

Biden announces national security team

Associated Press

WILMINGTON, Del. — Declaring “America is back,” President-elect Joe Biden introduced selections for his national security team Tuesday, his first substantive offering of how he’ll shift from the Trump administration’s “America First” policies by relying on foreign policy and national security experts from the Democratic establishment to serve as some of his most important advisers.

Biden’s Washington veterans all have ties to former President Barack Obama’s administration as the president-elect has sought to deliver a clear message about his desire to reestablish a more predictable engagement from the United States on the global stage.

“It’s a team that reflects the fact that America is back, ready to lead the world, not retreat from it,” said Biden, at an introductory event at which his selections stood on stage, at least six feet apart and masked.

The president-elect’s team includes Anthony Blinken, a veteran foreign policy hand well-regarded on Capitol Hill whose ties to Biden go back some 20 years, for secretary of state; lawyer Alejandro Mayorkas to be homeland security secretary; veteran diplomat Linda Thomas-Greenfield to be U.S. ambassador to the United Nations; and Obama White House alumnus Jake Sullivan

as national security adviser.

Avril Haines, a former deputy director of the CIA, was picked to serve as director of national intelligence, the first woman to hold that post, and former Secretary of State John Kerry will make a curtain call as a special envoy on climate change. Kerry and Sullivan’s position will not require Senate confirmation.

With the Senate’s balance of power hanging on two runoff races in Georgia that will be decided in January, some Senate Republicans have already expressed antipathy to Biden’s picks as little more than Obama world retreats.

Sen. Tom Cotton, an Arkansas Republican and potential 2024 GOP presidential hopeful, derisively accused Biden of surrounding himself with “panda huggers” who will go soft on China. Sen. Marco Rubio, who sits on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that will consider Blinken’s nomination, broadly wrote off the early selections as uninspiring.

“Biden’s Cabinet picks went to Ivy League schools, have strong resumes, attend all the right conferences & will be polite & orderly caretakers of America’s decline,” Rubio tweeted.

But Biden’s transition team hailed the president-elect’s selection as a group of “crisis-tested leaders” who will be ready to

hit the ground running in the new administration.

Outside the realm of national security and foreign policy, Biden is expected to choose Janet Yellen as the first woman to become treasury secretary.

She was nominated by Obama to lead the Federal Reserve, the first woman in that position, and served from 2014 to 2018.

Biden said his choices “reflect the idea that we cannot meet these challenges with old thinking and unchanged habits.”

He said he tasked them with reasserting global and moral leadership.

Biden’s emerging Cabinet marks a return to a more traditional approach to governing, relying on veteran policymakers with deep expertise and strong relationships in Washington and world capitals.

And with a roster that includes multiple women and people of color — some of whom are breaking historic barriers in their posts — Biden is acting on his campaign promise to lead a team that reflects the diversity of America. Thomas-Greenfield is Black, and Mayorkas is Cuban American.

Mayorkas might pose the most difficult confirmation challenge from Biden’s early round of nominees.

The Senate previously confirmed him in December 2013 by a party-line vote to be the deputy secretary of Homeland Security.

Navy releases report on deadly Pensacola shooting

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A breakdown in oversight of foreign aviation students and a culture of harassment and cultural insensitivity potentially contributed to the deadly shooting at Naval Air Station Pensacola, Fla., in December 2019, according to a new investigative report.

The Navy’s 267-page report of the investigation by Rear Adm. John Meier, commander of Naval Air Force Atlantic, looked into the circumstances leading up to the shooting and what could be done to prevent another attack in the future.

The Navy’s report, which was released Friday, stated the primary cause for the shooting was Royal Saudi Air Force 2nd Lt. Mohammed Saeed Alshamrani’s self-radicalization. This included his social media activity and radical posts, according to the report. Though Attorney General William Barr stated in January that the shooting was a terrorist attack and Alshamrani was motivated by jihadist ideology, the investigation found he did not come to the United States for terrorist reasons based on the amount of time that he was in the country and number of opportunities that he had to carry out an attack.

In addition to Alshamrani’s actions and behaviors, the report also stated a lack of coordination and risk assessments across training commands likely increased the possibility of him committing an insider attack.

“Military leaders, government employees, contracted employees, peers, and civilians knew of isolated events and indicators, but all remained unaware of a complete picture of 2nd Lt. Alshamrani’s potential threat indicators. While these indicators are apparent in hindsight, they were not evident in aggregate before 6 December 2019,” the report states.

USS McCain challenges Russia's claims

By CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan – The Navy on Tuesday sent another warship to challenge maritime claims in the Western Pacific, this time in an area which is claimed by Russia, according to a 7th Fleet spokesman.

The guided-missile destroyer USS John S. McCain, based at Yokosuka, “asserted navigational rights and freedoms in the vicinity of Peter the Great Bay in the Sea of Japan,” with a freedom of navigation operation aimed at challenging Russia’s “excessive maritime claims,” Lt. Joe Keiley said in the statement.

