

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

6 Americans among 8 dead in copter crash

BY CHAD GARLAND

Stars and Stripes

At least eight people were killed, including six Americans, when a helicopter carrying members of an international peacekeeping force in Egypt crashed near the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula on Thursday.

"Six of the dead were American, one was French and one Czech," Ahmed Manduh, who works at the Cairo office of the Multinational Force and Observers, told Stars and Stripes by telephone. The U.S., France and Czech Republic are among 13 countries that provide military personnel to MFO, which since the early 1980s has monitored the Israeli-Egyptian peace accord signed in 1979.

Nine people were on board the helicop-

ter, MFO said in a statement. One American survived the crash and was medically evacuated, but Manduh had no information about his condition.

The Army and Defense Department confirmed separately that six Americans had died in the crash.

"We are saddened by the loss of six U.S. and two partner nation service members," Acting Defense Secretary Christopher Miller said in a statement released by the Pentagon.

"Yesterday we recognized the sacrifice of millions who have defended our nation, and today we are reminded of the last full measure our warriors may pay for their service."

The crash happened near the Red Sea resort town of Sharm el-Sheikh during a routine mission, MFO said in a statement.

The organization's Egypt headquarters and logistical hub, South Camp, is located on a bluff near the town, overlooking the sea.

The crash was apparently caused by a technical failure of a UH-60 Black Hawk helicopter during a reconnaissance mission, an Egyptian official told The Associated Press.

The Americans on the helicopter were National Guardsmen, an Israeli official told The Washington Post.

The injured American was evacuated by the Egyptian military and transferred to an Israel Defense Forces aircraft near Eilat, the Israeli official said. The soldier was taken to the Soroka University Medical Center in Beersheba, Israel, The New York Times reported.

Drill sergeant blasts trainees on viral TikTok video

BY WYATT OLSON

Stars and Stripes

An Oklahoma-based drill sergeant found himself in hot water with superiors this week in the wake of a viral video in which he described his trainees as "[expletive] soft" and "[expletive] sickening."

The video, posted on TikTok by the drill sergeant at Fort Sill, was shared on Twitter by user Lethality Jane, who maintains a considerable following and often posts on military topics.

Army Times, which first reported on the video Tuesday, said it had identified the drill sergeant as Staff Sgt. Treyon Wallace after comparing his TikTok and Facebook

profile photos. The TikTok account, @dstomcat92, which has nearly 10,000 followers and more than 49,000 "likes," is currently private.

In the video taken Sunday, Wallace films a scattered group of trainees sitting on the ground with cellphones to their ears. He harshly criticizes the Army policy that allows once-a-week use of cellphones by trainees.

"This is what the Army has turned into now," he says. "A bunch of soft-assed, [expletive] ... " he says, his words trailing off as he surveys the trainees. "I get to use my cellphone every [expletive] Sunday for 30 minutes because, why? Because we're [ex-

pletive] soft, that's why. [Expletive] sickening. You're crying and you just got here and you ain't done [expletive]."

"But hey, this is the new Army; I guess we gotta [expletive] change with 'em."

The Twitter post drew the attention of Lt. Gen. Ted Martin, deputy commander of the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, who responded to one Twitter commenter by writing: "We heard him. Loud & clear." Martin tagged the command sergeant major in his response.

Wallace faces discipline for violating Army policy regarding online conduct, Jessica Tackenberg, a Fort Sill spokeswoman, told Army Times on Tuesday.

Navy's virus 'authorized departures' to expire Dec. 9

Stars and Stripes

Navy family members who left duty stations under an authorized departure because of the coronavirus pandemic should return to their base by Dec. 9, the service announced.

In a Navy administrative memo, the service said it was ending a global autho-

rized departure enacted in September that allowed family members and civilians to return to the United States because of the pandemic, particularly if they were at high risk for the virus.

Exceptions to the return order may be requested and will be considered on a case-by-case basis, the Navy said. All extensions

must end prior to March 8, it said.

Family members who do not want to return to their permanent duty station because of health or security concerns may request an early return of dependents, the Navy said. Such requests should be routed as soon as possible to the relevant combatant command for consideration.

Many wary shakeup could affect military

Associated Press

WASHINGTON—The words spoken by America’s top military officer carried a familiar ring, but in the midst of a chaotic week at the Pentagon, they were particularly poignant.

“We are unique among militaries,” said Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. “We do not take an oath to a king or a queen, a tyrant or a dictator. We do not take an oath to an individual.”

Milley was speaking Wednesday at the dedication of an Army museum during a week in which President Donald Trump fired Defense Secretary Mark Esper and installed three staunch loyalists to senior Pentagon policy positions. The abrupt changes raised fears about what Trump might try to do in his final two months of office — and whether the military’s long held apolitical nature could be upended.

Milley’s comments, made as he stood alongside Esper’s successor, acting defense chief Christopher Miller, reflected a view he has long been passionate about: the military’s unequivocal duty to protect and

defend the Constitution — what he called the “moral north star” for everyone in uniform.

His message in a time of turmoil — Trump has refused to concede his election loss — was unmistakable: The military exists to defend democracy and is not to be used as a political pawn. “We take an oath to the Constitution,” Milley said, adding that every service member “will protect and defend that document regardless of personal price.”

