

STARS AND STRIPES®

Saturday, November 23, 2019

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

Pence surprises troops in Iraq with visit

Associated Press

IRBIL, Iraq — Vice President Mike Pence worked to reassure the U.S.'s Kurdish allies in an unannounced trip to Iraq on Saturday, the highest-level American trip since President Donald Trump ordered a pull-back of U.S. forces in Syria two months ago.

Flying in a C-17 military cargo jet to preserve the secrecy of the visit, Pence landed in Irbil to meet with Iraqi Kurdistan President Nechirvan Barzani. The visit was meant to hearten the U.S.'s regional partners in the fight against the Islamic State after the U.S. pulled troops from northern Syria, leaving the Kurdish allies in neighboring Syria to face a bloody Turkish assault last month following the Trump-ordered withdrawal.

It was Pence's second trip to the region in five weeks. Trump deployed him on a whirlwind trip to Ankara, Turkey, last month to negotiate a cease-fire after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan seized on the U.S. withdrawal to launch the offensive on U.S.-allied Kurdish fighters in northern Syria. Trump's move had sparked some of the most unified criticism of his administration to date, as lawmakers in both parties accused Trump of forsaking longtime Kurdish allies and inviting Russia and Iran to hold even greater sway in the volatile region.

Pence said he welcomes "the opportunity on behalf of President Donald Trump to reiterate the strong bonds forged in the fires of war between the people of the United States and the Kurdish people across this

region."

Asked whether the U.S. was facing a sense of betrayal from Iraqi and Syrian Kurdish allies over Trump's actions in Syria, Pence said both groups, including Syrian Kurdish forces "who fought alongside us," had no doubts about the U.S. commitment to them. "It's unchanging," Pence said.

A senior U.S. official said Pence's visit was also meant to reassure the many Americans who have long supported the region's Kurds that the Trump administration remained committed to the alliance. The visit was also designed to show Pence's focus on foreign policy as Washington is gripped by the drama of impeachment.

Barzani thanked Pence for the U.S. military support in the fight against ISIS, adding that his "visit at this particular

time is an important indication of your continued support to Kurdistan and Iraq."

Pence, joined on the trip by his wife, Karen Pence, also greeted U.S. troops ahead of the Thanksgiving holiday, serving turkey and accompaniments to hundreds of troops at the two locations.

"While you come from the rest of us, you're the best of us," Pence told service members in a dusty hangar at Al-Asad. He said the Trump administration is working to secure another pay increase for the armed services and suggested the impeachment inquiry in Washington was slowing the way.

"Partisan politics and endless investigations have slowed things down in D.C.," Pence said.

Navy secretary sides with admiral on Gallagher review

The San Diego Union-Tribune

Navy Secretary Richard Spencer said Friday that Chief Petty Officer Edward Gallagher should face a planned "trident review board," despite President Donald Trump's tweet Thursday that Gallagher should remain a SEAL.

Spencer told Reuters at the Halifax International Security Forum in Nova Scotia, Canada, he supports the hearing into whether Gallagher can keep his trident, a symbol of the SEALs, in light of Gallagher's conviction at a general court-martial in San Diego in July.

"I believe the process matters for good order and discipline," Spencer said.

The New York Times reported Saturday that Spencer and the admiral in charge of the

SEALs have threatened to resign or be fired if plans to expel Gallagher from the organization are halted.

The decision to review the SEAL qualifications of four service members connected to Gallagher's war crimes case by the commander of Naval Special Warfare Command, Rear Adm. Collin Green, was made with the support of Navy leadership, including the chief of naval operations, Adm. Mike Gilday.

Gallagher's legal team said the decision to hold board reviews was a challenge to Trump's authority as commander in chief.

Trump has intervened several times on Gallagher's behalf. On Thursday, about an hour after one of Gallagher's lawyers appeared on 'Fox &

Friends' decrying the review board, Trump took to Twitter to express his disapproval.

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

The Navy Chief of Information, Rear Adm. Charlie Brown, said Thursday the Navy was waiting for Trump to issue more specific orders before officially canceling the review.

"The Navy follows the lawful orders of the President," Brown said in a statement.

"We will do so in case of an order to stop the administrative review of SOC Gallagher's professional qualification. We are aware of the President's tweet and we are awaiting further guidance."

A senior Navy official said late Thursday that, in fact, all the review boards have been halted pending further guidance from Trump.

Gallagher was charged with killing a wounded Islamic State captive and shooting civilians during his time in Iraq in 2017. At the end of his court-martial, a jury acquitted him of the most serious allegations and convicted him of the offense of posing for photos with the body of the deceased fighter.

A military jury sentenced Gallagher to four months' confinement, which he served before trial, and reduced his rank to petty officer 1st class, or E-6.

On Nov. 15, President Donald Trump restored Gallagher's rank to E-7, or chief petty officer.

Amazon's contract dispute uses Trump videos

The Washington Post.

WASHINGTON — Amazon on Friday cited comments by President Donald Trump at a rally and to journalists as it pursues its challenge to the Pentagon's surprise decision to award a lucrative contract to rival Microsoft last month.

