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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Witness affirms Ukraine ‘quid pro quo’

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Ambassador Gordon Sondland told House impeachment investigators Wednesday that he worked with Rudy Giuliani on Ukraine at the “express direction” of President Donald Trump and pushed for a political “quid pro quo” with Kyiv because it was what Trump wanted.

“Mr. Giuliani was expressing the desires of the president of the United States, and we knew that these investigations were important to the president,” Sondland testified of his dealings with Trump’s personal attorney.

Sondland, the most highly anticipated witness in the public impeachment probe, made clear that he believed Trump was pursuing his desire for political investigations in return for an Oval Office meeting that the Eastern European nation’s new president sought to bolster his alliance with the West. Sondland said he later came to believe military aid that Ukraine relied on to counter Russia was also being held up until the investigations were launched.

In a blockbuster morning of testimony, Sondland’s opening remarks included several key details: He confirmed that he spoke with Trump on a cellphone from a busy Kyiv restaurant the day after the president prodded Ukraine’s leader to investigate political rival Joe Biden. He also said he kept Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and other top administration officials aware of his dealings with Ukraine on the

investigations Trump sought. Sondland said he specifically told Vice President Mike Pence he “had concerns” that U.S. military aid to Ukraine “had become tied” to the investigations.

“Everyone was in the loop,” Sondland testified in opening remarks. “It was no secret.”

Trump has insisted he did nothing wrong in his dealings with Ukraine, casting the impeachment inquiry as a politically motivated effort to push him from office. Speaking to reporters outside the White House on Wednesday, he said he wanted nothing from the Ukrainians and did not seek a quid pro quo. He also distanced himself from Sondland, a major donor to his inauguration.

“I don’t know him very well. I have not spoken to him much,” Trump said, speaking from notes on the hearing, written with a black marker.

The impeachment inquiry focuses significantly on allegations that Trump sought investigations of former Vice President Biden and his son — and the discredited idea that Ukraine rather than Russia interfered in the 2016 U.S. election — in return for the badly needed military aid for Ukraine and the White House visit.

In Moscow on Wednesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin said he was pleased that the “political battles” in Washington had overtaken the Russia allegations, which are supported by the U.S. intelligence agencies.

“Thank God no one is accusing us of interfering in the U.S. elections anymore,” Putin said. “Now they’re accusing Ukraine.”

Sondland said that conditions on any potential Ukraine meeting at the White House started as “generic” but “more specific items got added to the menu including Burisma and 2016 election meddling.” Burisma is the Ukrainian gas company where Joe Biden’s son, Hunter, served on the board. And, he added, “the server,” the hacked Democratic computer system.

“I know that members of this committee have frequently framed these complicated issues in the form of a simple question: Was there a ‘quid pro quo?’ As I testified previously, with regard to the requested White House call and White House meeting, the answer is yes,” he said.

Sondland said he didn’t know at the time that Burisma was linked to the Bidens but has since come to understand that — and that the military aid also hinged on the investigations.

“President Trump never told me directly that the aid was conditioned on meetings,” he testified. “The only thing we got directly from Giuliani was that the Burisma and 2016 elections were conditioned on the White House meeting. ... The aid was my own personal guess ... two plus two equals four.”

Sondland’s hours of testimony didn’t appear to sway Trump’s GOP allies in the Senate.

2 US service members killed in helicopter crash

By J.P. LAWRENCE

Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Two U.S. service members were killed in a helicopter crash Wednesday in Afghanistan, a statement from U.S. Forces Afghanistan said.

The cause of the crash is under investigation, but “preliminary reports do not indicate it was caused by enemy fire,” the statement said.

Neither service member was identified, pending family notification.

The crash took place in Charkh district

of Logar province, in the country’s east, two Afghan officials and a Taliban spokesman said.

“The plane crashed due to technical error,” said Fawad Aman, Afghan Defense Ministry deputy spokesman.

No Afghan service members were killed in the crash, Aman said.

The crash destroyed the helicopter, which was participating in a night raid, said Deedar Lawang, Logar province spokesman.

The Taliban in a statement claimed they shot down the aircraft and killed 54 Afghan and American soldiers. The Taliban

are known to exaggerate their claims.

Aman said the Taliban statement is false and that the militants did not shoot down the helicopter.

There have been 19 U.S. combat deaths in Afghanistan in 2019, the deadliest year for American troops in the country since international combat operations ended in late 2014.

Most of the 20,000 international troops now in the country are focused on training and advising Afghan security forces, with a smaller contingent taking part in a counterterrorism mission.

4 SEALs to undergo Navy 'trident review'

The San Diego Union-Tribune

SAN DIEGO — San Diego-based Naval Special Warfare Command is initiating a so-called “trident review” of four SEALs involved in a closely watched war crimes case that divided the tight-knit SEAL community and became a cause celebre for conservative commentators and politicians.

Among the SEALs coming under review, according to defense officials with knowledge of the case, are Lt. Cmdr. Robert Breisch, Lt. Thomas MacNeil, Lt. Jacob Portier and Chief Petty Officer Edward R. Gallagher, who was restored in rank to chief by President Donald Trump on Friday.

