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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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GOP discusses impeachment trial plans

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Top White House officials met Thursday with Republican senators to discuss strategy for a widely expected Senate impeachment trial of President Donald Trump but made no decisions about its length or other tactics, two people familiar with the session said.

Participants expressed more interest in voting as soon as they have the 51 votes needed to acquit Trump than in setting a specific timetable for the proceedings, according to one Senate GOP aide.

That aide and a senior White House official said a trial lasting two weeks was discussed but not agreed to. The aides spoke on condition of anonymity to describe a private meeting.

Thursday's White House meeting, which one aide said

lasted about an hour, came as the House Intelligence Committee held its latest public hearing on whether to impeach Trump over his attempts to pressure Ukraine to help his 2020 reelection campaign.

Trump also had lunch Thursday with a different group of GOP senators, the latest of several such lunches he's had since the House impeachment inquiry started in September. Senators said Trump brought up impeachment briefly but did not directly ask them for their support and was in a good mood.

"I think he feels understandably unable to defend himself" because the information surfacing in the House hearings has been "useless," said Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, R-W.Va.

The Democratic-controlled House is expected to vote to impeach Trump in coming weeks.

A trial in the GOP-run Senate on whether to remove him from office seems likely to follow. That chamber seems unlikely to produce the two-thirds majority vote needed to oust him.

The White House official said those at Thursday's impeachment strategy session discussed possibly having no trial, a short trial or a long one. The person said Trump will make the final decision on strategy.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., has said his chamber would have "no choice" but to take up impeachment. He's left open how long a trial would take.

The Senate staffer said participants agreed that Republicans won't be able to muster 51 votes to dismiss the trial immediately. The White House aide dismissed that as an opinion.

Republicans control the Senate 53-47. Some GOP lawmakers

have already expressed doubts about ending the proceedings immediately, saying they must be seen as handling the case against Trump seriously.

White House officials at Thursday's meeting included acting Chief of Staff Mick Mulvaney, legislative affairs director Eric Ueland, counsel Pat Cipollone, counselor to the president Kellyanne Conway and senior adviser Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law.

Also attending were GOP Sens. Ted Cruz of Texas, Mike Lee of Utah, Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, John Kennedy of Louisiana, Lindsey Graham of South Carolina and Tom Cotton of Arkansas.

Sen. Mitt Romney, R-Utah, who has a fraught relationship with Trump, was among those who had lunch with him Thursday and said they were "cordial."

Clashes intensify in Iraq as death toll rises

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Iraqi security forces clashed with anti-government protesters on a historic Baghdad street near a key bridge for the second day on Friday, killing four and bringing the death toll from the fierce outburst of fighting to 14, security and medical officials said.

Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, the highest Shiite religious authority in Iraq, re-emphasized calls to political parties to pass electoral reform laws and respond to the protesters' demands. His comments were carried in his weekly sermon.

At least 340 protesters have been killed and thousands have

been wounded since unrest in Iraq began on Oct. 1, when demonstrators took to the streets in Baghdad and across Iraq's mainly Shiite south to decry rampant government corruption and lack of basic services despite Iraq's oil wealth.

Friday's clashes centered on Baghdad's Rasheed Street — a century-old avenue that was once the heart of Baghdad's cultural scene but now is known for its crumbling buildings — are the most intense altercations in recent days amid Iraq's weeks-long anti-government protests.

The fighting appeared to have begun a day earlier when protesters tried to dismantle a

security forces barricade on the street, which leads to Ahrar Bridge, a span over the Tigris River that has been a repeated flashpoint.

Security forces responded with barrages of tear gas and live ammunition that killed 10 protesters and injured more than 100 by Thursday evening.

The violence took off again Friday afternoon. Live rounds and tear gas canisters were fired by security forces from behind a concrete barrier on Rasheed Street. At least 65 were wounded in the fighting, security and medical officials said.

With their faces concealed with surgical masks, protest-

ers ran from the scene, picking up the bodies of the dead and wounded who collapsed on their way. Plumes of smoke billowed as ammunition fire rang out in the background.

One protester was killed Friday by live ammunition, while the other two died because of tear gas, the officials said. Another succumbed to injuries later in the evening. It was not immediately clear if they died from inhaling the gas or from a direct hit by a tear gas canister, which has caused several other deaths in recent weeks.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

Trump's pardon intervention spurs anger

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump took to the phone in the Oval Office last week after days of speculation. In succession, he notified three U.S. service members accused of war crimes that he was intervening on their behalf and issuing full pardons in two of the cases as Vice President Mike Pence, top political officials and lawyers listened on speakerphone.

Army Maj. Mathew Golsteyn, who faced a murder trial next year in the 2010 death of a suspected Taliban bombmaker, said he expected the call to be quick. Instead, Trump talked to him for nearly 15 minutes, asking questions about his plans for the future and the Pentagon's application of military justice.

"I'm paraphrasing here, but he asked, 'Did you feel like you were going to get a fair shake or that it was slanted or biased against you?'" Golsteyn said in an interview. "I told him, 'Sir, it was quite clear that the outcome was fixed.' And he said, 'Yeah, that was my thoughts, as well.'"

Trump's intervention in the cases prompted a sharp backlash from some veterans and legal experts, who said that it will undermine the military justice system and weaken U.S. credibility abroad. But on Thursday, Trump weighed in again, saying in a tweet that he will not allow one of the service members to be ejected from the Navy SEALs.