For the first time, Amazon directly linked comments by the president to the award of the Joint Enterprise Defense Infrastructure contract, also known as JEDI, to Microsoft last month. Though Amazon filed its protest under seal, it also notified the Court of Federal Claims that it intends to use four videos as exhibits, including one of Trump at a February 2016 campaign rally, as well as one of a Fox News host urging

him to prevent the Pentagon from awarding the contract to the online retail giant.

The e-commerce giant formally filed a protest with the Court of Federal Claims to challenge the award of the cloud-computing contract, following through on a threat it made last week. It did so under seal to protect trade secrets.

In a statement, the e-commerce giant repeated its claims that "unmistakable bias" and "political influence" tainted the decision-making process. Trump has repeatedly criticized Amazon, whose chief executive, Jeff Bezos, owns *The Washington Post*.

Amazon also repeated its suggestion that the award of the JEDI contract to Microsoft was improperly influenced by

Trump.

"We also believe it's critical for our country that the government and its elected leaders administer procurements objectively and in a manner that is free from political influence," Amazon spokesman Drew Herdener reiterated, issuing the same statement he gave a week ago. "Numerous aspects of the JEDI evaluation process contained clear deficiencies, errors, and unmistakable bias — and it's important that these matters be examined and rectified."

A spokeswoman for Microsoft, Janelle Poole, said: "We're ready to get to work so the men and women in uniform who serve our country can access the critical new technology they urgently require. We have

confidence in the qualified staff at the Department of Defense, and we believe the facts will show they ran a detailed, thorough and fair process in determining the needs of the warfighter were best met by Microsoft."

A Defense Department spokeswoman said the Department is aware of Amazon's protest and remains confident in the JEDI award.

"The source selection process was conducted in accordance with the stated criteria in the solicitation and procurement law," Defense spokeswoman Elissa Smith said in a statement. "Our focus continues to be on getting the warfighters these much needed capabilities as quickly and efficiently as possible."

U.S. Military loses drone over Tripoli

Associated Press

CAIRO — The U.S. military said Friday it lost an drone aircraft over the Libyan capital, Tripoli, where rival armed groups have been fighting for control of the city for months.

The U.S. Africa Command said the drone was lost Thursday while assessing the security situation and monitoring extremist activity.

AFRICOM did not give a reason for the drone's loss, but said it was investigating. It said drone operations in Libya were "fully coordinated with appropriate government officials."

Since 2015, Libya has been divided between two governments, one based in Tripoli and the other in the country's east. Forces loyal to the eastern government have been trying to wrest control of the capital since April.

An Italian drone was shot down Wednesday southeast of Tripoli by forces loyal to the eastern government.

In September, the U.S. military said it carried out several airstrikes against the Islamic State group in Libya, killing more than 40 militants. Those were the first U.S. strikes in the North African country in more than a year.

New Air Force secretary touts Space Force on overseas trip

BY JENNIFER SVAN

Stars and Stripes

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE, Germany — In her first trip overseas as the new Air Force secretary, Barbara Barrett said establishing a Space Force will be a major priority.

Barrett, who was sworn in last month as the fourth woman to serve as the Air Force's top civilian boss, has the credentials and conviction to push lawmakers to approve a sixth branch of the military, one that would fall under the Air Force.

"Establishing a Space Force is going to be one of the most important things that happen in the next year and it is vitally important for America's defense and America's way of life," Barrett said.

Barrett is an instrument-rated pilot who in 2009 trained in Russia to go into space. She's had a long career in the aerospace industry and foreign relations, including an appointment as U.S. ambassador to Finland under former President George W. Bush.

Barrett was at Ramstein Air Base on Friday with Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David L. Goldfein to visit with airmen and learn about their missions. The Ramstein stop came at the end of Barrett's and Gold-

fein's first joint trip to Afghanistan and other countries in the Middle East, including Iraq, Jordan and Qatar.

"This has been one of the most exciting and revealing weeks ever for me," Barrett said in an interview alongside Goldfein. "The greatest takeaway I have is the appreciation the world owes to these spirited, dedicated airmen."

It's important "for airmen to get to see and meet our new secretary and also to see us together as an executive team," Goldfein said. "Just here before the holiday, what we really want to do is just get out ... and say thanks to them, thanks to their families."

President Donald Trump chose Barrett, 68, to be the 25th Air Force Secretary, leading a department of more than 650,000 airmen, civilians and family members.

Trump has supported creating a Space Force since he took office, an idea that was at one time opposed by Barrett's predecessor, Heather Wilson, because of the added cost and bureaucracy.

Barrett did not say how many personnel Space Force would require or what it would cost but said it "won't be as people-driven as some of the other services. It will be technology-driven."

US looks to make asylum harder to obtain

Associated Press

TIJUANA, Mexico — Nkeze wasn't home when Cameroonian militants came knocking, probably to deliver their signature ultimatum to join their separatist movement or have his writing arm cut off.

The 24-year-old economics student escaped to Douala, the country's largest city, only to learn that the government wanted to arrest him for participating in a university protest. He then flew to Ecuador and traveled through eight countries to the U.S. border with Mexico, including a trek through Panamanian jungle where he saw corpses and refugees crying for shelter, food and water.