The four SEALs were to be notified of the review on Wednesday, according to the officials, who are not authorized to speak on the record.

Gallagher was acquitted of most charges he faced, including that he stabbed a wounded

Islamic State fighter in his care and shot unarmed Iraq civilians while deployed in 2017. He was convicted of one count of posing with the fighter's corpse.

Portier was charged in the probe and MacNeil and Breisch were witnesses and testified in Gallagher's court-martial.

The reviews, officially called Navy Classification Reviews, are administrative actions by the command to determine if service members still qualify to remain in their current positions — in this case, as Navy SEALs.

SEALs wear iconic gold insignia — often called “tridents” — on their uniforms.

The reviews are being held under orders from the commander of Naval Special Warfare Command, Rear Adm. Collin Green.

The action is seen by some to be a rebuke of Trump's recent decisions. Trump has intervened three times in the Gallagher case — once to release him

from the Miramar brig before trial, in August when Trump stripped prosecutors of awards they received after Gallagher's trial, and again Friday when Trump overruled a jury's sentence that reduced Gallagher in rank by one pay grade.

One of Gallagher's defense attorneys, Timothy Parlatore, said Green's action launching the review was “outright insubordination” of Trump's authority as commander in chief.

“There's no purpose to this other than to disrespect the president of the United States and retaliate against Eddie Gallagher,” Parlatore said when reached by phone Tuesday. “Adm. Green is daring the president to fire him.”

According to Parlatore, the decision has already been made to pull the tridents of the SEALs.

Parlatore filed an inspector general complaint Tuesday accusing Green of insubordination for defying Trump, The

Associated Press reported.

Navy Capt. Tamara Lawrence, a spokeswoman for the SEALs, would not comment on that but emailed the following statement to the Union-Tribune Tuesday:

“We have implemented the president's order to restore Chief Gallagher's paygrade,” Lawrence said in the email.

“Commander, Naval Special Warfare Command is responsible for the Naval Special Warfare Force. He remains focused on delivering a capable, ready, and lethal maritime special operations force in support of national security objectives, which includes assessing the suitability of any member of his force via administrative processes.”

A spokesman for Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday said in an email Tuesday that the CNO supported Green.

Cases against Marines arrested in formation in jeopardy

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — Marine Corps prosecutors were scrambling Tuesday to save numerous cases tied to a human smuggling investigation after a military judge ruled it was illegal for the military to arrest the Marines during a morning battalion formation and accuse them in front of their peers.

Maj. Kendra Motz said prosecutors were meeting at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton to explore their options, but she did not know what they were considering.

The judge, Marine Col. Stephen Keane, gave prosecutors until Monday to offer a way to remedy the situation.

When ruling Friday, Keane agreed with defense attorneys who said the command violated the rights of the defendants when they pulled 16 Marines

out of a battalion formation of 800 troops at Camp Pendleton on July 25 and accused them of the crimes in front of their unit.

The unit's leaders called them “a cancer” and “bad Marines,” defense attorneys said.

In the end, only 10 of those in the formation were charged with various crimes ranging from the distribution of LSD and stealing smoke grenades to illegally transporting immigrants to help a smuggling operation, according to charge sheets.

Two Marines were arrested near the U.S.-Mexico border after being stopped by the Border Patrol and found to have immigrants in their car, according to court documents. Another service member was arrested, but not during the formation.

Keane said the public display of the arrests amounted to unlawful command influence.

The judge said that if the prosecution cannot remedy the situation, the court would be left with only one option.

Defense attorneys for some of the Marines have asked for charges to be dismissed. They say otherwise it will be difficult to find an impartial jury pool.

“I don't know how they can un-ring the bell,” said defense attorney Bethany Payton-O'Brien, who is asking that the charges be dismissed against her client, Cpl. Trenton Elliot, 27, citing unlawful command influence.

The Marine Corps filmed the arrests, and part of the video was later obtained by the San Diego Union-Tribune.

A battalion commander and a sergeant major can be heard on the video calling the detained “bad Marines” and “a cancer,” Payton-O'Brien said.

“The Marine Corps that day

essentially announced to the world that they are guilty,” she said. “How do we now go and defend them?”

The Marine Corps said in a statement after the newspaper reported on the video that it was made to document the arrests “in an unbiased, non-editorialized manner.”

Correction

A story published in Tuesday's Stars and Stripes about survivors and victims' families suing over the collision of the destroyer USS Fitzgerald should have said the lawsuits were filed in Louisiana's Eastern District Court.

Air Force Arctic survival kit surprises testers

By JAMES BOLINGER
Stars and Stripes

A cold-weather survival kit under development at Eielson Air Force Base, Alaska, was designed to keep F-35A Lightning II pilots alive at 40 degrees below zero.

Thanks to a thermometer glitch, the kit surprised its testers on Nov. 5 by keeping subjects reasonably warm for six hours in temperatures that dropped below minus 65, said Tech. Sgt. Garrett Wright, operations noncommissioned officer for the Arctic Survival School, 66th Training Squadron, Detachment 1.

One of the four test subjects, Lt. Col. James Christensen, a pilot and commander of the 356th Fighter Squadron at Eielson, reviewed the kit in an email Wednesday to Stars and Stripes.