Out of the loop

"The Navy will NOT be taking away Warfighter and Navy Seal Eddie Gallagher's Trident Pin," the president wrote. "This case was handled very badly from the beginning. Get back to business!"

How Trump came to believe that the Pentagon could not handle the cases fairly, and ultimately issue the pardons, reflects his tendency to accept the advice of people outside his administration. The president

mostly left defense officials out of his discussions about the issue until a few weeks ago and told his top advisers that his supporters would back the move, according to five officials familiar with the situation.

Instead, the officials said, Trump discussed the issue with other people in his orbit, including Pete Hegseth, a Fox News personality who highlighted the cases on his show and described the service members as heroes facing malicious prosecution. Trump called Hegseth numerous times to discuss the issue and told others about the conversations, according to one current and one former administration official.

Avoiding ire

This account of how Trump reached his decision — and what comes next — is based on interviews with more than a dozen people familiar with the cases, including White House and Pentagon officials. Many of them spoke on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue and a desire to avoid the president's ire.

In addition to Golsteyn, Trump pardoned former Army 1st Lt. Clint Lorange, who was convicted in 2013 of two counts of second-degree murder after ordering his soldiers to open fire on unarmed men in Afghanistan. Trump also reinstated the rank of Gallagher, a Navy SEAL who was acquitted of murder in July but convicted of posing for a photo with the remains of an Islamic State fighter.

Early this month, Defense Secretary Mark Esper and Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy — both Army veterans — went to the White House to persuade the president not to move forward with his plan. The visit came one day after Hegseth, who did not respond to *The Washington Post's* requests for comment, announced on his show that he expected Trump to intervene in the cases.

For over an hour, the senior

defense officials described what they believe to be the facts of the case, said officials familiar with the meeting. They carried documents and graphics with them and pointed out that Golsteyn was accused of burying the man he had killed, digging up his remains and then moving them. Lorange had been convicted in the deaths of unarmed men, they added.

Senior defense officials, who learned about Trump's plan shortly before Hegseth's announcement, were convinced that Trump was being fed bad information. Two officials said one document that reached the Oval Office stated that the Afghans killed in Lorange's case were "gunning" their motorcycle at the soldiers — a point often repeated by conservative pundits. Other soldiers testified at Lorange's trial that the men killed were a couple hundred yards away and not on a motorcycle when the Americans opened fire.

Misinformation

During the meeting, Trump shared the points Hegseth was making, according to one current and one former administration official. The defense officials tried to correct what they saw as misinformation, the officials said.

Esper later described the conversation with Trump as "robust."

Trump told other advisers at the White House that, before the meeting, he already had made his decision to issue pardons. Esper sought to delay an announcement, the officials said. Army Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, argued that the pardons would damage U.S. relationships around the world, and other advisers said it would set a bad precedent.

"They were trying to convince the president these guys were actually criminals, not heroes," one of the officials said.

Trump said the system was stacked against the men and

it would send a bad message if "we throw people in jail for going to war for us," the officials said.

Trump first signaled publicly that he might wade into war crimes cases last December, after Golsteyn's wife, Julie, appeared on Hegseth's program.

"At the request of many, I will be reviewing the case of a 'U.S. Military hero,' Major Matt Golsteyn, who is charged with murder," Trump tweeted afterward. "He could face the death penalty from our own government after he admitted to killing a Terrorist bomb maker while overseas."

Surprise tweet

The president's tweet — a surprise to advocates for the service members — altered possibilities, said people familiar with the cases.

While Hegseth began discussing the cases with the president, United American Patriots, a nonprofit that advocates for service members charged with war crimes, also sent files to the White House, said David Gurfein, the group's chief executive. Gurfein said in an interview that UAP provided the information this spring after a congressman — he declined to say who — met with Trump.

Several officials said that Trump began making comparisons to the cases of Bowe Bergdahl, a soldier who triggered a massive manhunt in Afghanistan after he deserted his post in 2009 and was captured by militants, and Chelsea Manning, a soldier who leaked a trove of classified information. President Barack Obama traded five Taliban officials for Bergdahl and invited his parents to the Rose Garden before he was court-martialed. Obama shortened Manning's prison sentence from 35 years to seven in 2017.

"Our great warfighters must be allowed to fight," Trump said in a tweet Sunday. "I would not have done this for Sgt. Bergdahl or Chelsea Manning!"

Leader of wounded warrior unit fired

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The colonel in charge of the Marine Corps' Wounded Warrior Regiment was relieved of his command Thursday for loss of trust in his leadership, according to the service.

Col. Lawrence Miller was relieved by Lt. Gen. Michael Rocco, the deputy commandant for manpower and reserve affairs, "because he lost trust and confidence in his ability to lead," according to a Marine Corps statement.

"There are allegations against Col. Miller that are being investigated," Maj. Craig Thomas, a spokesman for U.S. Marine Corps Manpower and Reserve Affairs, said Thursday.

He could not specify what the allegations are because "these proceedings are administrative and therefore not releasable."

"However, it is important to note the removal of the commanding officer was not based

on a single incident, rather on the totality of his job performance and personal leadership choices that led to the loss of trust and confidence in Col. Miller's ability to lead the unit," Thomas said.

Miller had been the commanding officer of the regiment since March 2017.