Named for Czar Peter the Great, who ruled Russia from 1682 to 1725, the bay is the largest in the Sea of Japan and comprises about 377,600 square miles.

The Soviet Union in 1984 claimed the bay as internal waters, drawing a 106-nautical-

mile line from its adjacent coasts to enclose it. After the Soviet Union’s fall, Russia continued the claim, which the Navy said is “inconsistent with the rules of international law as reflected in the Law of the Sea Convention to enclose the waters of a bay,” Keiley said.

“By drawing this closing line, the U.S.S.R. attempted to claim more internal waters — and territorial sea farther from shore — than it is entitled to claim under international law,” he said in the statement.

“By conducting this operation, the United States demonstrated that these waters are not Russia’s territorial sea and that the United States does not acquiesce in Russia’s claim that Peter the Great is a ‘historic bay’ under international law,” Keiley added.

The Russian Defense Ministry said that when the McCain crossed about 1.2 miles into the bay, its anti-submarine destroyer Admiral Vinogradov threatened the ship

via an international communication channel that it would “force (the McCain) out of the country’s territorial waters in a ramming maneuver” if they did not leave, according to the state-owned TASS news website.

“After the warning was issued and the Admiral Vinogradov changed its course, the USS John S. McCain destroyer returned to international waters,” the ministry said, according to TASS.

Keiley called Russia’s allegation “false,” adding that “USS John S. McCain was not ‘expelled’ from any nation’s territory.”

“McCain conducted this FONOP in accordance with international law and continued to conduct normal operations in international waters,” Keiley said. “The United States will never bow in intimidation or be coerced into accepting illegitimate maritime claims, such as those made by the Russian Federation.”

Navy ready group deploys in Pacific after deadly sinking

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

The amphibious ready group that suffered the loss of eight Marines and a sailor during a training exercise off the California coast in July and a coronavirus outbreak last month is now conducting regular operations in the Pacific, a Navy spokesman said Monday.

“The Makin Island Amphibious Ready Group and the 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit are underway and conducting routine operations in U.S. Third Fleet,” Cmdr. Sean

Robertson, a spokesman for the San Diego-based 3rd Fleet, told Stars and Stripes.

Citing operational security, Robertson declined to specify where the group — which includes the amphibious assault ship USS Makin Island and the amphibious transport docks USS San Diego and USS Somerset — was now operating or where it was headed.

Pacific Fleet referred questions about the ready group to 3rd Fleet.

Citing two unnamed defense officials, USNI News reported Monday that the ships

had completed months of training with an exercise off Hawaii last week and were officially deployed as of Friday.

The 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit and Makin Island Amphibious Ready Group were conducting a routine training exercise off San Clemente Island, Calif., on July 30 when an amphibious assault vehicle carrying 16 personnel started taking on water.

The amphibious assault vehicle, which weighed about 26 tons, quickly sank in waters hundreds of feet deep. Nine of those aboard lost their lives.

Bill proposed to improve DOD’s abuse prevention program

By ROSE L. THAYER
Stars and Stripes

AUSTIN, Texas — Two senators have introduced a bipartisan bill to improve staffing levels for a Defense Department program designed to address domestic abuse while also raising awareness of the program’s existence among military spouses.

Sens. John Cornyn, R-Texas, and Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., introduced the Military Domestic Violence Prevention Act, which takes aim at improving the Defense Department’s Family Advocacy Program through better resourcing, sharing more information about its services with families and en-

hancing coordination between the military service branches, according to a joint news release from the senators.

“Domestic violence survivors in the military deserve our full support as they rebuild and recover, and we owe it to them to ensure perpetrators are held accountable,” Sinema said in a statement issued Thursday. “Our bipartisan bill empowers survivors by improving counseling and encouraging reporting on military bases, ensuring the health and safety of everyone in our military communities.”

The bill requires the Family Advocacy Program to report to Congress on staffing

“to ensure the program is properly resourced,” according to the news release. As of now, this specific staffing information is not reported to Congress, according to an aide in Cornyn’s office speaking on the condition of anonymity.

Delivered through the service branches, the Family Advocacy Program addresses domestic abuse, child abuse and neglect and problematic sexual behavior in children and youth, according to its website. It also coordinates with military and civilian agencies to prevent and identify abuse and provide appropriate treatment for affected service members and their families.

Court: States can end Medicaid for Planned Parenthood

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — A federal appeals court ruled Monday that Texas and Louisiana can cut off Medicaid funding to Planned Parenthood clinics — a move supported by opponents of legal abortion, but opposed by advocates who said it affects a variety of non-abortion health services for low-income women.

The ruling was handed down by the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans. While it expressly reversed decisions in Texas and Louisiana, it also affects Mississippi, which is under 5th Circuit jurisdiction. The issue is likely to go next to the U.S. Supreme Court.

Opponents of legal abortion have long sought to deny federal Medicaid funding for Planned Parenthood clinics.

Abortion rights supporters and advocates for women's health have argued that the move would reduce access and choice for low-income women seeking cancer screenings, birth control and other non-abortion-related health services.