"This would enable pilots to survive for hours while awaiting rescue," he wrote. "However, I was never really warm or comfortable in that environment with this gear. I still had cold legs, feet and face, and the hands were a problem throughout the test. It will keep you alive, but not comfortable. Don't touch anything metal at that temperature!"

The test was successful, but the Air Force has yet to decide whether to include the kit on board the stealth fighters when they arrive at the reactivated 356th in 2020.

Airmen at the Eielson survival school created the kit after the Air Force discovered the equipment in older fighters like the F-16 Fighting Falcon would not fit underneath the F-35A's ejection seat, Wright said by phone Wednesday.

US Marines, Indian military build ties at Tiger Triumph

By J.P. LAWRENCE
Stars and Stripes

U.S. Marines and sailors are in eastern India for the inaugural Tiger Triumph humanitarian exercise, a drill that U.S. officials and analysts say is part of a growing partnership in a region where China is increasingly active.

Exercise organizers said Tiger Triumph is the first drill of its kind to include the U.S. military and all three of India's armed services.

On Wednesday, the Marines built a humanitarian relief camp as part of a simulated response to a natural disaster, said Marine 1st Lt. Tori Sharpe, a spokeswoman for the exercise.

The nine-day exercise, which wraps up Thursday, brought together more 500 U.S. Marines and sailors, and 1,200 Indian sailors, soldiers and airmen. The Marines traveled from Okinawa to Vishakhapatnam, India, where the drills kicked off Nov. 13, Sharpe said.

The exercise, which kicked off with the arrival of the dock landing ship USS Germantown, comes at a time when China is gaining influence in the Indo-Pacific region. U.S. policymakers view India as an ally in balancing Chinese ambitions.

Cpl. Christian Salvaggio of the 3rd Marine Division said his platoon mixed in with an Indian army platoon. Service members from both countries were able to train, hang out, and play soccer and volleyball, he said.

At sea, Salvaggio rode on the INS Jalash-

wa, a landing platform dock, as both forces sailed about 100 miles south to the city of Kakinada.

After arriving, Salvaggio's platoon rode to the beach aboard an Indian landing craft.

"It's a very cool experience, a lot more room than we're used to, but it was a lot faster as well," Salvaggio said.

After landing, the two forces built a field hospital and brought supplies ashore, Sharpe said.

The exercise mimicked disasters occurring in areas where security was problematic.

"We've brought weapons ashore, but (the exercise) is to focus on helping a population affected by a natural disaster," said Lt. Col. Dana S. Demer, the Marine task force commander.

Units went out on patrols, where they found actors who portrayed displaced civilians, Sharpe said. After moving them to the field hospital, troops from both countries called in a helicopter to evacuate the victims.

While the U.S. and India have trained together for decades, American diplomats said they hope Tiger Triumph will enhance military-to-military relations between the two nations.

"Military collaboration between India and the United States is a result of growing, high-level trust and consistent effort to broaden the ways in which we can work together," U.S. Ambassador to India Kenneth Juster said in a statement.

DOD audit finds US pullout from Syria strengthens terrorists

CQ-Roll Call

WASHINGTON — The sudden departure of most U.S. troops from northeastern Syria in early October has strengthened Islamic State in that country despite the U.S. military's recent killing of the group's leader, according to a new Pentagon assessment.

ISIS is reconstituting its forces and readying new plans for terrorist attacks in the wake of the U.S. troop withdrawal and Turkey's subsequent invasion of Syria, and other forces in the area are unlikely to pri-

oritize counterterrorism as the U.S. military did, according to an intelligence report summarized in a Pentagon audit published Tuesday.

The audit was produced by Glenn Fine, who is the lead Defense Department inspector general for overseeing U.S. military operations in Syria and Iraq.

Fine's assessment stands in contrast to President Donald Trump's recent tweets and statements depicting the situation in Syria as improved.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., issued

a statement Tuesday saying the new intelligence assessment "confirms many of our worst fears: that the president's precipitous withdrawal of troops from northern Syria has given ISIS a lifeline."

U.S. troops pulled back from the Syria-Turkey border in early October. Fewer than 1,000 of them remain and are either guarding oil fields in the north or stationed at a southern outpost called Al Tanf.

The Defense Intelligence Agency told Fine that ISIS is "likely to exploit the reduction in counterterrorism pressure

to reconstitute its operations in Syria and expand its ability to conduct transnational attacks," he wrote. "The DIA also stated that absent counterterrorism pressure, ISIS would likely have more freedom to build clandestine networks."

The intelligence agency also told Fine that ISIS "probably will attempt to free" ISIS members detained in prisons in Syria. The terrorist group will likely have the "time and space" to target the West and provide support to its global branches and networks, Fine wrote.

House passes short-term spending bill

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The House passed a short-term spending bill Tuesday that would avert a government shutdown on Friday, setting up a Christmas showdown over President Donald Trump's border wall that could fall in the midst of impeachment votes against the president.

The legislation, which passed 231 to 192, extends government funding through Dec. 20. It must pass the Senate and be signed by Trump before midnight Thursday. If not, government funding would ex-

pire, causing many agencies to begin to shutter operations and furlough staff.