Trump’s motives for the Pentagon shakeup are unclear, but it has created a great deal of unease within the building. Was he simply striking out at Esper and others he deemed not loyal enough? Is there a broader plan to enact policy changes that Trump could tout in his final days as commander in chief? Or, in the most extreme scenario, would Trump try to get the military to help him stay in office beyond Inauguration Day?

Milley has pushed back against that last possibility, telling Congress in October that “In the event of a dispute

over some aspect of the elections, by law U.S. courts and the U.S. Congress are required to resolve any disputes, not the U.S. military.” He said service members must not get involved in the transfer of power after an election.

Trump had grown increasingly angry with Esper, who openly disagreed with his desire to use the active-duty military during the civil unrest in June. Esper also had worked with military leaders to talk Trump out of complete troop withdrawals from Syria and Afghanistan.

If the motive is to hand Trump some quick policy changes, then filling top jobs with more amenable loyalists will help — particularly in any effort to impede the smooth transition of power to President-elect Joe Biden. Accelerating troop withdrawals might also be a goal — but there is a fairly limited pool of other options.

Swift and radical changes in Trump’s final 10 weeks are unlikely in a building that prides itself on exhaustive planning. The Pentagon is a massive bu-

reaucracy and doesn’t turn on a dime. And while the department is rooted in the democratic bedrock of a civilian-controlled military, the members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff are powerful presidential advisers with decades of experience, and armed with documents detailing the potential consequences of national security actions.

As yet, military commanders have gotten no new orders. And top military leaders — including Milley — are counseling patience and stability. They are projecting an America that remains a strong and reliable world power, where things remain steady.

Most are watching Afghanistan as a possible bellwether. Trump has long talked about getting troops home for the holidays, while military leaders have urged for a more methodical withdrawal that gives them time to get equipment out and to apply pressure on the Taliban during peace talks. Fulfilling the goal of pulling all troops out could be Trump’s final fist pump as commander in chief.

GOP keeps quiet on DOD changes amid Ga. runoffs

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — There is widespread alarm among congressional Republicans at how President Donald Trump this week abruptly replaced Pentagon leaders with political allies, and sent signals he might do the same in the intelligence community, but for now lawmakers are refraining from overtly criticizing the moves for fear doing so could harm the party’s chances of holding onto its two Senate seats in Georgia.

Republicans’ response to the ouster of Mark Esper as defense secretary has been noticeably circumspect, especially when compared to the explosion of criticism hurled at Trump when he fired Esper’s predecessor, Jim Mattis, two years ago. To date, Republican lawmakers have offered praise for Esper’s tenure and little else.

Congressional aides say the anodyne public expressions represent a concerted attempt to self-muzzle, as the political

party that prides itself on being strong on national security grapples with its fear of antagonizing an erratic and impulsive lame-duck president while battling to keep control of the Senate.

“They see the extraordinarily high stakes in the Georgia Senate runoffs,” American Enterprise Institute congressional expert Norm Ornstein said Wednesday. “Creating a deep internal division in the party right now could jeopardize those seats, and the calculus they’ve made is that sticking with Trump is a better course of action at this stage.”

GOP leaders have set an “unspoken standard,” as it was put by one of several congressional Republican aides who spoke on the condition of anonymity, not to “rock the boat too much before Georgia.”

But the president’s decision to replace Defense Department leaders with Trump loyalists — including one person previ-

ously deemed too controversial for Senate confirmation — nonetheless has grievously upset most Republican members, the aides explained, particularly as it appears clear that Trump fired Esper in retribution for their policy differences.

GOP aides described the sudden change in leadership as an “unwise” move that could cause “chaos” within the U.S. national security establishment as the country already is vulnerable to threats. Multiple GOP aides also surmised that the shake-up would hamper the incoming Biden administration if Trump’s newly chosen leaders and senior staff withhold information from his opponent’s transition team while the president contests the election outcome.

To date, however, it is almost exclusively Democrats expressing such sentiments publicly, while Republicans — at least outwardly — seek to portray the changes as underwhelming.

709K seek jobless aid as infections rise

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of people seeking U.S. unemployment benefits fell last week to 709,000, a still-high level but the lowest figure since March and a sign that the job market might be slowly healing.

The figures coincide with a sharp resurgence in confirmed coronavirus infections to an all-time high above 120,000 a day. Cases are rising in 49 states, and deaths are increasing in 39. The nation has now recorded 240,000 virus-related deaths and 10.3 million confirmed infections.

As colder weather sets in and fear of the virus escalates, consumers may turn more cautious about traveling, shopping, dining out and visiting gyms, barber shops and retail-

ers. Companies in many sectors could cut jobs or workers' hours. In recent days, the virus' resurgence has triggered tighter restrictions on businesses, mostly restaurants and bars, in a range of states, including Texas, New York, Maryland and Oregon.

Last week's new applications for unemployment benefits was down from 757,000 the previous week, the Labor Department said Thursday. The still-elevated figure shows that eight months after the pandemic flattened the economy, many employers are still slashing jobs.

The number of people who are continuing to receive traditional unemployment benefits fell to 6.8 million, the government said, from 7.2 million. That suggests that more Americans are finding jobs and no

longer receiving unemployment aid. But it also indicates that many jobless people have used up their state unemployment aid — which typically expires after six months — and have transitioned to a federal extended benefits program that lasts 13 more weeks.