Lt. Col. Larry Coleman, the regiment's executive officer, is now serving as the interim commander. The Wounded Warrior Regiment is at Marine Corps Base Quantico, Va.

Miller has been temporarily assigned to the staff of the Marine Corps Combat Development Command at Quantico, according to the statement.

The Wounded Warrior Regiment has two battalions, one at Camp Pendleton, Calif., and the other at Camp Lejeune, N.C. The unit is in charge of combat and noncombat wounded, as well as ill and injured Marines and sailors, who are recovering in order to return to duty or transition out of the military.

Trump salutes 2 soldiers killed in an Afghan crash

Associated Press

DOVER AIR FORCE BASE, Del.—President Donald Trump paid respects Thursday to two Army aviators who were killed when their helicopter crashed this week in Afghanistan, holding his salute until each of the flag-draped cases containing their remains were returned to their grieving families.

Trump and his wife, Melania, traveled to Dover Air Force Base to offer condolences to the families of Chief Warrant Officer 2 David C. Knadle, 33, and Chief Warrant Officer 2 Kirk T. Fuchigami Jr., 25.

The president and first lady led a group of dignitaries that included Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Mark Milley and national security adviser Robert O'Brien. Trump and members of the military saluted and civilians placed a hand over their hearts as a carry team of six white-gloved members of the Army's Old Guard executed the delicate task of transferring the remains from a vehicle the military referred to as a ramp to a waiting vehicle, one case at

a time.

Trump has said witnessing the dignified transfer of service members' remains is "the toughest thing I have to do" as president.

As the final day of public hearings in the House impeachment inquiry wound down, Trump left the White House for the short flight to the Delaware military base, where the remains of service members killed abroad are returned to U.S. soil.

Knadle, of Tarrant, Texas, and Fuchigami, of Keaau, Hawaii, died Wednesday when their helicopter crashed as they provided security for troops on the ground in Logar Province in eastern Afghanistan.

Both were assigned to Fort Hood, Texas.

Wednesday's crash brought this year's U.S. death toll in Afghanistan to 19, excluding three noncombat deaths.

The Taliban claimed responsibility for shooting down the helicopter, but the U.S. military has dismissed that as a false claim. The crash remains under investigation.

New 'hoodie' to protect military dogs' hearing tested

BY JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

A high-tech "hoodie" is being developed to protect the hearing of military working dogs who, like their human counterparts, are often exposed to loud noises in their job, the Army said this week.

Tests during helicopter operations of the Canine Auditory Protection System, which the Army is developing with biodefense and medical device company Zeteo Tech, "found a significant reduction in short-term hearing loss" in military canines, the Army said.

"Even a short helicopter flight can affect a dog's hearing, resulting in impaired performance and inability to hear the handler's commands, which can hinder the mission," said

'Military working dogs are subjected to the same combat exposures as their military handlers.'

2017 Army report

Army Research Office scientist Stephen Lee in a statement.

A little more than an inch thick, the system is made of lightweight acoustic absorption materials that block unwanted sounds. The flexible system fits snugly around a dog's head — like a hoodie — and forms a seal around the ears.

The system is compatible with goggles and allows dogs to work in tight spaces, the Army said.

The new hearing protection is

a break from current products, which are "rigid, cumbersome and hard to put on the dog, with limited effectiveness in testing for the protection of canine hearing," the Army said.

It's not clear when the new equipment will be made available to military dog handling units.

The incidence of hearing loss in military dogs is thought to be similar to that in human service members, for whom it ranks as the leading service-related dis-

ability within the Department of Veterans Affairs.

"Military working dogs are subjected to the same combat exposures as their military handlers... (and) are estimated to experience similar levels of noise-exposed hearing loss," the Army wrote in a 2017 request for proposals seeking hearing solutions for canines.

Military dogs carry out a range of jobs, including sniffing out roadside bombs and tracking down enemy combatants.

Last month, a Belgian Malinois named Conan suffered injuries that were not life-threatening when he chased Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi into a dead-end tunnel in Syria. The militant leader blew himself up, along with two of his children.

Trump signs stopgap bill to avert shutdown

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump on Thursday signed a short-term funding bill, averting the threat of a government shutdown until next month.

Trump signed the bill, which will extend funding through Dec. 20, hours before government funding was set to expire.

The Senate, by a 74-20 vote, passed the short-term funding bill earlier in the day.

The push to keep the government funded comes as the House is in the midst of contentious public impeachment inquiry hearings. House Democrats are probing whether Trump abused his power by pressing Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskiy to investigate Democratic rival

Joe Biden and his son's dealings in that Eastern Europe nation.

The stopgap spending bill would give negotiators four more weeks to try and break an impasse involving funding for Trump's border wall project that has gridlocked progress on the 12 appropriations measures that fund about one-third of the government. Talks on the broader, full-year appropriations measures have hit a rough patch after the administration rejected bipartisan entreaties to add about \$5 billion to grease their path.

Negotiations on the full-year measure also could be buffeted by the toxic atmosphere that's worsening because of the ongoing impeachment probe, which could send articles of impeachment to the House

floor around the Dec. 20 deadline for averting another potential shutdown.

The chief holdup is Trump's demands for up to \$8.6 billion more for the U.S.-Mexico border wall.

Republicans controlling the Senate have stuck with Trump despite worries that an impasse over his demands could force Congress into resorting to funding the government for the entire budget year at current spending levels.