The Senate is expected to act on the legislation ahead of the deadline. A senior administration official said Trump is expected to sign the bill. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity.

Passage of the "continuing resolution" is necessary because lawmakers and the administration have failed to agree on full-year spending bills for the 2020 budget year that began Oct. 1. The government is operating on a stop-gap spending bill that was passed in

September but expires Thursday night.

Ahead of the vote, lawmakers of both parties bemoaned their failure to agree on the 12 annual spending bills for 2020 and the need for short-term measures.

"This is an admission of failure; it's a recognition of failure," said Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md. But, Hoyer added, "The alternative is shutting down government on midnight of the 21st. That's not an acceptable alternative."

Trump's demands for billions of dollars to construct a wall along the U.S.-Mexico bor-

der have emerged as the principal impediment to a broader budget deal. Trump wants \$5 billion for the wall, and Senate Republicans signed off on that figure earlier this year. But House Democrats dedicated no money at all to the wall in spending bills they passed. It remains unclear how — or if — a compromise can be struck.

That makes a government shutdown a real threat when the new funding bill expires Dec. 20, just before Christmas and potentially around the same time the House is voting on articles of impeachment against Trump.

Ex-Baltimore mayor faces federal charges

Associated Press

BALTIMORE — The disgraced former mayor of Baltimore was charged Wednesday with fraud and tax evasion involving sales of her self-published children's books.

An 11-count federal indictment accuses Catherine Pugh of using her "Healthy Holly" children's books to enrich herself, promote her political career and fund her run for mayor.

Federal authorities say Pugh

and two city employees double sold her self-published children's books or failed to deliver them to institutions they were purchased for, including Baltimore City Public Schools. Pugh then allegedly used the proceeds to fund straw donations to her mayoral campaign and to renovate a house.

The grand jury indicted Pugh on federal charges of conspiracy to commit wire fraud, seven counts of wire fraud, conspiracy to defraud the United States and two counts of tax evasion.

She's expected to surrender to U.S. Marshals before an initial appearance and arraignment Thursday before U.S. District Judge Deborah K. Chasanow in Baltimore.

Also unsealed Wednesday were the guilty pleas of former Baltimore City employees Gary Brown Jr. and Roslyn Wedington. Both pleaded guilty to conspiracy and tax fraud.

"Corrupt public employees rip off the taxpayers and undermine everyone's faith in government," United States

Attorney Robert K. Hur said in an announcement of the charges. "Our elected officials must place the interests of the citizens above their own."

Steven Silverman, Pugh's attorney, didn't immediately respond to a phone message and email seeking comment.

Pugh resigned in early May after authorities began probing whether she arranged bulk sales of "Healthy Holly" books to disguise hundreds of thousands of dollars in kickbacks.

Germany offers expert group in bid to end NATO rift

Associated Press

BRUSSELS — Germany sought Wednesday to ease French worries about NATO by offering to set up a group of experts to examine the alliance's security challenges after President Emmanuel Macron lamented the "brain death" of the military organization.

Macron's public criticism of NATO — notably, a perceived lack of U.S. leadership, concerns about an unpredictable Turkey since it invaded northern Syria without warning its

allies, and the need for Europe to take on more security responsibilities — has shaken the alliance.

At a meeting of NATO foreign ministers in Brussels, Germany's Heiko Maas said that the 29-nation trans-Atlantic alliance is "Europe's life insurance and we want it to remain so." He said the aim should be to prevent "break-away tendencies" within NATO.

To ensure that doesn't happen, Maas told reporters, the "political arm" of NATO must be strengthened.

"We should get advice from experts, from people who understand these issues," he said.

Maas declined to elaborate or comment on who might be part of this expert commission, saying he was more interested in how Germany's partners react to the proposal. France's response to the offer should indicate whether NATO's internal differences can quickly be papered over.

Macron's choice of words was rejected as "drastic" by German Chancellor Angela Merkel the day after they were pub-

lished in *The Economist* magazine. Senior U.S. and European officials have since piled on, leaving France feeling isolated for speaking out.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg heads to Paris next week for talks with Macron, tentatively scheduled for Nov. 28.

On the eve of the Brussels meeting, Stoltenberg said the best way to resolve differences "is to sit down and to fully understand the messages and the motivations."

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

End to 'opossum dropping' sought

NC RALEIGH — A movement is growing in North Carolina to prevent the act of so-called "opossum dropping."

The practice involves suspending an opossum in a transparent box on New Year's Eve and slowly lowering it to the ground as people count down to midnight.

The Raleigh News & Observer reported that a western North Carolina town had conducted opossum drops for 24 years.

The organization Animal Help Now wants to prevent anyone from doing it elsewhere. That will require a change to state law that currently allows people to do anything they want to opossums for five days each year.

200 evacuated from malfunctioning ski lift

VT DOVER — About 200 people had to be evacuated from a malfunctioning chair lift at Mount Snow in southern Vermont during its opening weekend.

Mynbc5 reported that the hourlong malfunction happened last weekend. Ski patrol helped riders off the Challenger lift.

No injuries were reported.

Bottle of lotion leads to airport evacuation

FL DAYTONA BEACH — Sheriff's investigators said a "suspicious package" flagged during the screening process at Florida's Daytona Beach International Airport turned out to be a bottle of lotion.