The viral outbreak threatens to upend the improvement in the job market in recent months. The unemployment rate plunged a full percentage point in October to 6.9% while employers added a solid 600,000 new jobs.

Even so, weekly applications for jobless aid remain at historically high levels. The applications likely include some people who lost jobs weeks ago but who have had to wait for states to process their claims. Some of them might not have filed for benefits until last week

even though they were laid off earlier.

The job market remains severely damaged. The economy still has roughly 10 million fewer jobs than it had before the pandemic — a total that exceeds all the jobs that vanished in the 2008-2009 Great Recession. Government stimulus, in the form of federal unemployment benefits, aid for small businesses and checks to most individuals has largely run out. Without further assistance, economists worry that more restaurants and other small businesses will close and the plight of the unemployed will worsen.

And unless Congress extends their benefits, millions of jobless people will run out of aid entirely by year's end.

GOP's \$1.4T spending bill faces uncertain odds

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republicans controlling the Senate unveiled a government-wide, \$1.4 trillion spending bill on Tuesday, a largely bipartisan measure that faces uncertain odds during this period of post-election tumult in Washington.

The GOP-drafted measure contains funding for President Donald Trump's border wall and other provisions opposed by Democrats, but top leaders in both parties want to try to mount a drive to enact the unfinished spending bills — which, along with a separate COVID-19 relief effort and annual defense policy bill, represent the bulk of Capitol Hill's unfinished business for the year.

Success depends on getting the signature of Trump, however, whose unpredictability and toxic relationships with Democrats threaten to doom the effort. The recent history of lame-duck sessions conducted as the White House is turning over has been that

unfinished spending bills get kicked into the next year, with existing funding simply left on autopilot.

"I've had this argument before and so far I've lost. I argued 12 years ago, the Obama transition, that the best thing you could do to help the new president was to get this year's work done, and we didn't get it done," said Sen. Roy Blunt, R-Mo. "Four years ago I argued that ... and we didn't get it done."

Large swaths of the measure are indeed bipartisan, including a \$696 billion defense budget that adds 96 F-35 fighters to the Pentagon's ranks, funds nine Navy ships and provides \$69 billion for overseas military operations. It adopts \$2 billion for 82 miles of border wall, certain to be fought by Democrats, along with \$8.8 billion for Immigration and Customs Enforcement that Democrats charge isn't needed. NASA, health research and veterans' programs would all be rewarded with healthy increases.

Eta dumps rain on Florida

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Tropical Storm Eta dumped torrents of blustery rain on Florida's west coast as it moved over the state after making landfall north of the heavily populated Tampa Bay area Thursday morning.

The storm slogged ashore near Cedar Key, Fla., with maximum sustained winds of 50 mph. The National Hurricane Center in Miami predicted Eta would then move northeast across Florida as it loses strength. Eta briefly gained hurricane strength Wednesday morning, but forecasters said it later weakened to tropical storm status.

In Bradenton Beach, Mark Mixon stepped into his flooded garage as he was laying sandbags around his home on Wednesday evening and was electrocuted, said Jacob Saur, director of public safety for Manatee County. There were appliances plugged into the garage and when Mixon stepped into the water, he was killed, Saur said.

Rescue crews had to wait for

Florida Power and Light, which was responding to power outages from the storm, to deenergize the grid for the neighborhood where Mixon lived before they could assist, Saur said.

There were no other immediate reports of any injuries or serious damage in the Tampa Bay area as the storm skirted past that region Wednesday afternoon. Several tornado warnings were issued, but there were no reports of one touching down.

On Thursday morning, much of the Tampa Bay area was under a storm surge warning. The storm forced officials to close some lanes on two of the three bridges that cross Tampa Bay, connecting the St. Petersburg area to Tampa, the Tampa Bay Times reported. The Sunshine Skyway Bridge also remained closed early Thursday.

Firefighters in Tampa rescued around a dozen people who got stuck in flooding on Bayshore Boulevard. On Thursday morning, there were still a few abandoned vehicles on the flooded roadway, WFTS in Tampa reported.

California nears 1M confirmed virus cases

Associated Press

California will be the second state — behind Texas — to eclipse a million known coronavirus cases. The grim milestone in a state of 40 million comes as the United States has surpassed 10 million infections.

The timeline of COVID-19 in America often comes back to California. It had some of the earliest known cases among travelers from China, where the outbreak began. The Feb. 6 death of a San Jose woman is the first known coronavirus fatality in the U.S. That same month, California recorded the first U.S. case not related to travel and the first infection spread within the community.

On March 19, Gov. Gavin Newsom issued the nation's first statewide stay-at-home order, shuttering businesses and schools to try to prevent hospital overcrowding. The spread slowed, but California faced the same challenges as other states: providing enough protective gear for health workers, doing enough testing and providing timely results, tracking infections and those potentially exposed.

The virus has struck poor Californians and Latinos especially hard. Latinos make up 39% of the population but account for more than 60% of infections.

In working-class neighborhoods near downtown Los Angeles, one in five people tested positive at community clinics during the pandemic's early days, said Jim Mangia, president and chief executive of St. John's Well Child and Family Center.

Georgia

ATLANTA — A Catholic high school in Georgia switched to online learning this week after about 50 students tested positive for the coronavirus, which they may have contracted at a Halloween party hosted by a student's family, officials said.