Both sides on Capitol Hill want to avoid any chance of such a full-year continuing resolution, as it is known in Washington-speak. Such an outcome would be an inefficient way to run the government and has particularly negative consequences for the Pentagon budget.

Obama warns against primary 'purity tests'

Associated Press

LOS ALTOS HILLS, Calif. — Former President Barack Obama warned Democrats on Thursday against adopting "purity tests" in the presidential primary and said any adversity the candidates face in the contest will make whoever emerges an even stronger nominee.

Obama spoke to about 100 donors during a question-and-answer session with Democratic National Committee Chairman Tom Perez in Los Altos Hills, Calif. The event came a day after the fifth Democratic presidential primary in Atlanta and as the 17-person field continues to expand, with the expected entry of former New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg in the coming days.

Until recently, Obama largely refrained

from opining publicly on the Democratic contest, and his move from the sidelines comes at a moment of deep uncertainty for the party. Many are jittery about the uneven candidacy of his former Vice President Joe Biden, questioning whether Sens. Bernie Sanders and Elizabeth Warren can defeat President Donald Trump next year, and skeptical of whether Pete Buttigieg, the South Bend, Ind., mayor who is surging in Iowa, can appeal to black voters that are a crucial Democratic voting bloc.

"We will not win just by increasing the turnout of the people who already agree with us completely on everything," Obama said. "Which is why I am always suspicious of purity tests during elections. Because, you know what, the country is complicated."

Obama urged Democrats to "chill out,"

saying, "The truth of the matter is that every candidate on that stage believes we should provide better health care and education and address climate change."

He also noted the historic diversity of the Democratic field, which now includes five women, three black candidates, a Latino man and a gay man. He compared that to his own election as the nation's first black president.

"We have a number of women candidates and we have one gay candidate. And those candidates are going to have barriers if they win the nomination, or they win the general election — just like I did," Obama told donors. "You can overcome that resistance if the way you are framing these issues and messages indicate, 'Look, I'm part of an American tradition ... of opening up opportunity.'"

Police: Woman stabbed at church because of fur coat

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — A woman with a history of attacks on people wearing fur has been charged with attempted murder for stabbing a woman she believed was wearing the material at a church outside Cleveland, police said.

Meredith Lowell, 35, is being held on a \$1 million bond after the attack Wednesday afternoon at a Presbyterian church in Cleveland Heights.

The victim had brought children she was babysitting to the church for choir practice, and Lowell stabbed her twice in the arm and once in the abdomen with a kitchen knife, according to a Cleveland Heights police report.

A man wrestled Lowell to the floor and held her until officers arrived, the police report said.

The victim remained hospitalized Thursday, police Chief Anne Mecklenburg said. Her condition was unclear. It's also not clear whether the victim was wearing real fur.

Lowell was arrested a year ago on suspicion of attacking someone she believed was wearing fur at a Whole Foods store in University Heights.

A police report said Lowell punched and

then tried to cut a woman wearing a jacket with fake fur on its hood with the serrated blade of a Swiss Army knife. The jacket was gashed, a police photo shows, but the woman was not cut.

Lowell was indicted in January on one count of felonious assault in Cuyahoga County. An online court docket shows she pleaded not guilty by reason of insanity last month. The case is pending.

And in March 2012, Lowell was indicted in federal court in Cleveland after authorities said she posted on Facebook that she wanted to hire a hit man to kill someone wearing fur.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

'Christmas in Ice' called off amid lack of ice

AK FAIRBANKS — Seasonal ice park officials in Alaska are missing a crucial ingredient, announcing a Christmas-themed park has closed amid lack of ice in North Pole.

The Fairbanks Daily News-Miner reported Wednesday that Executive Director Keith Fye said the annual ice park called Christmas in Ice was canceled for the first time in the city of North Pole in Alaska.

Fye cited winter conditions including not having enough ice on ponds to harvest for ice carving this year.

Officials said the winter ice park is located next to the Santa Claus House east of Fairbanks and normally runs for six weeks through December. Fye said this would have been the 14th year.

Hunter sparks probe by killing rare albino deer

MO HOUSE SPRINGS — Conservation officers are investigating after a rare albino deer was shot and killed by a hunter in eastern Missouri.

KMOV-TV reported that the deer was killed Tuesday near a subdivision and a school in the Jefferson County town of House Springs, south of St. Louis. The Missouri Department of Conservation is investigating.

The deer was shot about 500 feet from a middle school, far enough away that the shooting apparently didn't violate a state law that prohibits the discharge of a firearm near a school.

Some residents who live near the site told KMOV they enjoyed the sight of the white deer in their neighborhood. Others expressed concern that someone was hunting so close to homes and the school.

Trooper gives a hoot, rescues stunned owl

ME MANCHESTER — A state trooper made a wise move in rescuing a jeopardized owl who managed to fly to safety after the assistance.

The Maine State Police said Trooper Sam Tlumac found the disoriented owl on Nov. 15 in the middle of a much-traveled road in Manchester, not far from the state capital of Augusta. Tlumac took the owl to a nearby fire department and consulted with a warden, who said the bird might've been stunned by a car.

Police said in a Facebook post that Tlumac then "had to bring a person to jail (unrelated to the owl)," but returned to check on the bird and found it doing much better. He took the owl outside, where it took flight.

Inmate sentenced for running drug ring

CT HARTFORD — A Connecticut inmate has been sentenced to nearly eight more years behind bars for running a cocaine distribution ring while in prison.