In his quest to settle with relatives in Houston, Nkeze now faces a potentially insurmountable obstacle: a new American ban that forbids anyone who travels through another country to the U.S.-Mexico border from applying for asylum there.

"When you find yourself on U.S. soil, you are well-protected," Nkeze said, sounding

upbeat as he waited in Tijuana for a chance to make his case. "You are protected by human rights." He spoke to The Associated Press on the condition that he be identified only by his last name due to safety concerns.

The U.S. is increasingly aligning itself with wealthy countries in Europe and elsewhere to make asylum a more distant prospect.

On Thursday, American authorities sent a Honduran man from El Paso, Texas, to Guatemala. It marked the first time the U.S. government directed an asylum-seeker back to that country under the new policy, which gave him an option to file a claim there. He decided against filing a claim and returned to Honduras, according to Guatemala's foreign ministry.

Asylum was once almost an afterthought, until an unprecedented surge of migrants made the United States the world's top destination in 2017, according to the United Nations Refugee Agency. The U.S. held its leading position last year, followed by Peru,

Germany, France and Turkey.

Trump has called asylum "a scam" and declared that the country is "full." In nine months, the administration returned more than 55,000 asylum-seekers to Mexico to wait for their cases to wind through U.S. courts. Another asylum ban on anyone who crosses the border illegally from Mexico is temporarily blocked in court.

It's unclear how the ban will be rolled out.

Nkeze may have caught a break when a federal judge in San Diego ruled Tuesday that anyone who appeared at a U.S. border crossing before the ban was announced July 16 and waited for their names to be called should be exempt.

He waited for five months in Tijuana for his turn on a list of nearly 9,000 people seeking asylum at a San Diego border crossing.

His name was finally called Nov. 12. He was immediately taken into immigration custody and is being held in an Arizona detention center.

Mystery grows over hold on Lebanon military aid

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration is withholding more than \$100 million in U.S. military assistance to Lebanon that has been approved by Congress and is favored by his national security team, an assertion of executive control of foreign aid that is similar to the delay in support for Ukraine at the center of the impeachment inquiry.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Friday congratulated Lebanon as the country marked its independence day but made no mention of the holdup in aid that State Department and Pentagon officials have complained about for weeks.

It came up in impeachment testimony by David Hale, the No. 3 official in the State Department, according to the transcript of the closed-door hearing. He described growing consternation among diplomats as the administration would neither release the aid nor provide an explanation for the hold.

"People started asking: 'What's the problem?'" Hale told the impeachment investigators.

The White House and the Office of Management and Budget have declined to comment on the matter.

The mystery has only added to the consternation of the national security community, which believes the assistance that pays for American-made military equipment for the Lebanese army is essential, particularly as Lebanon reels in financial chaos and mass protests.

There is opposition to aid to the Lebanese army from outside the NSC. Pro-Israel hawks in Congress have long sought to defund the Lebanese military, arguing that it has been compromised by Shiite Hezbollah, which the U.S. designates as a "foreign terrorist organization."

But the Pentagon and State Department reject that view, saying the army is the only independent Lebanese institution capable of resisting Hezbollah.

Calif. increases legal pot taxes, roiling industry

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — California is increasing business tax rates on legal marijuana, a move that stunned struggling companies that have been pleading with the state to do just the opposite.

Hefty marijuana taxes that can approach 50% in some communities have been blamed for pushing shoppers into California's tax-free illegal market, which is thriving. Industry analysts estimate that \$3 are spent in the illegal market for every \$1 in the legal one.

The California Cannabis Industry Association said in a statement that its members are "stunned and outraged."

The group said the higher taxes that will take effect Jan. 1 will make it even worse for a legal industry struggling under the weight of heavy regulation and fees, local bans on pot sales and growing a booming underground marketplace.

"Widening the price ... gap between illicit and regulated products will further drive consumers to the illicit market at a

time when illicit products are demonstrably putting people's lives at risk," the group said, referring to the national vaping health crisis.

The changes involve taxes paid by legal businesses, which ultimately get passed along to consumers at the retail counter.

Josh Drayton of the cannabis association predicted that an eighth-ounce purchase of marijuana buds, typically priced around \$40 to \$45, would be pushed up to \$50 or more in the new year.

A major change involves what's known as the mark-up rate, which is used when calculating taxes in certain business transactions, such as when a retailer purchases wholesale cannabis that will in turn be sold to consumers.

Separately, cultivation tax rates are being increased by inflation, as required by law. For example, the tax on an ounce of dry buds will climb to \$9.65 from \$9.25, an increase of just over 4%.

Trump hears arguments in vaping debate

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump on Friday heard opposing viewpoints in the debate over youth vaping but offered no insight into where he would ultimately come down on the issue after promising two months ago that he would ban most flavored e-cigarettes but later backtracking.

He said the administration would announce its plan “very soon.”

“We want to take care of our kids, got to take care of our kids,” Trump told reporters after listening to more than an hour of at times robust debate among representatives from the vaping industry, the nation’s major health associations, parent advocates and business groups.

Trump backed off the proposal he an-

nounced in September after advisers told him a ban would not serve his political interests.