St. Pius X Catholic High School went fully virtual Monday and will remain so throughout the week with no

extracurricular activities, news outlets reported Wednesday.

The DeKalb County school had nearly 50 positive cases as of Monday, an increase of 19 since last Friday, according to officials with the Archdiocese of Atlanta.

Archdiocesan spokeswoman Maureen Smith said the school was performing contact tracing to determine who can return to school Monday.

Smith said the school is assuming a "bulk" of the cases came from the Halloween party.

Maryland

WESTMINSTER — A Maryland county's Board of Education has voted to allow hybrid learning at local high schools starting Thursday, although coronavirus cases in the area have increased steadily since October.

Carroll County's Board of Education unanimously voted on Wednesday to allow high school students to participate in a hybrid learning model starting Thursday, news outlets reported.

Students in the "B" cohort will attend class on Thursday and Friday. The "A" cohort will go Monday and Tuesday.

At Wednesday's meeting, County health officer Ed Singer said that he wouldn't recommend bringing high schoolers back Thursday.

On Wednesday, Nov. 18, the board will meet again to see whether COVID-19 case numbers have improved. If not, changes will be made system-wide, either limiting in-person instruction or going back to an all virtual model.

Michigan

DETROIT — Michigan's largest school district will suspend in-person classes next week, joining other districts that have shifted to online-only classes as coronavirus cases rise significantly around the state, officials said Thursday.

Detroit Superintendent Nikolai Vitti said he can't ignore a

city infection rate that is climbing after reaching nearly 5% last week.

Vitti faced criticism from some teachers and activists for offering a face-to-face option for its roughly 50,000 students, but he said families deserved options.

Meanwhile, Michigan's major hospitals planned to speak publicly about the impact of rising coronavirus cases. Gov. Gretchen Whitmer planned a separate afternoon event.

The state reported 6,008 new infections Wednesday and 42 additional deaths.

North Dakota

BISMARCK — The North Dakota Nurses Association says it does not support a move to allow health care workers who have tested positive for COVID-19 but do not have symptoms to remain on the job.

Gov. Doug Burgum supports the idea as part of an effort to ease stress both on hospitals and medical personnel trying to keep up with skyrocketing virus cases in North Dakota.

The governor said hospital administrators asked for the action to be taken, and interim State Health Officer Dirk Wilke amended an order to allow it to take effect.

The nurses association says guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says the decision should be left to the COVID-19 positive nurse and their willingness to work.

If a nurse believes she or he is not well enough to provide safe patient care and chooses not to work under these circumstances, employers should not retaliate against the nurse for making this decision, the association said.

New Jersey

NEWARK — Residents in some parts of New Jersey's largest city are facing a 9 p.m. curfew for at least the rest of the month as officials seek to stop a surge in coronavirus infections.

Newark Mayor Ras Baraka imposed the new measures, which went into effect immediately, on Wednesday. They include a mandatory 9 p.m. weekday curfew and 10 p.m. weekend curfew for parts of three ZIP codes where virus cases have spiked recently.

Indoor and outdoor gatherings are limited to 10 people, and all sports in the city are suspended for at least two weeks. The city is also banning visitation at long-term health care facilities for the same duration.

The new restrictions go beyond statewide measures announced earlier in the week by Gov. Phil Murphy, who ordered bars and restaurants to halt indoor dining between the hours of 10 p.m. and 5 a.m. beginning Thursday.

Nonessential businesses in Newark must already close at 8 p.m. and restaurant and bars must cease indoor service at 8 p.m., under an executive order signed by the mayor two weeks ago.

Vermont

BURLINGTON — The city of Burlington is setting up pop-up clinics in the New North End to test for the virus that causes COVID-19 after it was found in wastewater.

The free tests will be offered Thursday and Friday at the Robert Miller Community and Recreation Center.

City officials said wastewater monitoring shows the virus may be on the rise in the area. Detection of the virus in wastewater can occur as much as three to seven days before it is found in positive tests.

On Thursday, the tests will be offered from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. On Friday, they will be offered from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. While the tests are free, appointments are required.

Gov. Phil Scott and other state officials are reiterating their calls for Vermonters to comply with virus guidance, including wearing masks, staying 6 feet apart, avoiding crowds and quarantining.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Nurses, front line workers getting a break

FL MIAMI — Over a dozen Miami nurses and front line health care workers are finally getting a well-deserved break. The group was scheduled for an upcoming mandatory, aka boring, 48-hour training, but were instead surprised with an island vacation to the Florida Keys.

Jackson Health System supervisors were asked to choose staff that went above and beyond during the pandemic. Many of the staff, including respiratory therapists and lab techs, have not been able to take any time off during the pandemic to relax or spend time with their loved ones and have been working tirelessly during the pandemic treating COVID patients, the hospital said.

The 50 workers were told they had to attend a mandatory two-day, training, but when they gathered at the hospital Tuesday they were handed gift boxes with gift certificates.

DA: Store owners forced man to work every day

CA GILROY — A husband and wife have been charged with human trafficking for allegedly locking a man from India in a liquor store, where prosecutors said he worked 15-hour shifts seven days a week, slept in a storage room, bathed in a mop bucket and was never paid.

