother. He was unhappy with the direction of DEI since his father’s 2001 death in a last-lap accident at the Daytona 500, and a frosty relationship with his stepmother led him to bolt to NASCAR’s most powerful team.

He won a Daytona 500 with each team, and 26 races overall. But he never won a Cup championship, or came close in achievements to matching his late Hall of Fame father, Dale, who won seven titles and was known as “The Intimidator.”

Patrick ending racing career after Indianapolis 500

Associated Press

HOMESTEAD, Fla. — Danica Patrick broke down in tears Friday as she announced she will retire from full-time racing next year after running the Daytona 500 and then the Indianapolis 500, closing her career at the storied track that made her famous.

Patrick told The Associated Press it took her many months to come to the realization her career is all but over. Once she accepted it, the idea of ending her career at Indianapolis Motor Speedway popped into her head.

She told her agent, and she’s been working on putting together “The Danica Double” over the last several weeks.

“Nothing that was being presented excited me, then about three weeks ago, I just blurted out, ‘What about Indy? Let’s end

it with the Indy 500,’” she said. “This ignites something in me. But I am done after May. Everyone needs to put their mind there. My plan is to be at Indy, and then I’m done.”

Patrick would not reveal who she will drive for in either race next year, but Chip Ganassi Racing is the likely ride at Indy.

Patrick will not be driving in the Daytona 500 for Stewart-Haas Racing, team co-owner Tony Stewart told AP. Patrick moved from IndyCar to NASCAR after the 2011 season, and has been racing Cup cars for SHR since 2012. She is being replaced after Sunday’s season finale at Homestead-Miami Speedway by Aric Almirola.

Patrick is the only woman to have led laps in both the Daytona 500 and the Indianapolis 500. Patrick ran the Indy

500 from 2005 through 2011. Her highest finish was third in 2009, and she was the first woman to lead laps in the race when she paced the field for 19 trips around the Brickyard as a rookie.

Patrick was highly marketable early in her career even if success on the track was rare. She won the pole for the Daytona 500 in 2013, but finished 24th in the standings the last two seasons. She won her only IndyCar race in 2008, in Japan.

Bell wins Trucks title

HOMESTEAD, Fla. — Kyle Busch celebrated one championship already this weekend when driver Christopher Bell captured the Truck Series championship.

It was the first career title

for Bell, who turns 23 next month and was the favorite to win the title Friday night at Homestead-Miami Speedway. Bell won five races this season driving a Toyota for Kyle Busch Motorsports, and led the series in nearly every statistical category.

He wrapped up a second series driver championship for Busch, who will race for his second Cup title on Sunday. Bell finished second to Chase Briscoe, who won his first career race in the last event for Brad Keselowski Racing. The team is closing after this race, and had a shot to end its run with a title behind Austin Cindric. But Cindric was beaten by Bell for the championship, so the team settled for the race victory with Briscoe.

Saints' Brees quietly as efficient as ever

Associated Press

METAIRIE, La. — Saints quarterback Drew Brees is averaging fewer yards per game passing than at any point in his 11-plus seasons with New Orleans.

Yet he sees no evidence of a drop-off in his effectiveness, or that of his receivers.

Overshadowed by dramatic improvements in the Saints' running game and defense is the fact that the 38-year-old Brees has been as efficient as ever.

He's keeping defenses on their heels with a personal-best completion percentage and drive-sustaining third down conversions when New Orleans has needed them during its seven-game winning streak.

"When we're running the ball effectively and when we're playing the type of defense we're playing, it's not necessary to throw the ball 35, 40 times a game," Brees said. "If we can throw the ball mid-20s and rush the ball 40-something times and win the way that we have, then, man, that's great.

"I'm sure there's going to be games where we're going to need to throw it (much more) to win the game — and we're ready to do that," Brees added. "We've done that many times before."

The Saints have finished the regular season leading the NFL in yards passing six times since Brees arrived in New Orleans in 2006.

New Orleans has never finished a season worse than fourth in yards passing; that

was the 2009 season, which ended with New Orleans' only Super Bowl triumph.

Now New Orleans ranks fifth in yards passing per game at 260.2 — still elite in a 32-team league, but below the Saints' usual passing production since Brees joined forces with coach Sean Payton.

However, Brees' completion rate of 71.7 percent, if he sustains that through the end of the season, would set an NFL record, breaking the mark of 71.6 percent set by Sam Bradford last season (when he broke Brees' 2011 mark of 71.2 percent).

Brees' career-low interception rate for a whole season is 1.8 percent in 2013 and 2015. Through nine games this season, he's been intercepted on only 1.3 percent of his passes.

"At the end of the day, you want to be as efficient as you possibly can, so that's what we talk about when it comes to anything around here — it's efficiency," Brees said.

"How efficient are we at the passing game? How efficient are we in the running game? How efficient are we on third down and in the red zone? And all that together results in a winning formula."

In a 47-10, cold-weather victory at Buffalo that really seemed to get the rest of the NFL's attention, the Saints rushed for 298 yards, making them only the fifth team in NFL history with as many as 295 yards and six touchdowns rushing in a game.