In Friday’s meeting, he asked most of those seated around the table in the Cabinet Room to spell out their solution.

Health groups told him they support the near-total ban on e-cigarette flavors that he promised in September.

“Our stance is very aligned with what you suggested on Sept. 11,” said Gary M. Reedy, chief executive officer of the American Cancer Society, a position shared by the American Lung Association, said its president and CEO, Harold Wimmer.

Others pressed for banning all flavors, including mint and menthol, arguing that teens will gravitate to those flavors if they remain on the market.

Other participants argued for raising the

age limit for legal purchases of electronic cigarettes from 18 to 21.

Trump said earlier this month that the administration will pursue such an increase. He said Friday that age would be discussed at the meeting, calling it a “big factor.”

Federal law bans sales of e-cigarettes to those under 18, but some states have pushed that to 21 — the same as with traditional cigarettes.

Industry representatives argued against banning sweet, fruity and other flavors that have proven attractive to teens, arguing that bans don’t work.

Trump seemed sympathetic to that argument as he compared a flavor ban to prohibition and suggested that such a move could lead to the creation of a black market for flavored e-cigarettes.

2 students arrested for threats on schools

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Deputies arrested a 13-year-old boy and seized a semi-automatic rifle after he threatened to shoot other students and staff at a Los Angeles-area middle school, authorities said Friday.

In a separate case, a boy at another school was taken into custody involving a planned shooting.

The arrests came barely a week after deputies were frantically summoned to a high school in Santa Clarita, where a 16-year-old boy killed two fellow students and took his own life.

Since then, the Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department has investigated at least 30 school threats, spokesman Sgt. Bob Boese said.

The incidents that resulted in the arrests were the only ones deemed credible.

At Animo Mae Jemison Charter Middle School in Willowbrook, just south of downtown Los Angeles, multiple students overheard the 13-year-old say Thursday that he would carry out the shooting on campus the following day, Sheriff Alex Villanueva said.

The students alerted teachers and police were notified.

Deputies searched the boy’s home and discovered an AR-15-style rifle, 100 rounds of ammunition, a list of names and a drawing of the school, Villanueva said.

The boy was arrested without incident on suspicion of making criminal threats. A 19-year-old male relative also was arrested on suspicion of possessing an unregistered firearm, Boese said. The man, who was not identified, was held on \$35,000 bail, he said.

Investigators were trying to determine who owns the gun that authorities initially called a ghost gun — a weapon without a serial number made from parts from other guns. Villanueva later clarified the weapon has a serial number.

Villanueva praised school officials for quickly notifying authorities about the threat.

“The fact that people stepped forward and said what they had heard led us to prevent a tragedy today,” he said.

The other boy was arrested Thursday in Palmdale, north of Los Angeles. Villanueva said the student at Knight High School made threats on social media following a campus fight. The sheriff said the boy acknowledged posting threats along with pictures of a teen with a gun. No weapon was recovered in the case.

Security forces, protesters clash for 3rd day in Baghdad

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — Iraqi security forces fired rubber bullets and tear gas to disperse crowds of protesters Saturday, killing one person, in a third day of fierce clashes in central Baghdad, security and hospital officials said.

A protester was struck by a rubber bullet and died instantly and 12 others were wounded in the fighting on Rasheed Street, a famous avenue known for its old crumbling architecture and now littered with

rubble from days of violence.

Fifteen people have died and over 100 wounded in the renewed clashes. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity in line with regulations.

At least 341 protesters have died in Iraq’s massive protests, which started on Oct. 1 when thousands of Iraqis took to the streets to decry corruption and lack of services despite Iraq’s oil wealth.

Separately, Iraq’s Parliament failed to hold a session Saturday due to lack of a

quorum. Lawmakers were supposed to read reform bills introduced to placate protesters. The next session was postponed to Monday.

The fighting has centered on Rasheed Street and started on Thursday 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.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Motorist takes off with officer still hanging on

NH HUDSON — Police said a motorist drove off with an officer hanging onto his vehicle during a traffic stop in New Hampshire.

Police said Michael Derochers, 37, of Nashua, led police on a chase over the New Hampshire-Massachusetts border before being apprehended.

Hudson police said Derochers was intoxicated and speeding when he was pulled over early Nov. 16.

They said he became combative and drove off with an officer partially inside his vehicle. The officer managed to free himself and was not hurt.

Deer rescued from Halloween bucket

NY PUTNAM VALLEY — Animal control officers came to the aid of a deer that had a plastic Halloween bucket stuck to its snout.

TV station WABC reported that the yearling deer was spotted in Putnam Valley, northeast of New York City, with its snout in a pumpkin-shaped bucket.

The state Department of Environmental Conservation and Putnam Valley Animal Control made the rescue on Wednesday. Authorities say the bucket was stuck to the deer's snout for four days. The community nicknamed the animal Little Pumpkin.

Officer shoots himself in hand, gets surgery

ND FARGO — A Fargo police sergeant underwent a four-hour surgery in a Minneapolis-area hospital after shooting himself in the hand.