Amarjit and Balwinder Mann, both 66 and of Gilroy, are accused of threatening the alleged victim with deportation if he told the truth to law enforcement, Santa Clara County District Attorney's office said in a statement Monday.

An investigation estimated that the couple, who own M&M Liquors in Gilroy and a nearby market, stole more than

\$150,000 in wages from the victim and three other employees.

Boy escorted to last treatment for cancer

RI PROVIDENCE — A 9-year-old child arrived at Rhode Island Hospital for his last scheduled treatment for cancer flanked by a police escort, including more than half a dozen motorcycles, the police said.

Photos posted on the Warwick Police Department's Facebook page on Monday show the Warwick boy, identified just as Cal, standing with officers, including two mounted on horseback.

The post said officers from Warwick, Bristol, Cranston, Portsmouth and Woonsocket police departments and the Cranston Fire Department were a part of the escort.

A Cranston police officer and her husband, who is a firefighter with the town, organized the effort, WPRI reported. Their son recovered from cancer last spring.

2021 Oklahoma City marathon postponed

OK OKLAHOMA CITY — Next year's annual Oklahoma City Memorial Marathon, run in honor of victims of the 1995 bombing that killed 168 and wounded many more, will again be postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic, race organizers announced Tuesday.

The 2021 event is set for the weekend of Oct. 2, in another reminder that the effects of COVID-19 — which the state says has killed more than 1,400 people in Oklahoma — won't leave soon.

The 2020 event initially was pushed to October from April, when it is typically run. This year's race — marking the 25th anniversary of the attack —

was virtual to allow for social distancing.

"This is not just another marathon, this is one of Oklahoma City's signature events that brings our whole community together," said race director Kari Watkins. "If a few more months allows people to run together, it's worth the delay."

Man indicted for threats over internet

MS JACKSON — An 18-year-old Mississippi man faces federal charges after posting multiple threats on the social media site Snapchat.

Christian Blake Bunyard, of Lauderdale County, was indicted Tuesday on two counts of making threats in interstate commerce and one count of making an interstate transmission of an extortionate communication, said U.S. Attorney Mike Hurst and Special Agent in Charge Michelle A. Sutphin with the FBI in Mississippi.

According to the indictment, Bunyard used Snapchat in May and July to threaten a school shooting, to kill and rape African Americans in Oxford, Miss., and to rape another Snapchat user if she did not provide nude photos.

Police: Officer stole car from dealership

CA LOS ANGELES — A Los Angeles police officer was arrested Monday on suspicion of stealing a car from a Southern California dealership last year, authorities said.

LAPD Officer Matthew Calleros is accused of stealing a vehicle from a used car dealership in the city of Orange. The vehicle was reported stolen on Oct. 25, 2019, Orange police said in a Facebook post.

Calleros, 45, was booked into the Orange County jail Monday night on suspicion of auto theft

and possession of a stolen vehicle. The LAPD assigned Calleros to home and suspended his police powers, according to a news release.

FBI: Man suspected of robbing banks arrested

AZ PHOENIX — A man suspected of robbing four Phoenix-area banks since September has been arrested, according to the FBI.

They said members of the FBI Phoenix Violent Crimes Task Force took William Cantrell, 29, into custody without incident following a bank robbery in Mesa last week.

According to the FBI, the bank robberies occurred Sept. 18 in Glendale, Sept. 26 in Peoria, Oct. 2 in Avondale and Nov. 4 in Mesa with an attempted robbery Oct. 6 in Litchfield Park. The FBI didn't disclose how much cash was taken in the robberies and if any of the money has been recovered.

School mascot dropped after complaints

HI HONOLULU — A Hawaii school plans to change its mascot after receiving complaints the name was disrespectful to Native Americans.

The Kahuku High and Intermediate School on Oahu will no longer be known as the Red Raiders, Hawaii News Now reported Monday.

Principal Donna Lindsey announced the change in a letter last week, which said the school received complaints that the nickname and use of a so-called tomahawk chop gesture by supporters were "disrespectful and potentially discriminatory toward Native Americans."

From wire reports

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and Military News

COVID keeps NFL season unpredictable

Associated Press

From the unbeaten Steelers at the top to the winless Jets at the bottom, predictability has taken a hike halfway through NFL 2020. There's one main reason, of course: COVID-19.

We can discuss the magnificence of Russell Wilson and Patrick Mahomes, of Aaron Donald and T.J. Watt. We can laud the legwork of Justin Tucker and Jason Sanders, and brag about the brilliant coaching of Brian Flores and Kliff Kingsbury in bringing also-rans to playoff contention.

The overriding fact, however, is that the pandemic has determined much of what we've seen, and that almost certainly will continue with predicted spikes in the coronavirus as we head toward winter.

Everyone would love to turn attention to the on-field product — well, maybe not Jets fans, though even their team's hapless start is beyond their followers' most pessimistic projections. Of course, "Tanking for Trevor" doesn't seem so farfetched these days, does it?

But having already seen significant adjustments of the schedule because of COVID-19 outbreaks, plus key people missing games because of the virus, well, the daily questions

have become not how is a player performing, but how is he feeling?

"You got to make sure that you're doing the right thing so you can be healthy for your team, and your team's able to play week after week," said running back Derrick Henry, whose Titans had the major outbreak of COVID-19 during the first half of the season.