The U.S. attorney's office said Westley Northrup, known as "Piff," was sentenced Wednesday by a federal judge in Hartford. Prosecutors said Northrup, 31, was caught on prison phone recordings in Cheshire Correctional Institution running a drug operation that sold cocaine through a network of dealers in Connecticut.

Authorities said the former Meriden resident was dealing drugs while serving a five-year sentence for distributing cocaine. He will serve the federal sentence after his state sentence.

A federal grand jury in 2017 indicted Northrup and 10 others in the cocaine ring. He pleaded guilty last year.

Suspected drunken driver kicks deputy

WI RACINE — Racine County sheriff's officials said a deputy was injured during a blood draw for a suspected drunken driver.

The deputy stopped the 44-year-old driver for speeding in an active construction zone on Interstate 94 in Raymond on Wednesday night. Authorities said the driver was arrested on suspicion of his fourth drunken driving charge after failing field sobriety tests. He was taken to the hospital, a search warrant was obtained and the deputy helped hold him down for the blood draw because he was uncooperative. Sheriff's officials said the Twin Lakes man kicked the deputy in the face, injuring the deputy's jaw.

The driver was taken to the Racine County Jail.

Counties vote to be gun-rights sanctuaries

VA ROANOKE — Local officials in a handful of Virginia counties have voted to honor and defend gun rights by declaring their counties to be "Second Amendment Sanctuaries."

The movement has spread in Virginia since the Nov. 5 election, when Democrats gained majority control of both the state Senate and House of Delegates.

Democratic Gov. Ralph Northam has said his party's leaders will push for gun control measures.

The Roanoke Times reported that Appomattox, Campbell, Charlotte, Carroll and Pittsylvania counties have passed sanctuary resolutions. Amherst and Franklin counties are considering adopting similar measures.

On Tuesday, more than 350 people wearing "Guns Save

Lives" badges appeared before the Franklin County Board of Supervisors, who directed staff to draw up a resolution after consulting with the sheriff, commonwealth's attorney and county attorney.

Jail escapee captured in makeshift hut

MO PRINCETON — Authorities said an inmate who escaped twice from a Missouri jail was captured more than 1,000 miles away in Delaware, where he was living in a makeshift hut in a wooded area.

The U.S. Marshals Service said in a news release that Drake Kately, 27, of Kansas City, Mo., was captured Tuesday near New Castle, Del. Kately escaped most recently in September from the jail in Mercer County, Mo., after making a hole in his cell. He was being held there on multiple charges, including assault.

The Marshals Service said he was found in a shelter created by placing foliage around a fallen tree after authorities spotted clothing on a tree branch.

Deer hunters told to look for feral pigs

WI MADISON — Wisconsin wildlife officials are urging deer hunters to keep an eye out for feral pigs.

The state's traditional nine-day gun deer season begins Saturday and runs through Dec. 1. The Department of Natural Resources wants hunters to look for feral pigs and kill them whenever possible. Feral pigs are unprotected wild animals and may be hunted year-round with no bag limits.

DNR officials said any hunter who spots a feral pig or kills one should report it to the agency through its website.

From wire reports

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Texans hold off Colts, lead AFC South

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Determined to bounce back from an embarrassing loss, the Houston Texans used big performances from Deshaun Watson and DeAndre Hopkins and solid defense to beat the Indianapolis Colts and move into first place in the AFC South.

Watson threw two touchdown passes to Hopkins and finished with 298 yards to help the Texans to the 20-17 win Thursday night.

The Texans (7-4), who were routed by Baltimore 41-7 on Sunday, trailed by four early in the fourth quarter when Hopkins got in front of Pierre Desir and stretched out to haul in a 30-yard reception for a 20-17 lead. The Texans got things going on that drive with a 33-yard run by Carlos Hyde.

"It was a good team win," coach Bill O'Brien said. "Guys came in here on Monday to turn the page ... they were very focused this week and it showed up on the field."

Houston's defense stepped up after the touchdown by Hopkins, forcing a punt on the next drive before stopping the Colts (6-5) on fourth-and-7 with 3 minutes left. Jacoby Brissett threw for 129 yards, and came up a yard shy of a first down on Indy's fourth-down attempt late in the fourth quarter.

"There's still plenty of football left, and we're far from out of this thing," Colts coach Frank Reich said. "This was a play-off atmosphere. Obviously, it was a good opportunity for us to take sole possession

and have a sweep of Houston, but it didn't work out that way."

Hopkins finished with 94 yards receiving and his first TD reception came on a 35-yard grab in the second quarter.

Will Fuller, who returned after sitting out three games with a hamstring injury, had seven catches for 140 yards for the Texans.

"Anytime we have a healthy Will ... he's been a very productive guy," O'Brien said. "He's made chunk plays for us, touchdowns, and he's a great player. And when we get him as a part of our offense it really helps us and it opens up a lot of different things."

Watson was able to complete several long throws on Thursday, including ones for 51 and 44 yards to Fuller.

"I was able to put enough air on the ball and let our guys make plays and that's what they get paid to do, that's what they love to do," Watson said. "Just give them a chance and most likely they're going to come down with it."