The decision by the full 5th

U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans reverses an earlier ruling by a three-judge appellate panel that blocked Texas from enforcing its ban on Medicaid funding of Planned Parenthood. It also expressly reversed a ruling in a separate case blocking Louisiana from banning Planned Parenthood funding. A three-judge panel in 2015 had ruled against the ban and that decision stood when the full court deadlocked 7-7 in 2017, when there were only 14 active judges on the court.

The Texas and Louisiana defunding efforts followed the release by anti-abortion activists of secretly recorded videos in 2015.

A state inspector general said the video appeared to show Planned Parenthood had improperly changed how abortions were performed so that better specimens could be preserved for medical research.

Investigations by 13 states into those videos have concluded without criminal charges, and Planned Parenthood officials have denied any wrongdoing.

Feinstein plans to leave top Judiciary committee spot

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — California Sen. Dianne Feinstein said Monday she will step down from her role as the top Democrat on the Senate Judiciary Committee, giving up the powerful spot after public criticism of her bipartisan outreach and her handling of Supreme Court Justice Amy Coney Barrett's confirmation hearings.

Feinstein, 87, said in a statement that she would not seek the position in the next Congress. She did not say why, but said she would instead focus on wildfire and drought issues and the effects of climate change, which are important in her home state.

She plans to continue to serve on the Judiciary, Appropriations and intelligence panels, but said she will not seek the role of top Democrat on any of those committees.

"I will continue to do my utmost to bring about positive change in the coming years," she said in the statement. She has held the Judiciary post since 2017.

Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin, the Senate's No. 2 Democrat, said that he will seek to replace Feinstein as the committee's top Democrat.

He is third in seniority on the panel, after Vermont Sen. Patrick Leahy, who is currently the top Democrat on the appropriations committee.

Feinstein, first elected in 1992, has been a powerful force in the Democratic Party and is the former chairwoman of the intelligence panel.

She has not shied from bipartisanship even as her state has become increasingly liberal and both parties have become more polarized.

That tension came to a head during the Barrett hearings, when Feinstein closed out the proceedings with an embrace for Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., and a public thanks to Graham for a job well done. Democrats fiercely opposed Barrett's nomination to replace the late liberal icon Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg.

"This has been one of the best set of hearings that I've participated in," Feinstein said at the end of the hearing.

Those actions put her immediately in the crosshairs of some influential liberals who had been questioning for some time whether she was right for the job.

China launches moon mission to collect rocks

Associated Press

WENCHANG, China — China launched an ambitious mission Tuesday to bring back rocks and debris from the moon's surface for the first time in more than 40 years — an undertaking that could boost human understanding of the moon and of the solar system more generally.

Chang'e 5 — named for the Chinese moon goddess — is the country's boldest lunar mission yet. If successful, it would be a major advance for China's space program, and some experts have said it could pave the

way for bringing samples back from Mars or even a crewed lunar mission.

The four modules of the Chang'e 5 spacecraft blasted off at just after 4:30 a.m. Tuesday atop a massive Long March-5Y rocket from the Wenchang launch center along the coast of the southern island province of Hainan.

Minutes after liftoff, the spacecraft separated from the rocket's first and second stages and slipped into Earth-moon transfer orbit.

About an hour later, Chang'e 5 opened its

solar panels to provide its independent power source.

The mission's key task is to drill almost 7 feet beneath the moon's surface and scoop up about 4.4 pounds of rocks and other debris to be brought back to Earth, according to NASA.

The Chang'e 5 lander's time on the moon is scheduled to be short. It can only stay for one lunar daytime, or about 14 Earth days, because it lacks the radioisotope heating units to withstand the moon's freezing nights.

Los Angeles could issue stay-home order

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — The nation's largest county was on the brink of a stay-home order just days before Thanksgiving after a spike of coronavirus cases Monday surpassed a threshold set by Los Angeles public health officials to trigger one.

An "impressive and alarming surge" of more than 6,000 new cases put the county over a five-day average of 4,500 cases per day, said Public Health Director Barbara Ferrer, though she declined to take action until county supervisors met Tuesday.

If the county orders residents to stay home, it would be the first such action since mid-March when Gov. Gavin Newsom followed several counties and issued a statewide order that closed schools and severely restricted movement, except for essential workers or to buy groceries or pick up food.

Cases and hospitalizations have been rapidly rising across California in November. The state recorded its highest day of positive test results Saturday with more than 15,000. It had more than 14,000 cases Sunday. Hospitalizations have increased 77% over the past two weeks.

Georgia

ATLANTA — U.S. Sen. Kelly Loeffler said Monday that she will return to public campaigning after she got a second straight negative coronavirus test.

The Georgia Republican is facing a Jan. 5 runoff in one of the state's twin U.S. Senate races.

Loeffler took a rapid COVID-19 test Friday evening that came back positive, a day after she campaigned with Vice President Mike Pence and U.S. Sen. David Perdue, who also faces a Jan. 5 runoff.