KFGO radio reported Sgt. Matt Ysteboe was hurt on Nov. 15 while hunkering down after a man fired a gun toward officers.

Fargo Police Chief David Todd said Ysteboe suffered a serious injury. No further information about Ysteboe's condition was released.

Todd said the 54-year-old suspect shot a revolver with a laser in the direction of officers and fired additional shots in the Radisson Hotel lobby, where he was arrested.

Wife of man found in freezer feared doctors

MO KANSAS CITY — Records show that police and state workers responded repeatedly to concerns about the care of a terminally ill Missouri man before his body was found in a freezer in his wife's bedroom, where it may have stored for nearly a year.

Barbara Watters, 67, of Joplin was charged with abandonment of a corpse. An autopsy found no signs of foul play in the death of her husband, Paul Barton, whose body was found after a witness told police that he had died on Dec. 30, 2018, and that his body had been in her freezer ever since.

Police records obtained by The Associated Press show Watters feared that a doctor wanted to harvest Barton's brain for research and that she prohibited him from receiving medical care.

Police: Woman left 3 dogs to die in home

NJ LACEY — A woman who allegedly abandoned three dogs that were found dead at a vacant home this month is now charged with animal cruelty.

Ocean County prosecutors said Allissa DeStefano, 29, was responsible for caring for the dogs and had left them alone for an unspecified amount of time, but it's not clear if she owned the dogs.

The animals were found Nov. 11 in a Lacey Township home.

'Large fireball' in sky remains a mystery

OR SALEM — Deputies said they aren't sure exactly what was spotted blazing across the sky in southwest Polk County Thursday afternoon.

The Statesman Journal reported Friday that it wasn't a plane, according to Lt. Dustin Newman with the Polk County Sheriff's Office.

Newman said the main concern was that it was a plane and people were stranded.

He said law enforcement officials have been in contact with U.S. Air Force and Federal Aviation Administration sources who determined it wasn't an airplane.

Still, it remains unclear what the object was.

\$114M indoor rec complex plan unveiled

ND BISMARCK — Planners said a new \$114 million indoor recreation complex in Bismarck would be funded by a new sales tax and private donations.

The Bismarck Parks and Recreation District staff talked about the proposed facility at a meeting Wednesday night. They said the center would have a main building with a separate ice arena. The concept includes a four-lane running and walking track and an indoor cross-country track with elevation and obstacles.

Recreation staff also recommend six indoor tennis courts,

adjacent to five indoor pickleball courts. Other amenities would include two indoor basketball courts, four racquetball courts and an indoor playground.

Teen mayhem at mall leads to arrest, injuries

NY NEW YORK — Police said a throng of teenagers got out of hand at a New York City mall, and the commotion devolved into fights, injuries and an arrest as police and security officers cleared the crowd.

The Queens Center mall mayhem began around 1:30 p.m. Friday. The local precinct captain noted many local schools had dismissed students early.

Police said mall staffers asked them to intervene after the youths began running around and creating a ruckus.

Police: Pay tickets with canned food

OH BAY VILLAGE — A Cleveland-area community is among those allowing drivers to pay their parking tickets with non-perishable food donations instead of cash this holiday season.

WEWS-TV reported the Bay Village Police Department in northeastern Ohio is accepting food items in lieu of monetary payment for tickets totaling up to \$25, at a rate of one item for every \$5 in fines owed.

The offer is good through the end of the year. It's a partnership with a Bay Food Ministry, a group that provides food assistance for those in need.

A department Facebook post said tickets for handicap parking and fire lane violations don't qualify, and any fines beyond \$25 must be paid in cash.

From wire reports

STARS AND STRIPES

On a mission to provide credible reporting and daily news to America's military, wherever they serve.

Mobile apps available: www.stripes.com/apps.

Seattle's Clowney focuses on present

Associated Press

RENTON, Wash. — When the Seattle Seahawks were last on the field nearly two weeks ago, Jadeveon Clowney was their best player.

He was disruptive in every way possible — rushing the passer, stopping the run and generally causing headaches for the San Francisco 49ers.

And yet, Clowney didn't see much of anything special in the impact he had, even if it was his best game since being traded to Seattle before the season.

"I play a lot of great games I feel like. That game was just different because it was Monday night," Clowney said. "It was an away game, prime time. I think everybody just saw it. I feel like I've been playing OK all season."

Nobody in Seattle has any issue with what the Seahawks have gotten from Clowney during his 10 games. He's been the top performer for a defensive line group that, until the game against San Francisco, had been underperforming.

But what Clowney did against the 49ers was eye-opening,

even for a former No. 1 overall pick. He had five tackles, five QB hits, one sack, one forced fumble and one fumble recovery he returned for a touchdown, not to mention plenty of other moments that didn't show up in the official stats.

And if he has more games like that, the price tag for retaining his services after this season — whether by Seattle or someone else — is only going to rise.

"He had so many impact plays. Such a significant role in the night," coach Pete Carroll said. "I think he affected the guys around him, most obviously, in terms of our pass rush, pressure on the QB, and just the activity. This was his best game. It's looked like he should have numbers and stuff like that in what we've seen. We have not been disappointed at all in his activity, his effort, and all that."