The incident forced about

200 passengers and workers to evacuate the airport about 6:15 a.m. Tuesday. Airport officials gave an all-clear more than an hour later, resuming normal operations.

Volusia County Sheriff Mike Chitwood said the item was described as a possible detonator during the screening process.

Officials said two flights were delayed because of the evacuation.

Animal shelter caring for dumped rodents

NY ITHACA — An animal shelter in central New York is teeming with rats, mice, gerbils and guinea pigs after humane officers found more than 300 of the small mammals abandoned along roads.

The SPCA of Tompkins County said the rodents were found huddled on the ground beside two roads in the towns of Danby and Dryden, near Ithaca. Many had died of exposure or from ailments related to overcrowded cages and lack of water.

Joe Hoffer, an SPCA investigator, said the animals were probably being bred as "feeder" animals for reptiles, to be sold to pet stores. He said the person who dumped them will face several hundred charges if caught.

Chased teen breaks legs in airport leap

OK OKLAHOMA CITY — Authorities said a teenager broke both his legs after leaping from an Oklahoma City airport terminal roof while being chased by officers.

An Oklahoma City police statement said the 16-year-old boy was exiting a Houston-to-Oklahoma City flight at Will Rogers World Airport when police approached with a felony

burglary warrant. Police said he slipped out a side door on the jet bridge, ran across the terminal apron and climbed to the terminal roof in a bid to elude capture.

As officers continued their pursuit across the roof, police said the teen jumped to the apron below, breaking both legs.

State's bronze slave medallion unveiled

RI PORTSMOUTH — The first of the bronze slave medallions to be placed at locations around Rhode Island has been unveiled.

Rhode Island Democrat David Cicilline and Charles Roberts, chairman of the Rhode Island Slave History Medallions project, cut the ribbon for the unveiling of the medallion at Patriot Park in Portsmouth.

The Newport Daily News reported each of the plaques have a QR Code that visitors can scan with their phones to read about its history.

Roberts said at least one of the medallions will be placed in 25 towns and cities that were involved with slavery across the state.

State has most metal theft claims

CT WATERBURY — A new report said Connecticut has had the most metal theft insurance claims in the country.

The National Insurance Crime Bureau issued a report recently that found that Connecticut had the most metal theft insurance claims per capita in 2017 and 2018. The state had almost 32 theft claims for every 100,000 residents.

According to the report, thieves mostly steal copper and metal piping.

Bureau spokesman Frank Scafidi said this kind of theft is typically driven by "an urgent need for quick cash" and drugs.

Officials report record number of hatchlings

SC CHARLESTON — South Carolina said more than half a million loggerhead sea turtle hatchlings have made it to the sea during a record-breaking year despite losses during Hurricane Dorian.

The Post and Courier reported that preliminary data from the state Natural Resources Department counted about 525,500 turtles emerging from their nests. The previous record was set in 2016, when eggshell counts showed about 396,400 turtles emerged.

Guinea pig thrown at pet shop owner

KY DANVILLE — A Kentucky pet store owner said two women stole a pair of guinea pigs, lobbing one of the animals at him during their escape.

News outlets reported Isabelle Mason, 21, and Jaimee Pack, 19, are accused of trying to take the animals from Pet Paradise without paying. Owner Scott Gonyaw told WKYT-TV he confronted the suspects, screaming "Give me the guinea pigs!" as they got into a car.

One suspect rolled down a window and tossed a 4-month-old guinea pig named Lucky onto the concrete. The other ran over Gonyaw's foot with the car.

Lucky wasn't injured, and the other guinea pig remains missing.

From wire reports

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STARS AND STRIPES®

Anthony takes new outlook to new team

Associated Press

Carmelo Anthony had accepted the possibility that his NBA career might be over.

That seems to have liberated him to come back on his own terms when he signed with the Portland Trail Blazers.

"I came to a point where I was willing to accept it either way," Anthony said after playing the first game of his 17th season with his sixth NBA team on Tuesday night. "I had to get myself mentally prepared for that and I did, to be honest with you.

"I stayed with it, but there was times where I didn't want to. I wanted to just say, 'Forget it, move on with my life, spend more time with my family.' I started getting more comfortable with that," Anthony continued. "I come into this game with a totally different mindset, totally different motivation."

Anthony's Portland debut — played across the street from where he led Syracuse to the 2003 NCAA championship — was not a triumphant one. He missed 10 of 14 shots, finished

with 10 points, and the Blazers lost 115-104 in New Orleans.

Anthony was in good spirits, though, when he exited the locker room and stood in a hallway, patiently taking questions and often smiling as he spoke introspectively about the significance of his first NBA game action since his unceremonious departure from the Houston Rockets a year ago, after appearing in just 10 games.

"The greatest feeling of it all was to feel wanted by a group of guys who believe in me and my talent and what I can bring to the table," said the 10-time All-Star, who has averaged about 24 points per game during his career. "It wasn't just the players, it was the coaching staff. They showed a strong belief in me and what I can still do."

He started right away, even before he'd participated in a full practice with the Blazers. He joined them the day after they'd lost at Houston on Monday night, and approximately 72 hours after getting confirmation by phone that the Blazers were ready to sign him.