A test Saturday came back inconclusive and a test Sunday came back negative, Loeffler's campaign said. She had isolated after the Friday test and said she was consulting with medical experts and following guidelines of the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

South Carolina

COLUMBIA — A three-day ticket blitz in South Carolina's capital city brought 130 citations for going unmasked in public places despite the coronavirus pandemic — and fire chief Aubrey Jenkins says more are coming.

He spoke Sunday, the sixth day in a row that South Carolina had reported more than 1,000 infections of the new coronavirus. Monday made it seven, with 1,095 positive

tests and a total of 194,902. Five deaths from COVID-19 were reported Monday, bringing the total to 3,987.

Columbia passed a mask ordinance in June and beefed it up this month, including a \$100 fine. Before the weekend blitz, only about 50 citations had been issued.

Nearly all of last week's citations were in Columbia's Five Points nightlife area, though department personnel also checked other areas including hospitality districts and big box stores, Jenkins said Sunday.

Nevada

RENO, Nev. — The head of the Nevada agency promoting business growth urged companies on Monday to embrace the governor's latest move to tighten COVID-19 restrictions, saying it's the best way to protect against future shutdowns that are likely if the coronavirus keeps spreading at unprecedented rates.

State health officials said that the percentage of residents testing positive for COVID-19 over the previous 14 days has doubled since mid-October, from 8.2% on Oct. 15 to record highs of 16.7% on Sunday and Monday.

Gov. Steve Sisolak announced the state's most expansive mask mandate to date Sunday and reduced the capacity at casinos, restaurants, bars and many other businesses from 50% to 25% effective at 12:01 a.m. Tuesday.

Nevada COVID-19 Response Director Caleb Cage and Department of Business and Industry Director Terry Reynolds said they sympathize with business owners who may struggle to stay afloat amid new cutbacks, but said they are intended to help avert a more dramatic response in the weeks ahead.

Kentucky

LOUISVILLE — Kentucky's healthcare system could be at risk — and lives at stake — from rising pressures of new coronavirus hospitalizations if conditions do not improve, Gov. Andy Beshear warned Monday, defending the new mandates he issued last week to fight the pandemic.

The Democratic Governor's new restrictions on in-person gatherings at restaurants, schools and event venues have drawn criticism from GOP lawmakers, local business owners and private schools throughout the state. Kentucky's Republican Attorney General, Daniel Cameron, joined a Christian school on Nov. 20 in filing a federal lawsuit that seeks a statewide temporary re-

straining order against a new rule that suspends in-person classes in private and public schools.

Under the new restrictions, middle and high schools are required to continue with remote instruction until January. Elementary schools may reopen on Dec. 7 if the county they are located in is not in the "red zone," the highest category for COVID-19 incidence rates.

Washington

SEATTLE — A four-week shutdown on indoor service at restaurants and bars prompted by an alarming statewide spike in COVID-19 cases is expected to cost the industry some \$800 million, a representative said Monday.

Anthony Anton, chief executive of the Washington Hospitality Association, urged lawmakers from both parties to find ways to support restaurants, as well as hotels and other hospitality businesses, so they have a plan ready to go when the Legislature next meets.

Gov. Jay Inslee announced Friday an additional \$70 million in grants for businesses, as well as \$65 million for loans and other assistance — federal money appropriated through the CARES Act. Anton said that while anything helps, that would only cover about two days of losses.

Likely relief for the industry could include reducing or suspending business and occupation taxes and the costs of unemployment insurance. But the most significant help will have to come from Congress, Springer said.

Utah

SALT LAKE CITY — Utah Gov. Gary Herbert on Monday relaxed restrictions on social gatherings ahead of Thanksgiving weekend as coronavirus cases and hospitalizations continue to surge.

There were 545 people hospitalized for COVID-19 in Utah on Monday, and referral center ICU beds reached 91.9% occupancy statewide, according to state data. The increased number of hospitalizations has prompted doctors and public health officials to advise against attending large Thanksgiving gatherings.

Herbert, a Republican, said he will not extend his previous two-week order that required people to limit social gatherings to people in their immediate household, but urged caution. He recommended masks, social distancing and smaller gatherings for the holiday.

Sex club busted for partying without face coverings

NY NEW YORK — There were plenty of condoms but no masks at a sex club where 80 people were caught partying the night away without adhering to social distancing rules, the New York Sheriff's Office said.

Deputies responding to a complaint found people drinking, eating at a buffet and having sex at a site in Queens. Boxes of condoms were provided and three couples were engaged in sex in a small back room, the Sheriff's Office said.

The event was hosted by Caligula New York, which advertises itself as the "Hottest Swingers Club in New York."

Organizers were ticketed for violating pandemic rules and selling alcohol without a proper license.

Protesters fined total of \$4,700 for using noisy megaphones

FL NEW PORT RICHEY — A Florida town has fined people involved in recent racial justice protests thousands of dollars for using megaphones police say violate a local noise ordinance.