There is a little concern about Clowney's status for this Sunday's game at Philadelphia, even though he did not practice either Wednesday or Thursday, listed with knee and hip injuries. He's listed as questionable

on Seattle's injury report. He left the team Friday to receive treatment for the hip injury and will be a game-time decision.

Clowney's numbers for the season don't speak to his impact, with just 21 tackles and three sacks. It took a bit of time for Seattle to find his best role within the concepts of its 4-3 defense. It has some similar properties to what Clowney did in the past, but also some significant differences.

Understanding those differences took some time. Clowney said defensive line coach Clint Hurtt has been a significant help in helping him learn the best ways to play within the system.

"I was kind of surprised. I told them, 'What kind of 4-3 is this under? What is this? This is a different 4-3,'" Clowney recalled. "He broke it down to me. He said you'll still be able to make your plays. Got it figured out. We're going to put you in a good position. They started moving me around throughout the first couple weeks trying to figure out where I fit. They found a good spot for me."

While Clowney is trying to

keep the future out of his head, his contract status has defined his past couple of years. Clowney said each of the past two seasons he's been caught up during the year thinking about what was coming next. Would he be paid appropriately? Would he have long-term security?

It's helped ease some of Clowney's concerns that he can't currently negotiate with the Seahawks because he is playing on the franchise tag. When the trade was made, Seattle also agreed not to use the tag after this season. No matter what, whether it's in Seattle or elsewhere, Clowney should get the long-term deal he wants this offseason.

"I'm done thinking about that. Just take it one game at a time. One season. One play," Clowney said. "You never know what's going to happen. You can be one play away from the end and it all could blow up in your face. Just continue to have fun. Continue to play at a high level. Enjoy this game because it can be taken away from you at any minute. Not worried about what the future holds right now."

Browns' Landry says Garrett's suspension 'not fair'

Associated Press

BEREA, Ohio — Browns wide receiver Jarvis Landry called the NFL for two penalties — false start and illegal procedure in its handling of Myles Garrett's suspension.

"It was not fair to Myles," Landry said.

Garrett was banned indefinitely by the league for striking Steelers quarterback Mason Rudolph over the head with a helmet last week, the shocking act disrupting Cleveland's season and intensifying an already heated rivalry with Pittsburgh.

Garrett had asked for a reduction of his unprecedented penalty — the longest for a single on-field act in league history. He was denied Thursday by appeals officer James

Thrash, whose ruling came out shortly after a report surfaced that the Pro Bowl defensive end told the league Rudolph used a racial slur.

Garrett later stood by his claim, saying on Twitter: "I know what I heard."

Thrash did reduce Steelers center Maurkice Pouncey's suspension from three games to two for kicking and punching Garrett. One day earlier, Thrash upheld a one-game suspension for Browns defensive tackle Larry Ogunjobi, who pushed a helmet-less Rudolph to the ground in the melee.

On Friday, Landry and some other Browns players were trying to make sense of the discipline, saying it was hurried and one-sided. They also want

to know why Rudolph escaped punishment.

"I still do feel like the league handled the process too quickly, made a decision too quickly," Landry said. "With less than 24 hours, they made a decision. With the appeal process, you have a guy kicking and punching Myles, and he gets suspended, he gets a game taken off of his suspension? Then you have Larry, who did way less than that. He still gets suspended for his game. So it makes no sense."

"Then you have a guy who's involved and pretty much instigated the whole thing, and nothing happens to him. It's almost like deliberately trying to, like, mess with Cleveland."

The Browns have firmly supported Garrett from the outset,

and that backing didn't change following Thursday's explosive revelation that race may have ignited the incident.

For the second straight day, Browns coach Freddie Kitchens would not divulge if Garrett told him Rudolph used a racial slur.

"I will not reconsider anything I have talked about with Myles Garrett, but I will say this about Myles' character: if he tells me something, I am going to believe it," Kitchens said.

Landry's main complaint with the league is that its initial ruling came less than 12 hours after Garrett pulled off Rudolph's helmet before swinging it and hitting the QB on top of the head.

Shiffrin wins 41st slalom of career

Associated Press

LEVI, Finland — Coming off a record-breaking season with 17 race wins, Mikaela Shiffrin didn't need much time in the new campaign to reach yet another milestone.

The American set the all-time World Cup record for most slalom wins by any skier on Saturday, earning her 41st career victory in the discipline at the season-opening slalom race.

Shiffrin beat the 32-year-old mark by Swedish great Ingemar Stenmark, who won 40 slaloms between 1974 and 1987. Shiffrin amassed her total in just seven years, having won her first race in December 2012.

"I don't feel super emotional, I am just happy," said Shiffrin, who usually refrains from focusing on records or statistics. "I am happy with my skiing for the first (slalom) race of the season."

Shiffrin, the 2014 Olympic and four-time world champion,

has held the women's record since passing Marlies Raich's tally of 35 slalom wins a year ago.

On Saturday, Shiffrin came from behind to defeat Petra Vlhova, runner-up to the three-time champion in the overall standings last season.

Vlhova, who won this race in 2017, led by 0.13 seconds after the opening run but skied out early in her final run and failed to finish, immediately after the American had posted the fastest run time.