T.Y. Hilton had topped 100 receiving yards in four of his last six games against the Texans and entered averaging 133.3 receiving yards in seven career games at NRG Stadium. He wasn't a factor, finishing with just 18 yards receiving in his return after missing three games with a calf injury. Reich said Hilton was limited on Thursday and that they wanted to keep him under 30 plays.

Hilton dismissed any suggestion that lack of practice contributed to his tough

night, saying: "Ain't got nothing to do with nothing. I just played bad. It's on me."

There were about 6 minutes left in the third quarter when Jonathan Williams, who helped fill in for injured starter Marlon Mack, wriggled away from three defenders and dashed 13 yards for a touchdown to put the Colts up 17-10.

Fuller had his 51-yard reception on the first play of Houston's next drive, but the Texans couldn't move the ball after that and settled for a 36-yard field goal to cut the lead to four.

The Texans led 3-0 after a field goal early in the second quarter.

There were about 8 minutes left in the second when Kenny Moore tipped a pass from Watson and intercepted it. It was the first time Watson had thrown an interception at home since Oct. 14, 2018, against the Bills, a streak of 303 attempts, which was the longest active run in the NFL.

The Colts cashed in on the mistake when Brissett scrambled 5 yards for a touchdown to make it 7-3.

There were 2 minutes left in the first half when Watson avoided the rush and found Hopkins wide open in the end zone for a 35-yard touchdown pass to put Houston back on top 10-7.

"I don't know where the safeties and the corners were, but they weren't in position, so I just kind of laid it out there," Watson said.

Indianapolis added a field goal at the end of the first half to leave it tied at 10 at halftime.

Yellow Jackets halt late comeback by Wolfpack

Associated Press

ATLANTA — Only five days after being removed from Georgia Tech's low point of the season, James Graham showed his dual-threat potential as the new leader of a revamped offense.

Graham threw three touchdown passes, including two to Ahmarean Brown, and Georgia Tech stopped a potential tying 2-point play with about five minutes remaining to beat North Carolina State 28-26 on Thursday night.

Graham also ran for 129 yards with a touchdown as Georgia Tech (3-8, 2-6 Atlantic Coast Conference) snapped a three-game losing streak that included a 45-0 loss to Virginia Tech on Saturday.

Graham, who was pulled from the lopsided loss to the Hokies, wasn't leaving the win over the Wolfpack.

"Especially after last week he had some-

thing to prove," said wide receiver Malachi Carter, who had two catches for 74 yards. "He just went out there and did his thing."

N.C. State (4-7, 1-6) suffered its fifth straight loss.

Graham helped the Yellow Jackets gain 395 yards — a dramatic improvement from their 134 yards in the loss to Virginia Tech.

Even so, Georgia Tech had to withstand N.C. State's comeback after leading 21-3 at halftime and 28-13 to start the fourth quarter.

The Wolfpack rallied on Devin Leary's 4-yard touchdown pass to tight end Cary Angeline and Ricky Person's 1-yard scoring run.

"I thought the guys played their butts off in the second half," said N.C. State coach Dave Doeren. "We just did too many things in the first half that made it difficult to

win."

Person's run, with 5:17 remaining, cut the Yellow Jackets' lead to two points.

N.C. State's two-point try failed. Leary rolled to his right before stopping to throw to Angeline on the left side of the field. But Leary had no time to set his feet because of the pressure from Christian Campbell and the pass fell incomplete.

"He was running away from me," Campbell said of Leary. "He had no idea I was behind him, so as soon as he turned to square up I was in his face."

On the game's first play, Graham threw a 54-yard pass to Carter. Two plays later, Graham found Brown in the right side of the end zone for a 17-yard touchdown pass.

Graham's 13-yard scoring pass to former starting quarterback Tobias Oliver gave the Yellow Jackets a 14-0 lead — their first two-touchdown advantage of the season.

NHL roundup

Isles extend points streak to 16 games

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Brock Nelson came through in overtime again for the New York Islanders.

Nelson scored his second goal of the game at 4:16 of the extra period, lifting the Islanders to a 4-3 win over the Pittsburgh Penguins on Thursday night to extend their point streak to a franchise-record 16 games.

Nelson, who also scored the overtime winner at Pittsburgh two nights earlier, got a pass from Mathew Barzal on the left side on a rush, cut across the front of the goal to avoid a defender and draw goalie Matt Murray out of position, and then backhanded it into the right side for his eighth.

“Good win by us, sticking with it. It was nice to get the win in overtime,” said the 28-year-old Nelson, a 2010 first-round draft pick who was playing his 500th NHL game. “We’ve won a number of different ways now on this run.”

Anthony Beauvillier had a goal and an assist, Scott Mayfield also scored, and Barzal had two assists to help the Islanders — who haven’t lost in regulation since Oct. 11 — improve to 15-0-1 during their streak while winning their fifth straight since an overtime loss to the Penguins here on Nov. 7.

New York had earned points in 15 straight games three times previously, the last during a franchise-record 15-game win streak in the 1981-82 season — before overtime or shoot-outs. That streak came during the heyday of their run of four straight Stanley Cup titles from 1980-83.

Thomas Greiss stopped 23 shots for his eighth straight win — all coming during the Islanders’ streak — and ninth of the season.

Maple Leafs 3, Coyotes 1: Sheldon Keefe won his coaching debut since taking over for the fired Mike Babcock, and visiting Toronto stopped a six-game slide by beating Arizona.