"It's a crazy time right now and every day I say a prayer for this team and for every player on every team around the league. Everybody has families and things like that. This is a serious disease and pray that everybody can stay healthy, but we're all grown men and you've got to be careful."

Coronavirus outbreaks, readjusted schedules, losing records for home teams — 65-67-1 thus far — and tons of major injuries marked the first half of the NFL season.

Uncertainty about what's ahead for November and December, not to mention for the playoffs and Super Bowl during an ongoing pandemic, could overshadow the on-field product.

That product has been offensive — in a good way. Through nine weeks, 2020 marks the highest-scoring season in NFL history: 6,737 points, 778 total

touchdowns and 745 offensive touchdowns, all the most at this point in a schedule. There's been an average of 50.7 points scored per game, the most through Week 9 since 1970.

Injuries

The pandemic hasn't drawn attention from the ever-expanding injured reserve collection because so many big names have landed on that list.

It began in preseason with Denver linebacker Von Miller (ankle), and has not slowed. Blaming the lack of offseason and preseason in-person preparation could account for some of the injuries, particularly soft tissue problems such as hamstrings. But the stream of stars sidelined has been dizzying.

Quarterback Dak Prescott. Running backs Christian McCaffrey and Saquon Barkley. Receivers Michael Thomas and Odell Beckham Jr. Tight ends George Kittle and Zach Ertz. Tackles Taylor Lewan and Tyron Smith. You could do a lot of damage offensively with those guys. Miller and linebackers Chandler Jones and Devin Bush. Pass rushers Nick Bosa and Danielle Hunter. Inside D-linemen Kawann Short, Vita Vea and Sheldon Rankins. Cornerbacks Stephone Gilmore

and Richard Sherman. Safeties Landon Collins and Derwin James.

Powerful division

The way injuries have destroyed the 49ers is a shame, because otherwise all four NFC West teams had a shot at the expanded playoff field. Last week was a bad one for the division, losing three times (the Rams were on a bye), but there's no denying the base of NFC power is out west.

Awful division

Among the difficult realities of 2020 is this: Barring a stunning turnaround, the winner of the NFC East, uh, East, will have a losing record. Probably deservedly so.

The NFL likely wouldn't mind simply dropping this sector from the standings it posts. Philadelphia, among the most undermanned clubs because of injuries, is on top at 3-4-1, followed by Dallas (2-6), Washington and the New York Giants, both 2-7.

Yet any of these pretenders could limp off with the division crown. The secret seems to be winning within the division because they are a total of 2-10 outside the NFC East.

Washington's Smith set for first start since 2018

Associated Press

The last time Alex Smith practiced as a starting quarterback, Washington wasn't just known as "Football Team," Jay Gruden was the coach, and the world had not been plunged into a pandemic.

That was November 2018, before his right leg bent the wrong way and snapped, breaking the tibia and fibula in gruesome fashion. Smith endured 17 surgeries, survived a life-threatening infection and progressed far enough to get back on the field in two relief appearances earlier this season.

Smith is poised to start an NFL game for the first time in two years when Washington visits Detroit on Sunday, another step in his remarkable journey from an injury that put his career in jeopardy.

"It's an amazing feeling, and I love the challenge," Smith said Wednesday. "It's been a long time, even just driving into work with that feeling (of) knowing that the ball's in your hands."

Smith had the ball and control of his own life ripped out of his hands Nov. 18, 2018, and this milestone comes almost

two years to the day later. He has amazed observers near and far unsure he could play again, let alone look a lot like his pre-injury self.

The 36-year-old Smith got Washington back into its last game with 325 yards and his first touchdown pass in 748 days, but also threw three costly interceptions in a 23-30 loss to the New York Giants. Green Bay Packers QB Aaron Rodgers was watching when Smith entered in place of injured starter Kyle Allen and rooted for the fellow 2005 first-round pick to lead Washington to a

comeback victory

"Not having an idea what it took but just watching from afar, what he put his body through to get back on the field is incredible," Rodgers said. "I don't know how you can't root and pull for a guy like that and hope he continues to go out and ball out. So that's what I'll be hoping for every single week with him as a starter."

Smith, chosen by coach Ron Rivera to start over 2019 first-round pick Dwayne Haskins, is inspiring plenty of people inside Washington's organization.

Ohio sweep: Bieber, Bauer win Cy Young

Associated Press

Shane Bieber and Trevor Bauer love to talk pitching. They bonded as teammates with the Cleveland Indians, and stayed in touch after Bauer was traded to the Cincinnati Reds last year.

Bieber got a text from Bauer before this season started. The right-handers had the same Las Vegas odds for the Cy Young Award.

"I said ... why don't we go 2-for-2, or something like that?" Bieber said.

Why not, indeed?

Bieber was a unanimous winner in the American League on Wednesday night, and Bauer became the first pitcher to take home the NL honor for the majors' oldest franchise.

"Nobody's more deserving of it than him and he knows what he wants and he knows how to go out and get it," Bieber said. "And we keep in touch. I was truly pulling for him and you know, so is my family. And I know he feels the same way, so

it's special."

Bieber and Bauer, two California natives, made it an Ohio sweep on the mound in 2020. They are the third pair of former teammates to win Cy Young Awards in the same season, according to the Elias Sports Bureau. Greg Maddux and Dennis Eckersley in 1992 and Max Scherzer and Rick Porcello in 2016 also accomplished the feat.