"I had a solid first run and in the second run I was really attacking and fighting," Shiffrin said. "I may have been a little bit lucky but we have no idea how (Vlhova) was going to finish."

Even with Vlhova skiing out, the duo looked set to continue dominating the discipline, as all 21 World Cup slaloms since January 2017 have been won by either Shiffrin (17) or Vlhova (4).

On Saturday, Wendy Holdener finished as runner-up but

trailed Shiffrin by 1.78 seconds, a country mile in a sport mostly decided by hundredths of a second.

The Swiss skier had been nursing an elbow injury in recent weeks but improved from sixth position after the opening run.

"I still can't fully stretch the arm but you don't need that in slalom," Holdener said. "I am just happy that I could start here."

Katharina Truppe of Austria was 1.94 behind in third, while the rest of the field finished more than 2.4 seconds off the pace.

In the opening run Shiffrin and Vlhova had already created a gap from the rest of the field by almost a second, with Vlhova leading the American by 0.13.

"It was OK. I felt pretty solid with my skiing," Shiffrin said after the first run. "I think there are some spots where I can be a little bit more relaxed."

Vlhova was 0.32 behind Shiffrin at the second check point

but found a smoother line going over a roll into the steep part of the Levi Black course.

"I didn't do a great job on this one. It's pretty sharp. I think Petra did quite a good job there," Shiffrin said. "I like to be in a position where I am kind of coming from behind and chasing."

New Zealand teenager Alice Robinson, who beat Shiffrin in the season-opening giant slalom in Austria last month, was sitting out the race with a knee injury.

It was Shiffrin's fourth career triumph in the race in Finnish Lapland, where winners receive a reindeer.

The win also gave Shiffrin an early lead in the overall standings, going into the World Cup weekend in Killington, Vermont, next week.

"It's a really good start to the season. It's always great to be on the podium, in Soelden and then here," Shiffrin said. "It helps with the confidence in the next races to know my speed is there."

NHL roundup

Penguins race past Devils with outburst in 3rd period

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Jake Guentzel tried to corral the puck, but it wasn't quite cooperating. So as the Pittsburgh Penguins' forward raced in on New Jersey goalie Mackenzie Blackwood in the middle of the second period on Friday, Guentzel kept his stick on the ice and hoped for the best.

"It's just kind of a cluster there when you lose a puck like that and you're on a breakaway," Guentzel said. "Just tried to get him to cheat over and it worked."

As tends to happen when Guentzel is in close, particularly at home.

Guentzel managed find enough control to deke from his forehand to his backhand and back again, getting Blackwood

to bite in the process. Guentzel tapped the puck into the open net for his team-leading 11th goal of the season — and seventh at PPG Paints Arena — to give the Penguins all the momentum they needed in a 4-1 win.

"We're playing well," Guentzel said. "I think our record might not show some games that we've played well in but I think our top to bottom lineup, we're just playing well and we're filling spots and guys are stepping up big, so I think it's been good."

Guentzel has three goals and three assists during a four-game point streak that started shortly after the Penguins lost captain Sidney Crosby for at least six weeks following surgery to repair a sports hernia.

Pittsburgh's top line has kept rolling anyway as Guentzel, Rust and Evgeni Malkin have combined for eight goals and 12 assists in the five games since Crosby's injury.

"I think they kind of feed off each other," Penguins defenseman John Marino said. "They always kind of know where they are. They're always in the right position."

And they're getting help. Marino and Jared McCann scored 25 seconds apart in the third period to chase Blackwood. Dominik Kahun added his sixth goal in 11 games as the Penguins snapped a four-game winless streak at home against New Jersey. Tristan Jarry trimmed his goals-against average to 1.81, stopping 36 shots, weathering an early second-pe-

riod surge from the Devils then coasting after Guentzel's pretty move.

Taylor Hall scored his third of the season for the Devils. Blackwood made 30 saves before being removed in favor of Louis Domingue early in the third period after giving up goals on back to back shots.

"That one is not on Mackenzie," New Jersey coach John Hynes said. "I mean, he kept us in the game in the first period. The pull was not regarding Mackenzie or the disappointment in him by any means."

Senators 4, Rangers 1: Thomas Chabot had a goal and an assist, Anders Nilsson stopped 30 shots and Ottawa beat visiting New York for its third straight victory.

NBA roundup

Davis helps Lakers win sixth in a row

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Anthony Davis scored 24 of his 33 points in the second half to help the Los Angeles Lakers beat the Oklahoma City Thunder 130-127 on Friday night.

Davis also had 11 rebounds and seven assists, and LeBron James added 23 points and 14 assists. The Lakers have won six in a row to improve the best record in the NBA to 13-2.

Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 24 points and Steven Adams added 22 for the Thunder. They have lost five of six.

Los Angeles guard Rajon Rondo was ejected early in the fourth quarter after a kick to Dennis Schroder's groin area.

Clippers 122, Rockets 119: Kawhi Leonard hit a go-ahead jumper with 15 seconds remaining to finish with 24 points and lift host Los Angeles over

Houston.