But Brees still connected on 72 percent of his passes (18-for-25), including connec-

tions of 30 yards to Brandon Coleman and 28 yards to Michael Thomas.

"The total numbers are never important. It is more of what we are doing each week," Payton said. "Obviously, in today's NFL, you have to be able to convert third downs. You have to be able to attack certain defenses and we feel confident that that's something that each week we'll put the time in and be able to do."

Thomas finished the victory at Buffalo with nine catches for 117 yards, and said that when he has reviewed game video this season, he has seen a Saints passing game that is highly in sync and productive, even if overall attempts and yards are down.

"Any game," Thomas began, "Drew could go for 500 (yards) if he needs to, but we're not asking him for that."

Redskins coach Jay Gruden, whose team will have to try to stop the Saints in the Superdome on Sunday, said fewer attempts or yards by no means indicate a drop-off in Brees' effectiveness as a passer.

"Sometimes that is better. A lot of people worry about stats and fantasy football numbers ... but when you have balance, I think it makes it easier on the entire offense, the play-caller and the quarterback, the receivers, everybody," Gruden said.

"An effective passing game doesn't mean it has to lead the league in yardage. It just means it has to be effective getting the ball down the field and in the end zone. That's what they're doing right now."

NHL roundup

Bobrovsky makes 36 saves in Blue Jackets' win

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Sergei Bobrovsky made his typical batch of highlight-reel saves to help the Columbus Jackets shut out the potent New York Rangers.

Bobrovsky made 36 saves for his 21st career shutout and Zach Werenski and Artemi Panarin scored in the Blue Jackets' 2-0 win over New York on Friday.

New York ran into a hot goalie in Bobrovsky, the reigning Vezina Trophy winner who notched his second shutout of the season in powering Columbus to its third straight victory.

"Forget about his athletic ability, I just think he has a

mental toughness about him," Columbus coach John Tortorella said. "And I've seen it develop in the last three years I've been here, so he continues to grow as a goalie."

Rangers goaltender Henrik Lundqvist was nearly as good against the increasingly aggressive Blue Jackets, stopping 40 shots on the night. The Rangers (11-8-1) lost their second straight following a six-game winning streak.

"They played a pretty fast game, they had a lot of odd-man rushes, especially in the second, but it was still just a one-goal game until there were 10 minutes left," Lundqvist said.

"We were right there, but it was not enough. I feel like they were just the better team tonight."

The first period was scoreless, with both goalies making some slick, sprawling saves and managing heavy traffic in front of the nets.

Werenski found the back of the net with his sixth goal of the season 13:34 into the second. Brandon Dubinsky lost the handle of the puck in the slot, and Werenski picked it up just inside the right circle and beat Lundqvist with a one-timer.

Columbus (12-7-1) was the aggressor in the second frame, outshooting the Rangers 19-9,

and kept up the pressure in the third.

"Our second was probably one of our best periods we've played this year," Tortorella said.

Red Wings 3, Sabres 1: Tomas Tatar scored a go-ahead goal midway through the third period and host Detroit went on to beat Buffalo.

Detroit's Luke Glendening broke a scoreless tie late in the second period. Ryan O'Reilly pulled Buffalo into a 1-all tie 5:50 into the third. Dylan Larkin scored late in the game, and Jimmy Howard had 19 saves for the Red Wings. They have won consecutive games at home for the first time this season.

Top 25 roundup

Double-double by Carter leads Duke

Associated Press

DURHAM, N.C. — No. 1 Duke proved this week it's talented enough to beat the best team on its schedule — but not so dominant that it can take one of the worst for granted.

The Blue Devils beat Southern 78-61 on Friday night behind 20 points and 11 rebounds from Wendell Carter Jr.

"We just didn't come ready to play," Carter said. "I can't really speak for everybody, I don't know if everybody was energized or not or if people were hurt or not. Just as a team, we didn't play as a unit. We starters had an opportunity just to be selfish, and that's not the way to go. We've got to take every game seriously, and we did not do that tonight."

Marvin Bagley III added 19 points and 11 rebounds and Grayson Allen and Trevon Duval finished with 10 points apiece for the Blue Devils (4-0).

No. 4 Kansas 98, South Dakota St. 64: Svi Mykhailiuk scored a career-high 27 points and Lagerald Vick finished with 22 for the host Jayhawks.

Udoka Azubuike added 17 points and Malik Newman had 13 for Kansas (3-0), which shot 60 percent from the field and didn't commit a turnover until midway through the second half.

No. 5 Villanova 104, Lafayette 57: At Allentown, Pa., Mikal Bridges set a school record by hitting all six of his three-point shots and scored a career-high 24 points for the Wildcats.

Jalen Brunson added 22 points and hit 4 of 6 threes in another dominant performance by Villanova (3-0), which made 16 of 30 from long range.

No. 7 Kentucky 78, ETSU 61: Quade Green scored a career-high 21 points and Kevin Knox had 17 points with 10 rebounds as the host Wildcats overcame an early deficit.