The Tampa Bay Times reported that officials in New Port Richey have issued 14 citations that total about \$4,700 to at least five protesters. Black Lives Matter activist Christina Boneta said she was fined more than \$2,500 for using her megaphone and once arrested for refusing to sign a citation.

New Port Richey has a strict noise ordinance that was enacted in 2017 to crack down on loud downtown bars and clubs.

Police search river after third pipe bomb found in water

CT MERIDEN — Connecticut police searched the Quinnipiac River in Meriden after a third pipe bomb was found in the water.

Meriden police requested help from the state police bomb squad to search the area where the third bomb was found to make sure there were no others.

No additional bombs were found, Meriden Sgt. Darrin McKay said.

The other bombs were found in the same area in January and September. McKay said all three bombs had been submerged for long periods of time. Authorities destroyed all the bombs.

Two men who were magnet fishing found the latest bomb, the Record-Journal reported.

The explosives were found in the river

near a pedestrian bridge and adjoining vehicle bridge.

Rockefeller Center skating rink opens at reduced capacity

NY NEW YORK — The iconic Rockefeller Center ice-skating rink is set to open in a limited way on time for the holidays.

The sunken rink located in midtown Manhattan will begin welcoming skaters as part of a tradition going back to the 1930s, according to the Rockefeller Center website.

The rink is operating at a reduced capacity, with skate time limited to 50 minutes. Masks are required as a further pandemic safety measure.

Man accused of waving chain saw, yelling at neighbor

NE LINCOLN — A Lincoln man is accused of waving a chain saw at a Black neighbor and yelling racial epithets at her.

The Lincoln Journal Star reports a woman was entering her apartment building when a 41-year-old man allegedly confronted her with a chain saw, told her to leave the property and yelled racial epithets.

The woman ran away and called the police. The man was arrested on suspicion of making terroristic threats. It wasn't immediately clear if he has been charged.

Police: Man who stole tractor also had crack cocaine

DE LINCOLN — Police in Delaware say they've arrested a man for stealing a John Deere tractor.

Delaware State Police said Raymond E. Justice was arrested after a trooper in Lincoln spotted Justice driving a tractor that had been reported stolen.

Police said they found a small amount of crack cocaine on Justice after he was arrested. Police said he's being held at a local jail. It is not clear whether he has hired an attorney.

Historic railway tunnel now open to hikers and bicyclists

VA AFTON — Hikers and bicyclists can now explore a historic railroad tunnel in Virginia's Blue Ridge Mountains after nearly two decades of restoration efforts.

The News Virginian reported that the Claudius Crozet Blue Ridge Tunnel Trail system opened to the public Saturday.

The nearly milelong tunnel was constructed between 1849 and 1859.

Considered an engineering marvel at the time, the Blue Ridge Tunnel was designed by renowned French engineer Claudius Crozet.

Irish immigrants and enslaved laborers built the tunnel. It had to be built using hand tools and black powder, as dynamite had not yet been invented.

Railways stopped using the tunnel in 1944. CSX Transportation donated the tunnel to Nelson County in 2007. Officials have been working to restore the tunnel since 2001. The trail has parking lots on both sides and visitors need to bring their own lights to see.

Large, rare loggerhead turtle rescued on Cape Cod beach

MA TRURO — Officials on Cape Cod rescued a rare, 350-pound loggerhead turtle that was stranded on a beach.

The Mass Audubon Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary shared a video on its Facebook page of the Friday afternoon rescue in the town of Truro.

The organization said public works officials helped load the reptile into a truck before it was taken to the New England Aquarium's Sea Turtle Hospital in Quincy.

The Boston-based aquarium said adult male loggerhead turtles are rare in Massachusetts, especially this early in the season.

Connie Merigo, the aquarium's Marine Animal Rescue Department Manager, told MassLive that the turtle is at least 30 years old and has multiple health problems, including breathing difficulties.

University of Maine to train military veterans in farming

ME ORONO — The University of Maine is launching a program to offer training in food production to military veterans and farmers with disabilities.

The program is called "Boots-2-Bushels: Boot Camp for Market Gardeners and Farmers," the University of Maine Cooperative Extension said.

It is slated to begin in January and will focus on training in small-scale farming for market sales, the extension said.

The program will take place online through May 24 and include hands-on fieldwork from May to September. The extension said the program will include training in subjects such as crop planning, safe food handling and pest management.

From The Associated Press

College hoops begins amid pandemic

Associated Press

As more than 300 teams prepare to start a season that will look nothing like any before it, the conversation isn't so much about who will be cutting down the nets at the end of March Madness as much as whether anyone will cut down the nets at all.

If some team, any team, does climb a ladder in Indianapolis — and the top candidates include the usuals, with No. 1 Gonzaga, Duke, Kentucky and Kansas among them — then consider the season a success.

Anything short of that, and nothing less than the future of college sports could hang in the balance.

This is the new world created by a COVID-19 crisis that is mushrooming to more than 190,000 new cases a day across America just as college basketball gets set to tip off its season Wednesday.