"That was something that was established from the gate, when we had that phone call: Let's be transparent. That was a miscommunication over the last couple seasons over what my role would be and things that was expected from me, and that was a big point," Anthony said. "There's not nothing I won't be willing to do, but just let me know up front. Whatever it is, just let me know, put it out on the table and let's go from there.

"That was a big reason why I made my decision," Anthony added. "It worked. I'm here. They had a vision. They had a plan and I was part of that plan. When it came down to it, I wanted to be part of that plan."

Anthony, 35, said it was hard to tune out speculation over which teams might give him another shot during his year out of the game.

"It's been a roller coaster," he said. "There was one point where I told my agent: 'Just let me know when it's first and goal. Don't call me when it's first and 20.'"

In the meantime, Anthony assured that he "wasn't on the couch" waiting for a call, but continuing to train.

"Physically, as far as basketball goes, that comes easy to me," Anthony said. "I still have to put the work into that, but it was more of a mental and emotional challenge, more so than a physical challenge."

For the time being, Anthony is steering clear of setting expectations.

"Who knows? I don't think anyone knows what's going to happen this year," he said. "I'm here now. That's what's important. I could have still been home, right? So, Portland pulled the trigger. No matter what happens, I will always appreciate that.

"I have a new outlook," he added. "For me, where I'm at, mentally, emotionally, the way I see things now, the way I approach the game, the way I approach this situation is more so me just having another different appreciation of just what this is and what the game of basketball brings."

NBA roundup

LeBron first player with triple-double against every team

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — To LeBron James, triple-doubles are not a goal.

They are only a side effect of the consistent, brilliant all-around play he has been dishing out for 17 NBA seasons, with no slowdown in sight.

Triple-doubles also don't mean much to LeBron without wins attached to them, so James was pleased when his latest statistical superlative occurred during yet another successful night for the surging Los Angeles Lakers.

James became the first player in NBA history to record a triple-double against every team in the league, and Anthony Davis scored 34 points dur-

ing the Lakers' fifth straight victory, 112-107 over the Oklahoma City Thunder on Tuesday night.

James finished with 25 points, 11 rebounds and 10 assists to post a triple-double against his 30th opponent for the NBA-leading Lakers, who have won 12 of 13 after a perfect four-game homestand. James was more surprised than thrilled by his latest statistical achievement, particularly while a different statistic glared at him from the box score.

"Coach (Frank) Vogel came in here and said, 'Congratulations,' and I thought he was joking about my seven turnovers," James said. "I really don't know what to think about it."

James has five triple-doubles

in the Lakers' last 10 games, getting four in victories. There's a reason for this spree: Although James has constantly filled the stat sheet since he joined the league in 2003, he is leading the NBA this season with 11.1 assists per game, nearly four more than his career average.

Pelicans 115, Trail Blazers 104: Jrue Holiday had 22 points and 10 assists, Brandon Ingram added 21 points, and host New Orleans spoiled Carmelo Anthony's Portland debut.

Anthony finished with 10 points while Portland leading scorer and four-time All-Star Damian Lillard missed his first game of the season with back spasms.

Warriors 114, Grizzlies 95:

Alec Burks scored a season-high 29 points, Glenn Robinson III added 20 and visiting Golden State snapped a seven-game losing streak with a victory over Memphis.

Marquese Chriss and Eric Paschall added 17 points apiece for the Warriors. Draymond Green was just short of his 24th career triple-double with eight points, 10 rebounds and 11 assists.

Kings 120, Suns 116: Bogdan Bogdanovic set career highs with 31 points and seven three-pointers, and host Sacramento beat Phoenix.

Richaun Holmes had 20 points and 15 rebounds, Nemanja Bjelica scored 17 points and Harrison Barnes added 15 for Sacramento.

Same four teams sit atop CFP rankings

Associated Press

The College Football Playoff rankings were unchanged at the top this week, with LSU first, followed by Ohio State, Clemson and Georgia.

The selection committee's third weekly rankings had little movement in the top 10, with Alabama fifth, followed by Oregon, Utah, Penn State, Oklahoma and Minnesota.

The committee could face an interesting decision with Alabama in the coming weeks. The Crimson Tide lost quarterback Tua Tagovailoa for the season to a hip injury Saturday. Alabama faces Western Carolina this weekend, so playing backup Mac Jones shouldn't make much difference. On Thanksgiving weekend, the Tide will face Auburn with its No. 2 quarterback, which should give the committee a better read on what kind of a team Alabama is now.

"We do not look forward," said committee chairman Rob Mullens, who is also Oregon's athletic director. "Our charge is to rank the teams based on their body of work through

week 12, and that's what we did. Obviously, we'll watch the games moving forward and evaluate them after that."

Minnesota and Baylor, both of which lost for the first time last weekend, dropped in the rankings. Minnesota went from eighth to 10th after losing at Iowa. Baylor slipped from 13th to 14th after blowing a 25-point lead to Oklahoma.

Ohio State and Penn State play this weekend in a game that could essentially eliminate the Nittany Lions from the playoff race.