Russell Westbrook missed at the other end and Paul George got the rebound while getting fouled. He made both free throws with one second left to complete a wild finish and help the Clippers improve to 10-1 at home with their fourth win in a row overall.

James Harden couldn't get a shot off on the Rockets' final possession as time expired. Harden had 37 points and 12 assists for the Rockets. He made a career-high 11 three-pointers.

Mavericks 143, Cavaliers 101: Luka Doncic had 30 points and 14 assists with former Dallas teammate Dirk Nowitzki watching as a retiree for the first time.

Rookie Darius Garland scored a career-high 23 points for visiting Cleveland.

Nuggets 96, Celtics 92: Jamal Murray hit two free

throws with 1.5 seconds remaining and scored 22 points and host Denver won a game overshadowed by a head injury to Boston guard Kemba Walker.

Walker collided with teammate Semi Ojeleye late in the second quarter, striking Ojeleye's abdomen area head-first and going down to the court in a heap. In a tweet, the Celtics said Walker has been diagnosed with concussion-like symptoms and was transported to a hospital for evaluation.

76ers 115, Spurs 104: Tobias Harris scored 26 points, Joel Embiid had 21 points and 14 rebounds and Philadelphia handed visiting San Antonio its eighth straight loss — the longest under longtime coach Gregg Popovich.

Jazz 113, Warriors 109: Donovan Mitchell scored 30

points and Mike Conley had 27 to help host Utah hold off a late rally by undermanned Golden State.

Pistons 128, Hawks 103: Andre Drummond had 23 points and 15 rebounds and host Detroit had its highest-scoring first half since 1983, leading 76-57 at halftime.

Wizards 125, Hornets 118: Bradley Beal had 30 points and 12 assists as host Washington overcame a 13-point deficit in the fourth quarter to beat Charlotte.

Heat 116, Bulls 108: Jimmy Butler scored 27 against his former team and visiting Miami beat Chicago for its fifth straight win.

Nets 116, Kings 97: Spencer Dinwiddie scored 23 points and Joe Harris added 22 in host Brooklyn's victory over Sacramento.

College basketball roundup

No. 1 Duke downs Georgetown, sets another record

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Mike Krzyzewski set the record for wins coaching a No. 1 team as top-ranked Duke got 20 points and 10 rebounds from Vernon Carey Jr. to beat Georgetown 81-73 on Friday night at Madison Square Garden.

The Blue Devils (6-0) beat Cal and the Hoyas on consecutive nights to win the 2K Empire Classic and give Krzyzewski another slice of history. Krzyzewski is 218-34 when the Blue Devils hold the top spot, a mark they hit this week in The Associated Press poll. Hall of Famer John Wooden went 217-11 while UCLA was ranked No. 1.

No. 15 Utah State 80, LSU 78: At Montego Bay, Jamaica, Sam Merrill made a go-ahead three-pointer with 57 seconds left and the Aggies overcame

a 19-point deficit in the second half to beat the Tigers in the Jamaica Classic.

No. 6 Maryland 86, George Mason 63: Anthony Cowan Jr. scored 16 points, Jalen Smith had 12 points and 10 rebounds and the host Terrapins overwhelmed the previously unbeaten Patriots.

No. 9 Kentucky 82, Mount St. Mary's 62: At Lexington, Ky., Immanuel Quickley had eight of his 13 second-half points during an 18-3 run that helped the Wildcats pull away from the Mountaineers.

No. 10 Ohio State 85, Purdue Fort Wayne 46: Kaleb Wesson had 15 points and seven rebounds for the host Buckeyes.

No. 11 Oregon 78, Houston 66: Anthony Mathis kept up his accurate shooting with 18 points in the Ducks' victory

over the visiting Cougars.

No. 17 Villanova 83, Mississippi State 76: At Conway, S.C., Jeremiah Robinson-Earl scored 22 points and the Wildcats beat the Bulldogs to advance to the Myrtle Beach Invitational final.

No. 18 Xavier 75, Connecticut 74 (2OT): At Charleston, S.C., Jason Carter's two foul shots with 10.1 seconds left in the second overtime lifted Xavier past UConn and into the Charleston Classic championship game.

No. 24 Baylor 77, Coastal Carolina 65: At Conway, S.C., MaCio Teague scored 21 points and the Bears pulled away to beat the Chanticleers in the Myrtle Beach Invitational semifinals.

No. 22 Texas 62, California 45: Matt Coleman III scored 14 points, Jericho Sims had 12

points and nine rebounds and the Longhorns rebounded from their first loss to beat California in the 2K Empire Classic consolation game in New York.

No. 25 Washington 73, Montana 56: Isaiah Stewart scored 18 points in just 15 minutes, Jayden McDaniels added 14 points and the Huskies beat the Grizzlies.

Lipscomb 65, Navy 61: Ahsan Asadullah scored 12 points and grabbed 13 rebounds as the Bison held off a late rally to win its third straight game against the host Midshipmen.

Duquesne 69, Air Force 63: At Bimini, Bahamas Marcus Weathers and Michael Hughes combined for 21 points and 17 rebounds as the Dukes defeated the Falcons at the Junkanoo Jam on Friday night.