Panthers 5, Ducks 4 (OT): Aaron Ekblad scored his second goal of the game 22 seconds into overtime, and host Florida rallied with five straight goals to stun Anaheim.

Canucks 6, Predators 3: Bo Horvat scored one of his team’s five power-play goals, and visiting Vancouver stopped a three-game slide by beating Nashville.

Stars 5, Jets 3: Jamie Benn scored with 4:21 left, and rolling Dallas got the win after they blew a three-goal lead against visiting Winnipeg.

Sharks 2, Golden Knights 1 (OT): Logan Couture scored 3:20 into overtime, and Aaron Dell made 37 saves to lift visiting San Jose over Vegas.

Kings 5, Oilers 1: Tyler Tofoli had two goals and an assist to lead host Los Angeles past Edmonton.

Bruins 3, Sabres 2: David Pastrnak got his NHL-leading 20th goal, helping host Boston beat Buffalo.

Wild 3, Avalanche 2: Jason Zucker scored midway through the third period, and host Minnesota won consecutive games for the second time this season, beating Colorado.

Blues 5, Flames 0: Goaltender Jordan Binnington stopped 40 shots for his sixth career shutout, and Oskar Sundqvist scored twice to lead host St. Louis to a rout of Calgary.

Lightning 4, Blackhawks 2: Anthony Cirelli and Brayden Point scored 2:39 apart midway through the third period, and visiting Tampa Bay earned its eighth consecutive victory against Chicago.

Blue Jackets 5, Red Wings 4: Oliver Bjorkstrand, Boone Jenner and Eric Robinson scored in the third period, powering host Columbus to its third straight win.

Flyers 5, Hurricanes 3: Claude Giroux had two goals and two assists, helping visiting Philadelphia stop a four-game slide.

Seven-time champ Johnson to race 1 more season, retire

Associated Press

CONCORD, N.C. — Jimmie Johnson handed out mini bottles of Patron at his retirement announcement — so perfectly on brand for the cool Californian who stormed to a record-tying seven NASCAR championships yet somehow bored fans who found him too vanilla for their liking.

Nothing about Johnson was ever boring, though.

Certainly not as the unknown Xfinity Series driver in 2000 who slammed headfirst into a foam wall at Watkins Glen, climbed from the wreckage and raised his arms in triumph from the roof of his car. Or the time he tried to prove he could surf on top of a moving golf cart, only to fall and break his wrist weeks after winning his first championship. Horseplay at The Palms Casino with crew chief Chad Knaus after title No. 4 left both scrambling on the floor searching for a misplaced championship ring.

Now 44, Johnson has made friends with celebrities from practically every industry — musicians, actors, athletes, artists — and is legendary for a work hard, play hard mantra. His love of tequila is well-known, and the bottles celebrating him Thursday were a nod to the seven Patron toasts he did with his team during every championship celebration.

His work ethic made him the best NASCAR driver of much of the last two decades, and his desire to play a bit more certainly led to his decision to retire after the 2020 season. He said Thursday he made the decision earlier this fall and was at peace with it. He said he is committed to chasing a record eighth championship next year — but ready to take a break and spend more time with his family.

“This is not a retirement from driving race cars, this is slowing down from 38 races,” Johnson said, noting the length of the NASCAR Cup Series schedule. “A little more balance is really where that sits. This is not retirement from racing, this is stepping down for the 38 races and the commitment it takes to being competitive. I look forward to what might develop. I feel like I need to take a deep breath and see what comes from there, put my family first instead of racing first and see where that takes us.”

Making his 19th season the last one as a full-time racer was a decision Johnson has pondered for much of the year. He’s a planner, a processor, and wanted to figure out his plans by the end of this season.

He visited team owner Rick Hendrick in late October — “every time one of these drivers calls me and wants to come to my house, I know that’s not a good situation,” Hendrick quipped — and discussed his decision with Jeff Gordon, the four-time champion who believed enough in Johnson to convince Hendrick to build a team around the unknown driver all those years ago.

But he’s mired in a 95-race losing streak spanning more than two years, had two crew chief changes this season and has been slow in the new car Chevrolet rolled out in 2018. Chevy has yet another new model set for competition next season, and Johnson is the grizzled veteran on a Hendrick lineup of Chase Elliott, Alex Bowman and William Byron.

Johnson said his decision is not based on performance.

“It’s had very little to do on making the decision,” Johnson said. “There’s a feeling I’ve been waiting for, I didn’t know when or why, but it did.”

College basketball roundup

Ewing wins again at MSG
as Hoyas knock off Horns

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Mac McClung scored 19 points to help give coach Patrick Ewing another signature moment at Madison Square Garden, leading Georgetown to an 82-66 victory over No. 22 Texas on Thursday night.

The Hoyas (4-1) used a 12-0 run early in the second half that rallied the crowd and had “Let’s go Hoyas!” chants echoing throughout the arena. With his retired No. 33 New York Knicks jersey hanging in the rafters, Ewing helped orchestrate another wild one at his favorite arena.

The Hoyas are trying to make their first NCAA Tournament since 2015 and an early win over a Top 25 team could give that résumé a boost.

Matt Coleman made all six three-pointers and scored 22 points for the Longhorns (4-1). Texas lost with former Longhorn and injured Nets star Kevin Durant watching courtside.

The Longhorns shot 37% from the floor and had 12 turnovers.

Jamorko Pickett scored 15 points and James Akinjo had 14 for the Hoyas.