The highest-ranked team from outside the Power Five conferences is Memphis at 18th, one ahead of American Athletic Conference rival Cincinnati, and two ahead of Boise State from the Mountain West.

The highest-ranked team from outside the Power Five with a conference championship receives a bid to one of the New Year's Six bowls.

Where is this going?

It certainly looks as if the Southeastern Conference is positioned to have two teams in

the final four, but it's far from a slam dunk.

Tagovailoa's injury complicates the evaluation of Alabama, and it is difficult to see how it does anything but harm the Crimson Tide's chances. There is no way to argue the Tide are as good without one of the two or three best quarterbacks in the country and with a backup who has shown to be capable but not a star.

"We are aware of who's available in what games, and we make an evaluation based on watching the games and the results," Mullens said.

Of course, the rest of Alabama's roster is still about as talented and deep as it gets in college football. There is a case to be made that if Jones and Alabama win at Auburn in impressive fashion they could get the Cardale Jones bump from the committee. You might remember in 2014, Jones stepped in for an injured J.T. Barrett in the Big Ten championship game and led Ohio State to a historic 59-0 rout of Wisconsin. That game nudged the Buckeyes past TCU and Baylor and

into the fourth seed.

The problem for Alabama is unless LSU collapses down the stretch, the Tide are locked out of the SEC championship game.

Alabama was probably going to need some help working its way back into the top four even before Tagovailoa's injury. Now, it seems the Tide will need some real chaos in other conferences to extend their streak of playoff appearances to six.

So that leaves LSU and Georgia sitting in the top four and on course to meet in the SEC championship game. Barring upsets over the next two weeks, LSU will enter unbeaten and Georgia will be 11-1. (Note: Texas A&M is now the SEC's Agent of Chaos, playing at Georgia on Saturday and at LSU next week).

If Georgia were to win the SEC, beating an unbeaten LSU in the process, it is probably safe to assume the Tigers would still have done enough with victories against Alabama, Florida, Auburn and Texas to stay in the top four.

Steelers running short on healthy players, time

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — The chaotic ending will live in infamy. The carnage that came before it could have just as significant an impact on the Pittsburgh Steelers' season.

The ugly confrontation between Cleveland defensive end Myles Garrett and Steelers quarterback Mason Rudolph in the final minute of the Browns' 21-7 victory last Thursday — an altercation that culminated with Garrett drilling Rudolph in the head with the quarterback's helmet, a swing that resulted in Garrett being suspended indefinitely by the NFL — provided a chilling flashpoint that reverberated far beyond the 120 miles that separate the longtime AFC North rivals.

Rudolph insisted in the aftermath that he's fine. Maybe, but the Steelers (5-5) most certainly are not.

Not with wide receivers JuJu Smith-Schuster and Diontae Johnson both dealing with concussions sustained following illegal helmet-to-helmet hits by Cleveland defensive backs. Not with running back James Conner aggravating a shoulder injury that could keep him out an extended period. Not with center Maurkice Pouncey facing a three-game ban for punching and kicking Garrett while attempting to retaliate for Garrett's swipe at Rudolph.

Even when healthy, Pittsburgh's offense has been a mixed bag with Rudolph under center after Ben Roethlisberger was lost for the season in

September because of a right elbow injury. Now the Steelers face the prospect of moving forward without their top running back, two of their top three receivers and one of the best centers in the league.

"Just injuries wearing us down a little bit," guard David DeCastro said. "That's part of the game when you're losing guys and stuff. It's a player-driven league, it really is. I wish I had a better answer for you. Injuries are tough."

And, for the Steelers this season, relentless.

Smith-Schuster and Johnson are both in the concussion protocol, their status for Sunday's visit to winless Cincinnati (0-10) uncertain. Conner's setback could be potentially longer term, another staggering blow

to an offense that ranks in the bottom 10 in the league in both points and total yards. Yet just as troubling, however, is the play of the offensive line.

Save for a concussion that cost veteran guard Ramon Foster two games last month, Pittsburgh's line has been relatively healthy. While the group had done a solid job protecting Rudolph before the Browns took him down four times — the Steelers entered the game having allowed the fewest sacks in the league — it has struggled to generate any significant push in short-yardage situations.

Having healthy, capable and eligible bodies would help. There haven't been many to go around of late, and Pouncey's absence will only make things more difficult.

NHL roundup

Isles extend points streak to 15 games

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Brock Nelson's second goal of the game 2:55 into overtime capped a frantic comeback to lift the New York Islanders over the Pittsburgh Penguins 5-4 Tuesday night to extend their points streak to 15 games.

The Islanders trailed by two late in the third period before goals by Josh Bailey and Ryan Pullock in the final 4:29 of regulation forced overtime. Nelson won it when he fired a shot at Matt Murray that trickled to the goaltender's right. Nelson tapped the rebound into the open net for his sixth goal of the season.

Anthony Beauvillier added his seventh for the Islanders, and Semyon Varlamov stopped 27 shots as New York improved

to 14-0-1 in its last 15 games.

Brandon Tanev scored twice for Pittsburgh. Jake Guentzel had a goal and an assist and Bryan Rust also scored for the Penguins. Murray finished with 37 saves.