Bieber and Bauer had neighboring lockers in Cleveland.

"We've had a close relationship since then," Bauer said. "I think he's one of the best human beings that I've had the pleasure of meeting in professional baseball.

"We talked a little bit throughout the year about how cool would it be to have ex-teammates win the award together, and here we are. So I'm really happy for him."

Using a versatile repertoire that includes a looping curveball and wipeout slider, Bieber went 8-1 with a 1.63 ERA and

122 strikeouts in 77¹/₃ innings during the pandemic-shortened season, leading the majors in ERA and strikeouts and tying Chicago Cubs right-hander Yu Darvish for the most wins.

Bieber became the second player in Indians history to win the AL's pitching Triple Crown, joining Hall of Famer Bob Feller in 1940. He also was the first pitcher to lead the majors in all three categories since Johan Santana for Minnesota in 2006.

Bauer went 5-4 with an NL-best 1.73 ERA in 11 starts, helping the Reds reach the playoffs for the first time since 2013. Animated on the field and outspoken off it, the 29-year-old right-hander struck out 100 in 73 innings and led the majors with two shutouts, a pair of seven-inning performances on doubleheader days.

He became a free agent after the season and turned down the Reds' qualifying offer, but left the door open for a return.

"I haven't thought about free agency very much yet, to

be honest," said Bauer, known for some unusual and progressive training methods that have helped turn him into one of baseball's best pitchers. "I have had a lot of stuff that I've been doing trying to get my off-season underway, trying to get better at baseball."

Darvish finished second in NL voting by the Baseball Writers' Association of America.

New York Mets ace Jacob deGrom was third, falling short in his bid for a third consecutive Cy Young Award.

Bieber was the first unanimous American League winner since Justin Verlander for the Detroit Tigers in 2011.

It was the 10th time an AL pitcher was listed first on every ballot.

Minnesota Twins right-hander Kenta Maeda was the AL runner-up.

"Today's a good day regardless," Bieber said. "It just makes it that much better that we were able to take this thing home and

Stroman, Gausman take offers, Springer, LeMahieu don't

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Mets pitcher Marcus Stroman and San Francisco starter Kevin Gausman accepted \$18.9 million qualifying offers Wednesday, receiving one-year deals to stay with their teams rather than test what they could get in free agency.

Four players declined qualifying offers at the 5 p.m. EST deadline: right-hander Trevor Bauer from Cincinnati, outfielder George Springer from Houston, second baseman DJ LeMahieu from the New York Yankees and catcher J.T. Realmuto from Philadelphia.

If any of those players sign with a new team, his former club would receive a draft pick as compensation at the end of the first round of next year's amateur draft or at the end of competitive balance round B. The placement depends on

whether the new contract is worth \$50 million or more and the revenue-sharing and luxury tax status of the team losing the player.

A team signing the player would give up either its third-highest draft pick, its second-highest pick and \$500,000 of international signing bonus allotment or its second- and fifth-highest selections and \$1 million of international signing bonus allotment, depending on revenue-sharing and the luxury tax status of the signing club.

Qualifying offers began after the 2012 season, and only 10 of 96 offers have been accepted.

Other players among the 181 players who became free agents can sign without compensation. That group includes pitcher Masahiro Tanaka, outfielder Marcell Ozuna, shortstop Didi Gregorius and designated hitter Nelson Cruz.

Stroman, a 29-year-old right-hander, did not play this year. He missed the start of the shortened season in late July due to a torn left calf muscle, then said on Aug. 10 he had opted out because of the coronavirus pandemic. A native of Long Island who grew up about 50 miles from Citi Field, Stroman announced his decision the day after new Mets owner Steve Cohen held an introductory news conference. Cohen bought the team last week from the Wilpon and Katz families for a baseball-record \$2.42 billion.

"After watching the presser, I'm beyond excited to play for you sir," Stroman posted on Twitter. "I could feel the excitement and passion you're going to bring daily. Let's go be great!"

"Marcus, That is great news," Cohen replied on Twitter. "Looking forward to meet-

ing you soon. I will call you over the next few days to thank you."

Stroman rejoins a projected rotation that includes two-time NL Cy Young Award winner Jacob deGrom and left-hander David Peterson, with Seth Lugo and Steven Matz also options. Lugo could return to the bullpen if the Mets find other starters this offseason, and the injury-prone Matz might be a non-tender candidate after going 0-5 with a 9.68 ERA.

Noah Syndergaard is expected to miss at least the first part of next season while recovering from Tommy John surgery.

Stroman was acquired by the Mets from Toronto in July 2019 for left-hander Anthony Kay and minor league right-hander Simeon Woods Richardson. He went 4-2 with a 3.77 ERA in 11 starts for New York, leaving his career record at 51-47 with 3.76 ERA.

One and done for the Irish in ACC?

Associated Press

Notre Dame's overtime victory against Clemson put the No. 2 Fighting Irish atop the Atlantic Coast Conference standings and gave the league two teams in the top four of the Top 25.

Not everyone is thrilled, however, that Notre Dame is just dipping its toe in ACC waters in this season of the coronavirus pandemic and not taking the full plunge.