Teams will play truncated schedules — many cut from 31 to 27 or 25 games — after truncated preseasons. It's a shrunken, ever-shifting and still perilous grid laid out with the health of players and coaches in the forefront of everyone's mind, but with an unspoken belief that

the show really does need to go on.

The end game is the 68-team extravaganza known as March Madness, the event that was wiped off the calendar eight months ago in a stunningly rapid turn of events as the seriousness of the pandemic set off alarms across the U.S. It cost the NCAA around \$375 million, and sent shockwaves around the entire college sports landscape.

"The bottom line is that American higher education, not just athletics, is hemorrhaging like never before," Duke athletic director Kevin White said earlier this fall to the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Committee, of which he is a member.

The NCAA is already making plans to turn this year's postseason into something much different, and much less, than it has been in the past — proposing to hold all games in a single city, most likely Indianapolis, which is where the Final Four is already scheduled for April 3-5.

Though a vaccine appears to be on the way, there's a good chance that in March, fans and bands and mascots will largely miss out, much the way they've been missing out inside arenas and stadiums that have hosted

recent NBA, MLB and NHL seasons, as well as the current and oft-interrupted college and pro football schedules.

But the reality is the people college basketball really needs at the arenas are the TV crews.

CBS and various cable affiliates are scheduled to pay around \$800 million this season to televise America's most frenetic sports celebration for three weeks each March and April. That's on top of the millions the biggest conferences generate in media revenue during the regular season.

Most of it is money earmarked for distribution by the NCAA and the conferences to the schools, which combine hoops and football revenue to fund smaller sports in their programs. A staggering 116 of those programs have been cut from 34 schools at the Division I level since the pandemic hit, according to the USOPC, whose very ability to field an Olympic team is largely dependent on the college system.

Another year like that would have the potential to mark the beginning of the end of the college sports system as we know it.

"When you look around the

country, this has potential to force some schools to recalibrate what they're capable of supporting," said John Tauer, the coach at St. Thomas, the Minnesota school that is moving from Division III to Division I. "It's a complicated question that every school is going to answer differently."

So, how to get from November to March?

The Ivy League has already bagged it, canceling all winter sports, which means there will be no Harvard or Yale come tournament time, and none of those eminently entertaining stories about how smart guys can play hoops, too.

Most everyone else is planning a season. Many teams are planning shorter road trips and a smaller footprint. No trip's success — not even that of a quick bus ride — will be taken for granted. Testing protocols are in place and, as the college football season has shown us with the cancellation of a handful of games every weekend, all participants will need to be able to adjust on the fly.

"Those thoughts creep in every day," Florida coach Mike White said. "I wonder how many games I'll miss this year."

Baylor, Kansas are teams to beat in the Big 12

Associated Press

Kansas was the heavy favorite to land the overall No. 1 seed for the NCAA Tournament when word began to filter through conference tournaments that COVID-19 was going to shut down the remainder of the season.

Now, the Jayhawks might not even be the favorites to finish first in the Big 12.

With four starters back from a team that gave Kansas fits last season, second-ranked Baylor has been picked by many as the class of the confer-

ence.

Jared Butler, Davion Mitchell and MaCio Teague give the Bears one of the nation's best backcourts, top-100 recruit L.J. Cryer and transfer Adam Flagler provide depth, Mark Vital can stake claim as one of the country's best defenders and Tristan Clark is ready to take over for departed big man Freddie Gillespie.

"In a season that got moved back and a short summer, you definitely benefit from having guys that have college experience," Baylor coach Scott Drew

said. "Now, just because players did it one year doesn't guarantee that they'll be as successful the next year. But it definitely gives you an advantage, and most people would take it rather than not."

Experience is one thing; experience winning is another. The Bears haven't reached the third weekend of the NCAA Tournament since 2012, and they haven't won a league championship since sharing the Southwest Conference title in 1950.

The Jayhawks may have lost

big man Udoka Azubuike and point guard Devon Dotson, their key cogs last season, but they return a bevy of talent along with a championship pedigree that has made them so tough over the years.

"It's just a different team," said forward Jalen Wilson, an elite recruit who wound up missing last season with an injury. "We don't have Doke, we don't have Dot, but we have other wings, new players, and I think we just have a new team that's a little bit younger, that's hungry to play, hungry to win."

Goff throws 3 TD passes to top Bucs

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Jared Goff likes how the Los Angeles Rams are shaping up.

“We can be as good as we want to be, honestly,” the fifth-year quarterback said after Monday night’s 27-24 victory over Tom Brady and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. “We’ve got it all in front of us. Everything is there for us to take.”

Goff threw for 376 yards and three touchdowns, and Matt Gay kicked a 40-yard field goal with 2:36 remaining to lift the Rams back into first place in the NFC West.

Goff completed 39 of 51 passes, including short scoring throws to Robert Woods, Van Jefferson and Cam Akers. Los Angeles’ defense pressured Brady all night and sealed the win with rookie safety Jordan Fuller’s second interception of the six-time Super Bowl champion.

Goff threw a pair of interceptions, too, helping the Bucs remain close in the second half.