Blues 3, Lightning 1: Oskar Sundqvist and David Perron scored to lead host St. Louis past Tampa Bay, spoiling Pat Maroon's much-anticipated return after helping his hometown team to a Stanley Cup title last season.

Bruins 5, Devils 1: David Pastrnak and Matt Grzelcyk scored two goals apiece, and Brad Marchand added three assists to lead visiting Boston over New Jersey.

Wild 4, Sabres 1: Zach Parise scored twice, Alex Stalock made 30 saves and visiting Minnesota beat Buffalo.

Blue Jackets 5, Canadiens 2: Pierre-Luc Dubois had two goals and an assist, rookie Emil Bemstrom added a goal and an assist, and host Columbus beat Montreal.

Stars 6, Canucks 1: Jamie Benn scored twice, Ben Bishop made 32 saves and host Dallas beat Vancouver for its fourth straight victory and 11th (11-1-1) in its last 13 games.

Avalanche 3, Flames 2: Andre Burakovsky stayed hot with another two goals, leading visiting Colorado over slumping Calgary.

Hurricanes 4, Blackhawks 2: Nino Niederreiter had a goal and an assist, and visiting Carolina beat Chicago for its fourth straight victory.

Senators 4, Red Wings 3: Anthony Duclair had two goals and an assist, and visiting Ot-

tawa held on to beat Detroit.

Jets 2, Predators 1: Patrik Laine and Nikolaj Ehlers scored, Connor Hellebuyck made 38 saves and visiting Winnipeg defeated Nashville.

Panthers 5, Flyers 2: Aleksander Barkov and Brett Connolly each had a goal and an assist to lift host Florida over Philadelphia.

Golden Knights 4, Maple Leafs 2: Marc-Andre Fleury made 31 saves for his 450th win, including a diving stop late in the game, and host Vegas held off Toronto.

Oilers 5, Sharks 2: Connor McDavid had a goal and two assists for his third straight game with at least three points, Leon Draisaitl extended his point streak to 13 games and visiting Edmonton snapped San Jose's six-game winning streak.

College basketball roundup

No. 7 Cavs use defense to hold off Lamb, Catamounts

Associated Press

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. — Mamadi Diakite and No. 7 Virginia found themselves in a nail-biter, and with Anthony Lamb putting on an offensive show in the second half, Diakite took it upon himself to try to slow the Vermont star.

Diakite scored 19 points as the Cavaliers overcame Lamb's 30-point night to beat Vermont 61-55 on Tuesday night.

"It reminded me of last year when we played against Purdue — Carsen Edwards hitting again and again and again," Diakite said, recalling Virginia's Elite Eight overtime victory in the NCAA Tournament when Edwards scored 42.

"One of those days when everything falls in. At the end, I wanted to take the challenge and I responded to it, I thought," Diakite said.

Lamb scored 25 points after halftime and hit seven three-

pointers in all, but didn't score for the last 5½ minutes.

The Cavaliers had to overcome their own offensive struggles with their trademark — defense.

"I think we showed some grit with enough stops defensively and enough plays offensively," coach Tony Bennett said.

The Cavaliers (4-0) trailed before Diakite's basket gave them a 50-49 lead with 5:12 left and sparked a 9-0 run. Jay Huff scored twice in the spurt and Braxton Key hit a three-pointer as Virginia held the Catamounts scoreless, and forced four turnovers, in a nearly four-minute span.

Lamb at one point scored 17 points in a row for the Catamounts (4-1) and nearly matched the point total of the Cavaliers' first two opponents, who each managed just 34 points. Stef Smith added 11 points, but Virginia turned

Vermont's 13 turnovers into 20 points.

No. 4 Kansas 75, East Tennessee State 63: Udoka Azubuike pounded home 21 points, Devon Dotson added 19 and the Jayhawks weathered the Pirates' second-half charge.

Marcus Garrett added 13 points for the Jayhawks (3-1), who led by 18 early in the game before the Pirates (3-1) closed within 61-56 with just over 5 minutes to go.

No. 6 Maryland 74, Fairfield 55: At College Park, Md., Jalen Smith had 17 points and eight rebounds as the Terrapins (4-0) used depth and balance to wear down the Stags (1-4).

No. 8 Gonzaga 72, Texas-Arlington 66: At Spokane, Wash., Ryan Woolridge had 19 points and nine rebounds as the Bulldogs (5-0) held off the Mavericks (2-3).

No. 25 Washington 72, Maine 53: At Seattle, Isaiah

Stewart dominated on the interior and scored 16 points, Quade Green added 11 points on 5-for-5 shooting, and the Huskies (3-1) rebounded from their first loss of the season with a victory over the Black Bears (1-3).

Liberty 55, Navy 48: Myo Baxter-Bell knocked down four free throws and blocked a shot in the final minute to allow the Flames (5-0) to hold off the visiting Midshipmen (2-2).

Navy trailed by just three, 47-44, with less than two minutes left. Baxter-Bell pulled down a defensive rebound with 59 seconds remaining and, after drawing a foul seconds later, drained two shots from the line. Elijah Cuffee stole the inbounds pass and added two more free throws with 41 seconds left to make it 51-44.

Baxter-Bell blocked a Cam Davis layup with 26 seconds left left.