No. 1 Duke 87, California 52: At New York, Mike Krzyzewski won for the 217th time with his team ranked No. 1, matching John Wooden for the record in the Blue Devils’ romp over the Golden Bears in the 2K Empire Classic.

Krzyzewski is 217-34 when Duke (5-0) holds the top spot, a mark it hit this week in The Associated Press poll. Wooden went 217-11 during his run at UCLA.

Duke is ranked No. 1 for the 143rd week, extending its record, and has the top spot in the AP poll for the 20th season under Krzyzewski, also a record.

No. 12 Texas Tech 72, Tennessee State 57: Davide Moretti scored 13 of his 19 points in the second half, including all four of his three-pointers, and the host Red Raiders finally pulled away from the Tigers.

Freshmen Terrence Shannon Jr. and Jahmi’us Ramsey each scored 13 points for Texas Tech (4-0).

No. 14 Arizona 71, South Dakota State 64: Josh Green scored 15 points, Nico Mannion added 14 and the host Wildcats pulled away from the Jackrabbits in the final minutes,

Arizona (5-0) trailed for much of the first

half and by three at halftime. The Wildcats finally pushed ahead 40-39 with 14:28 left when Green made a 15-foot jumper. The basket was part of a 12-0 run that put the Wildcats ahead 46-39, and they didn’t trail again.

No. 17 Villanova 98, Middle Tennessee 69: At Myrtle Beach, S.C., Cole Swider scored a career-high 26 points, hitting six three-pointers, and the Wildcats routed the Blue Raiders in the Myrtle Beach Invitational quarterfinals.

Collin Gillespie added 16 points and hit four threes, Justin Moore had 15 points and Jeremiah Robinson-Earl had 11 rebounds to help Villanova (3-1) win its second straight following a loss at No. 10 Ohio State.

No. 18 Xavier 73, Towson 51: At Charleston, S.C., Tyrique Jones had 12 points and 12 rebounds to lead the Musketeers past the Tigers in the Charleston Classic.

Xavier is 5-0 for the second time in three seasons and first time since 2018 when it won the Big East Conference regular-season title and earned a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament.

Towson dropped to 2-3.

No. 24 Baylor 76, Ohio 53: At Myrtle Beach, S.C., Jared Butler scored 19 points and the Bears pulled away to beat the Bobcats in the Myrtle Beach Invitational quarterfinals.

MaCio Teague added 17 points, Freddie Gillespie finished with 10 points and 11 rebounds and Baylor (3-1) used a late 15-0 run to cruise to its second straight victory.

Lunden McDay scored 16 points for Ohio (3-2).

Loyola Marymount 78, Air Force 64: At Bimini, Bahamas, Ivan Alipiev scored 18 points as the Lions beat the Falcons in the Junkanoo Jam.

LMU shot 57.7% from the field in the first half, and finished at 62.5% (30-for-48). There were seven lead changes in the first half, and LMU held the lead the entire second half.

Parker Dortch added 17 points for the Lions, while Eli Scott chipped in 16. Scott also had nine assists and seven rebounds. Keli Leapepe had 10 points.

A.J. Walker had 18 points for the Falcons (2-3). Lavelle Scottie added 16 points. Abe Kinrade had seven rebounds.

NBA roundup

Bucks hold
off Blazers

Associated Press

MILWAUKEE — The Milwaukee crowd greeted Carmelo Anthony with a loud ovation when the 10-time All-Star was introduced before the game. It cheered louder after the Bucks extended their winning streak to six straight.

Giannis Antetokounmpo had his second triple-double of the season and Milwaukee beat Anthony and the short-handed Portland Trail Blazers 137-129 on Thursday night.

“Giannis is Giannis,” Anthony said about the reigning MVP. “He’s a tough check. I thought tonight we actually did a pretty good job. Even though he had a triple-double, when you look at that, it’s like, ‘Oh, he had a hell of a game.’ But I thought, for the most part, we were back on him. We loaded up on him. He got some and-ones, he got going a little bit. ... He found some guys, they made some threes, kind of opened the game up.”

Antetokounmpo had 24 points, 19 rebounds and a career-high 15 assists to lead the Bucks to their seventh win in the last nine games against Portland.

“I couldn’t get going offensively,” Antetokounmpo said. “Shots weren’t falling and they were showing a lot of crowds. I tried to find my teammates and they were in the right spots. They were able to knock down shots and to roll hard. I just did half of the work and my teammates did the rest.”

After scoring 10 points on 4-for-14 shooting in 24 minutes in his season debut Tuesday night against the Pelicans, Anthony had 10 points in the first half Thursday. He finished with 18 points (6-for-15 shooting) and seven rebounds for the Trail Blazers, who were without Hassan Whiteside (hip), Damian Lillard (back), Zach Collins (shoulder) and Jusuf Nurkic (leg).

“He’s getting his sea legs after having that year off,” Portland guard CJ McCollum said about Anthony. “Getting used to that movement, getting used to how the game is flowing.”

Pelicans 124, Suns 121: Brandon Ingram scored 15 of his 28 points in the fourth quarter and JJ Redick scored 26 points, leading visiting New Orleans to its third straight win.

Kelly Oubre Jr. led Phoenix with 25 points in its third consecutive loss. Devin Booker had 19 for the short-handed Suns, who were without starting center Aron Baynes and starting point guard Ricky Rubio.