But when the Rams (7-3) needed him to stand tall, he rebounded to lead them right down the field to retake the lead after Brady tied it with his second TD pass.

“I’ve always believed in myself in any situation, but when you actually do it in a tough environment, it makes you feel good,” Goff said.

“Jared just continued to demonstrate resilience,” Los Angeles coach Sean McVay said. “I love the fact he was outstanding from the jump. We had that one little mistake, and he just kept competing. What he did in terms of leading us down the field at

the most important moment was critical.”

Cooper Kupp had 11 receptions for 145 yards and Woods finished with 10 catches for 130 yards. Both caught passes on the eight-play, 53-yard drive Goff led to move the Rams into position for Gay’s winning kick.

Brady was 26-for-48 for 216 yards and two touchdowns. Los Angeles sacked him once after getting to Russell Wilson six times in the previous week’s 23-16 victory over the Seattle Seahawks.

“Disappointed. I have to do a better job,” Brady said.

Tampa Bay was limited to a touchdown and field goal in the second half, both set up by interceptions thrown by Goff.

“They did a good job preventing (the big play),” Brady said. “They play a defense that makes them tough to hit. Not impossible, but we didn’t hit any.”

Gay, a 2019 Bucs draft pick who was released after a rookie season marked by inconsistency, is the Rams’ third kicker in four weeks.

“I found out on Monday that the Rams were bringing me in,” Gay said. “It was a quick flight so I could begin testing so I could be eligible for the game. Saturday was the first day I could be in the building. Luckily we played Monday night.”

The Bucs (7-4) fell to 1-3 in four prime-time games despite avoiding the type of slow start that hurt them in losses to the Chicago Bears and New Orleans Saints and nearly cost them in a narrow victory over the New York Giants.

Coach Bruce Arians adjusted the team’s preparation schedule last week, holding two practices at night — one at Raymond James Stadium.

“Everybody is disappointed. Everybody was ready to play,” Arians said. “We played a good football team. Nobody’s head is down.”

Brady answered a 10-play, 80-yard, 7-minute, 55-second drive Goff led to give the Rams a 7-0 lead with a couple of long scoring drives of his own to put the Bucs up 14-7 with a 9-yard TD pass to Mike Evans.

Goff threw first-half TD passes to Woods and Jefferson, then used Woods’ 20-yard catch and run to the Tampa Bay 20 to set up Gay’s 38-yard field goal as time expired to give Los Angeles a 17-14 lead at halftime.

With the Bucs trailing 24-17, Brady took advantage of Goff throwing his second interception of the night. Chris Godwin’s 13-yard TD catch made it 24-all, setting the stage for Goff to move the Rams downfield for the go-ahead field goal.

Fuller, a sixth-round draft pick who came off injured reserve last week, ensured Los Angeles improved to 32-0 when leading at halftime under McVay.

“I was just in my zone, and the quarterback ended up throwing it in my direction,” said Fuller, who interestingly — like Brady — was selected 199th overall in the draft.

“I was just telling myself, ‘Don’t drop it, don’t drop it, don’t drop it.’ The second one was kind of the same,” Fuller added. “I was just reading the quarterback’s eyes and was able to go out there and get it.”

Ravens’ Ingram, Dobbins test positive for coronavirus

Washington Post

The Baltimore Ravens temporarily closed their training facility Monday morning after two players, running backs Mark Ingram II and J.K. Dobbins, and other members of the organization tested positive for the coronavirus.

The Ravens reopened their facility later Monday and planned to conduct a light walk-through practice, Coach John Harbaugh said. Their game Thursday night in Pittsburgh against the unbeaten Steelers remained on as scheduled, ac-

ording to Harbaugh and another person familiar with the NFL’s planning.

The Ravens’ issues came as the NFL further toughened its protocols. The league told teams in a memo Monday that, beginning with this week’s Thanksgiving games, all players who are on the sideline during a game (those not substituting or preparing to take the field and not wearing their helmets) must wear masks or double-layered gaiters.

“Players who fail to wear masks on the sidelines will be

subject to discipline,” the NFL’s memo said. “Clubs are required to enforce these rules. Violations by players and/or staff will result in accountability measures being imposed upon the Club. It is strongly recommended that each Club designate one or two individuals in the Bench Area to ensure compliance with these rules.”

Coaches and team staffers already were required to wear masks while on the sideline during games. Sideline mask-wearing previously had been recommended for players during

games but not required; it was required of players before and after games. Monday’s memo by the NFL also outlined a reduction to the number of players allowed to travel to a road game and further restrictions.

Harbaugh confirmed that Ingram and Dobbins had tested positive. According to Harbaugh, defensive tackle Brandon Williams was placed in a five-day quarantine after being identified as a high-risk close contact. The three players were placed on the Ravens’ covid-19 reserve list.

SEC postpones 2 more football games

Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. — The Southeastern Conference has shuffled its schedule, pushing back the Arkansas-Missouri and Tennessee-Vanderbilt games that had been set for Saturday.