Many coaches celebrate the Irish's presence at the top of the league that is routinely maligned as having Clemson at one level and everyone else a notch below. Others, however, are lamenting that Notre Dame's commitment is just for this season.

Clemson coach Dabo Swinney would welcome them as a permanent member.

"Notre Dame's a great program. I think any conference, you'd be crazy as a conference if you didn't want Notre Dame," said Swinney, whose team (7-1, 6-1 ACC) had won 28 consecutive conference games before the 47-40 double-overtime loss on Saturday. "So, I'd love to have Notre Dame in the conference. It'd be awesome."

Pittsburgh coach Pat Narduzzi doesn't disagree. It's just the one-and-done aspect of it that bothers him. So much in fact, he is hoping for the Irish to lose this year.

Narduzzi, whose team absorbed a 45-3 drubbing by the Irish in late October, is advocating that the ACC do away with its

arrangement to have five of its teams play traditionally independent Notre Dame every season.

His objection, he said, would be erased if Notre Dame decided to join the league.

"To me, you either play with us or don't play with us. You'd almost like to boycott them. But if you want to play in the ACC, come play in the ACC," Narduzzi said this week. "... And if you don't want to play, let's not give them five games; let them go play BYU and whoever else they want to play. But we shouldn't give them a game.

"But they're talented and we'd love to have them in the ACC for sure."

North Carolina will host Notre Dame (7-0, 6-0) on Nov. 27, and Tar Heels coach Mack Brown said he wouldn't mind having them regularly be on the schedule. North Carolina (5-2, 5-2) climbed to No. 5 in the Top 25 early this season, but losses at Florida State and Virginia knocked them out of the poll.

Brown said the competitive upgrade in the ACC with the Irish in the league this year is a positive.

"We're lucky to have them associated with us this year. They are really good, and good for them," Brown said. "And I think everybody that loves the ACC would like to see them join."

The North Carolina coach added that it would "raise the standard in our league,

like they have this year, and make the rest of us fight to get to them and get to where Clemson is. And those two right now seem to be better than the rest of us."

Virginia's Bronco Mendenhall was off last Saturday after the Cavaliers' game against Louisville was postponed because of COVID-19 concerns among the Cardinals. Mendenhall typically spends those days doing outside activities but said he watched some football, including all of Clemson's nail-biter at Notre Dame Stadium.

"I think parity is valuable. And I think that change is necessary. And I think growth happens through both of those things," said Mendenhall, who also would like to have Notre Dame join the ACC on a permanent basis. But he's also well aware that the Irish have mitigating factors because of the benefits of their independent status, including long-standing rivalries and a lucrative television contract.

"I think it would be powerful for the ACC" if Notre Dame joined the league, Mendenhall said.

If the Irish were added to the Coastal Division, he said, the intrigue surrounding the ACC could increase higher than what it already is "with the league that I think is growing, maturing, expanding and becoming more and more representative of elite-level college football."

Howard hauls in No. 1 recruiting class for Michigan

Associated Press

Juwan Howard's coaching acumen was never in doubt when he took over as Michigan's coach in 2019.

He played 19 NBA seasons, winning two titles with Miami, and spent six seasons as a Heat assistant under Erik Spoelstra.

The biggest question in Howard's return to his alma mater was whether he would be able to recruit at a high level to keep up in the Big Ten and nationally.

Howard's 2021 class, rated No. 1 in the 247Sports composite, leaves no doubt.

"I just go after guys that fit our culture and it's great to see those who have chosen Michigan embrace the vision we have moving forward," Howard said. "Yes, every coach in a pandem-

ic world at the collegiate level has pivoted in a way where you had to figure it out. Our staff, we didn't make any excuses. We had to figure it as well and see what was the best way to go out there and recruit."

They clearly handled it well.

The first day of the early signing period was Wednesday, but Michigan won't officially announce its 2021 recruiting class until the last player in it has signed on Friday.

The six-player class is headlined by Caleb Houston, a 6-foot-8 Canadian forward, the No. 8 overall recruit in the country. He will be joined by another five-star recruit, Moussa Diabate, a 6-10 French forward who's rated No. 20 nationally.

The class also includes guard Frankie Collins, Kobe Bufkin

and forward Isaiah Barnes, all four-star recruits. Three-star forward Will Tschetter rounds out the class.

Shifting dynamic

Villanova coach Jay Wright has been pulling in some of the nation's top recruiting classes the past few years and this year was no different, despite recruiting in a pandemic.

Villanova has the No. 4 overall recruiting class, topped by Trey Patterson, a 6-7 forward from Somerset, N.J., rated No. 30 nationally.

"It was really bizarre. I do feel like doing zooms with players, you're able to watch film with them," Wright said. "I felt like you developed, maybe not as good a personal relationship, but a much better understand-

ing of their basketball aspirations and their basketball IQ."

Top classes

Kentucky coach John Calipari has been one of the nation's best recruiters since arriving in Lexington and has another stellar class going. Kentucky's 2021 class, headlined by five-star forward Daimion Collins (No. 19 overall) is ranked No. 3 nationally and could get better with Calipari pursuing two other top-rated recruits.

Florida State announced one signing Wednesday, 7-1 center John Butler (No. 55 nationally) from South Carolina. Coach Leonard Hamilton and the Seminoles still have three more commits expected to sign soon, including five-star players Matthew Cleveland and Jalen Warley.