Green scored 10 of the Wildcats' next 12 points to cut the lead to 23-20, and Hamidou Diallo and Wenyen Gabriel combined for 11 of the next 16 as Kentucky (3-1) outscored ETSU 28-12 over the final 10:05 for a 36-30 halftime lead.

No. 16 Texas A&M 84, UC Santa Barbara 65: DJ Hogg scored 19 of his 24 points in the first 10 minutes of the second half and the Aggies won their home opener.

Max Heidigger scored 24 points as the Gauchos (1-2) stuck around after the Aggies (2-0) built an early 16-point lead. But Hogg's strong second-half kept UCSB from mounting a challenge.

No. 18 Louisville 87, Omaha 78: Ray Spalding had a career-high 19 points and 11 rebounds, Deng Adel had a game-high 21 points and Anas Mahmoud had eight of his team's 15 blocked shots for the host Cardinals.

Spalding scored 14 points after halftime, and Adel made 7 of 8 shots from both the field and the free-throw line to pace the offense for Louisville (2-0), which led by 20 early in the second half.

No. 23 UCLA 96, South Carolina St. 68: Jaylen Hands scored 22 points to lead three freshmen in double figures for the host Bruins, who notched their third straight win despite a depleted roster.

Hands and fellow freshman Kris Wilkes broke the game open to start the second half for UCLA (3-0). They scored 17 of the team's first 19 points to extend a six-point lead to 59-44.

No. 25 Baylor 78, Alcorn St. 61: Jo Lual-Acuil Jr. had 16 points and 12 rebounds as the host Bears gave coach Scott Drew his 300th career victory.

Manu Lecomte had 17 points for Baylor, which is 3-0 for the 10th time in 11 seasons. King McClure had 13 points and freshman Tristan Clark had 12 points and nine rebounds.

NBA roundup

James, Cavs win their 4th straight

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — LeBron James scored 39 points, Kevin Love added 25 and the Cleveland Cavaliers won their fourth straight, 118-113 in overtime over the skidding Los Angeles Clippers Friday night.

Love made a pair of 3-pointers in OT, when the Cavs outscored the Clippers 13-8. Dwyane Wade added 23 points and 11 rebounds for Cleveland.

The Cavs' win wasn't eye-pleasing, but it was another step in the right direction for the Eastern Conference champions, who went 3-1 on a just-completed trip. The Clippers are headed the other way. Los Angeles has lost seven in a row and nine of 10 since a 4-0 start.

Blake Griffin scored 23 points, and DeAndre Jordan had 20 points and 22 rebounds for Los Angeles, which didn't give up the lead until the first minute of overtime.

Spurs 104, Thunder 101: LaMarcus Aldridge had 26 points and host San Antonio overcame a 23-point deficit to beat Oklahoma City.

Danny Green added 17 points, and Pau Gasol had 14 points to help San Antonio end Oklahoma City's three-game winning streak.

Aldridge put back of Green's missed three-pointer gave the Spurs a 102-99 lead with 24.2 seconds remaining.

The Thunder missed two three-pointers on the ensuing possession, but Carmelo Anthony tracked down a second offensive rebound and made a 25-footer with his foot on the three-point line to cut the lead to 102-101.

Gasol made two free throws, and Russell Westbrook stumbled to the court and threw up an airball on a three-point attempt.

Anthony had 20 points to lead the Thunder. Westbrook was held to 15 points after scoring 10 in the opening period. He was 5-for-22 from the field.

Heat 91, Wizards 88: Miami

nearly wasted a terrific defensive effort against John Wall and high-scoring host Washington, allowing a 25-point lead to dwindle all the way down to one before holding on.

Hassan Whiteside had 22 points and 16 rebounds for the Heat. They limited the Wizards to 29 first-half points — Washington's lowest output for a half in more than 2½ years.

The Wizards made 38.1 percent of their field-goal attempts. Bradley Beal led Washington with 26 points and 10 rebounds.

Raptors 107, Knicks 84: Kyle Lowry matched his season high with 22 points and added 10 assists and short-handed Toronto beat visiting New York for the eighth straight time.

Timberwolves 111, Mavericks 87: Jimmy Butler led his team with 21 points and Minnesota ended a five-game losing streak in Dallas.

Pacers 107, Pistons 100: Lance Stephenson scored all 13 of his points in the fourth quarter, including a key three-pointer, and host Indiana rallied from 22 down to beat Detroit.

Nets 118, Jazz 107: Spencer Dinwiddie scored a career-high 25 points hours after D'Angelo Russell had knee surgery, and Brooklyn beat host Utah.

Bulls 123, Hornets 120: Justin Holiday had 27 points and host Chicago beat skidding Charlotte, overcoming a 47-point outburst by Kemba Walker to snap its five-game losing streak.

Nuggets 146, Pelicans 114: Jamal Murray scored 31 points and Denver had the NBA's highest-scoring game of the season in a win over visiting New Orleans.

Suns 122, Lakers 113: Devin Booker hit six three-pointers while scoring 33 points, and Phoenix beat host Los Angeles.

Kings 86, Trail Blazers 82: Willie Cauley-Stein scored 13 of his 22 points in the fourth quarter and Sacramento beat visiting Portland.