The league announced Monday that it has postponed the Arkansas-Missouri game because of a combination of positive tests, contact tracing and the resulting quarantining within the Arkansas program.

Vanderbilt and Missouri will now meet Saturday to make up a game that was postponed on Oct. 17.

The SEC is still trying to get in 10 games for all 14 teams,

and last week reserved the right to revise the schedule up until 8 p.m. CT on Mondays.

No date has been set for Arkansas-Missouri or Tennessee-Vanderbilt, but Dec. 19 is a possibility for teams not playing in the league championship game.

“As we continue to adapt to the current realities, it’s important to remain flexible as we move forward in the final weeks of the season,” SEC Commissioner Greg Sankey said. “Contact tracing continues to be the biggest contributing factor to game interruptions.

“We will continue to manage the remaining weeks of the

football schedule to allow for as many games to be played as possible.”

Arkansas at Missouri is the sixth game scheduled for this weekend that has been postponed because of COVID-19 issues with one of the teams involved, including the Apple Cup between Washington and Washington State.

In Conference USA on Monday, Louisiana Tech at FIU was canceled and Western Kentucky at Charlotte was pushed back from Saturday to Dec. 1. That game will have an unusual 10:30 a.m. ET kickoff time on a Tuesday.

In the past two weeks, 33 games involving FBS teams

have been postponed or canceled, about 27% of the schedule.

In the Big Ten, Minnesota announced it won’t practice on Tuesday, conducting all-virtual meetings instead because of presumptive COVID-19 positive tests within the program.

The Gophers are scheduled to play Saturday at Wisconsin, which has already had two games canceled due to the virus. The university said the team’s goal is to return to regular practice on Wednesday. Several Minnesota players were sidelined and three staff members were quarantined for last week’s game against Purdue.

FSU's Norvell stands by decision not to play Clemson

Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Florida — Florida State coach Mike Norvell is standing by the decision to postpone the Seminoles’ game Saturday against No. 4 Clemson after the Tigers reported a positive player test following their arrival on campus, adding that even though he and his team wanted to play there were safety concerns.

“We believe the right decision was made,” Norvell said on Monday.

The game was called off a few hours before kickoff Saturday when medical teams from both schools could not agree that it was safe to play.

Clemson offered Florida State an additional round of testing and delaying the start until later Saturday, or even Sunday or Monday.

Tigers coach Dabo Swinney was angered by the decision, saying Florida State administrators were using COVID-19 as “an excuse” not to play.

Norvell, who had COVID-19 and missed a game earlier this season, said the decision was entirely based on the coronavirus and the safety of his team.

“Football coaches are not doctors. Some of us might think that we are,” Norvell said. “There’s a reason why those (medical) advisors are able to make those decisions from the information provided.”

Norvell said he tried to call Swinney on Saturday, but the two did not connect and

have not talked.

Clemson athletic director Dan Radakovich said Monday on the ACC Network that Swinney is his players’ biggest advocate — “And he should be.”

“His comments,” the AD said, “while maybe a little disheartening to some, really were his feelings.”

Radakovich has said he will speak with the ACC about rescheduling the game. Both teams have open dates on Dec. 12, a week before the league’s championship game.

Swinney said Sunday that Florida State forfeited the game and if the Seminoles wanted to make it up, they should play at Clemson or pay the athletic department’s \$300,000 or so in traveling expenses.

Norvell expects the teams will meet at Florida State on Dec. 12.

In a response to Swinney’s comments on expenses, the Florida State coach said If Clemson needs donations to make up the trip’s cost so the game is played at Florida State, “then I’ll sign up to make one.”

Williams questions calls

MADISON, Wis. — Wisconsin cornerback Caesar Williams questioned pass interference calls made during last weekend’s loss to Northwestern and said the penalties won’t cause the Badgers to play any less aggressively the rest of the season.

The Badgers were called for pass interference four times Saturday in Northwest-

ern’s 17-7 victory. Two of the penalties came on the game’s opening drive, which ended with a Northwestern touchdown.

“At times I felt like the ref maybe had purple underneath their jerseys, I mean under their white-and-black shirts,” Williams said Tuesday.

Northwestern climbed from 19th to 11th in the AP Top 25 after the win while Wisconsin (2-1) tumbled from 10th to 18th. Northwestern (4-1) also took command of the Big Ten West Division race while dealing a blow to the Badgers’ chances of reaching the conference championship game for a second straight season.

Williams had an interception nullified in the second quarter when he was called for pass interference. He said defensive coordinator Jim Leonhard wasn’t coaching the secondary any differently due to the penalties and said “he doesn’t see them as pass interference calls and neither did the defense.”

“Maybe refs aren’t used to seeing perfect reps and they throw a flag,” Williams said while laughing. “It is a hard job, but I don’t think a flag should hinder a defensive back’s confidence in what they do.”

Wisconsin is scheduled to host Minnesota (2-3) on Friday, though the Golden Gophers are dealing with pandemic-related issues. Minnesota called off practice Tuesday and will conduct all meetings virtually as a result of presumptive positive tests.