

Military aircraft missed readiness targets

CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

More than half of 46 types of military aircraft failed to meet mission capability readiness goals in any year from 2011 through 2019, including most fighter jets, a government review has found.

The Air Force's fleet of UH-1N Iroquois "Huey" helicopters was among only three types that met or exceeded service targets in most of those years for mission capability, defined as the percentage of time they were able to fly and perform at least one mission, the Government Accountability Office said in a report this month.

The Huey, last produced at the end of the Nixon administration, exceeded targets for all nine years, GAO found. Fighter jets generally fell short in the metric used to assess the health of aircraft fleets, it said.

While each of the services set their own goals, Defense Secretary Mark Esper in September 2018 ordered that the F-22 Raptor, F-16 Fighting Falcon, F-35 Lightning II and F/A-18 variants be mission capable at

least 80% of the time by the end of fiscal year 2019.

None met that goal for the full year, though Navy F-35s did hit the mark at some point, GAO found.

Military officials had warned that it would be a challenge to meet the target set by Esper, who said even he didn't expect the F-35 to achieve the desired rate in time.

The F-22 also wasn't expected to meet the standard due to challenges with maintenance capacity made worse by damage to Florida's Tyndall Air Force Base from Hurricane Michael in 2018.

Members of Congress had asked the GAO to look into the condition and cost of sustaining aircraft that support combat-related missions.

After examining data on how long the aircraft are grounded for maintenance or awaiting parts, and the roughly \$50 billion in annual support costs, GAO found an overall decline in overall annual mission capability rates since 2011.

Officials attributed the trend to factors

such as parts shortages and delays, aging aircraft, unexpected replacements and unscheduled maintenance issues.

An aircraft may have multiple missions, such as a fighter jet's bomber escort and ground-attack missions, but as long as it's able to perform at least one of them, it is considered mission capable. Last year, over half of the aircraft types were within 15 percentage points of mission capable rate targets, but 11 fell short by 25 percentage points or more, the GAO found.

The aging F-16 and F/A-18 Hornet and Super Hornet variants failed in all nine years and saw decreasing rates of mission capability. The electronic warfare variant EA-18G Growler met service targets in only two of those years.

The F-22 Raptor, which at an average age of 12 is less than half as old as most other fighters, also failed to meet its goals for nine years running, which officials attributed to degraded stealth coating, supply shortages and flying for more hours than it was budgeted.

Guam governor's 'milking' comment draws ire

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

Guam Gov. Lou Leon Guerrero, a Democrat, recently came under fire from the U.S. territory's Republicans for saying her administration is "milking" concessions from the federal government in exchange for hosting the coronavirus-stricken USS Theodore Roosevelt in March.

The aircraft carrier arrived in Guam on March 27 after an outbreak of the virus spread rapidly among the ship's 5,000-person crew. More than 1,200 sailors ultimately tested positive for the virus and one died.

The carrier stayed for two months before it was able to redeploy. Many of its sailors quarantined in island hotels.

"The best decision I ever made is allowing the USS Theodore Roosevelt to go to our hotels, because they think we're just the bomb," Leon Guerrero said referring to the U.S. military during a group chat Thursday on Facebook that was posted to the KUAM

News page.

During the chat, Leon Guerrero said the island has enough personal protective equipment on hand to combat the virus.

Guam, with a population of nearly 160,000, on Tuesday reported a pandemic total of 6,655 viral cases and 107 deaths, according to the Joint Information Center there.

The U.S. government, she said, provided a good inventory of protective gear in exchange for hosting the Roosevelt.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency and the military also directed that Guam get whatever it asks for, the governor added. She said the territory has since received more than 79 ventilators and a solid inventory of personal protective equipment.

Guam was also given use of the military's intensive-care coronavirus tent set up for the Theodore Roosevelt sailors, should the island need it.

Secretary of the Navy Kenneth Braithwaite also agreed to return unused military land to Guam, she said. Leon Guerrero said the land would be the site of a new hospital.

"So, we're milking it," she said. "We're milking it very hard."

The comments drew an instant rebuke from the Republican Party of Guam.

"When a stranger is hungry or hurt, we ... extend our arms and help, not because of what we will attain in return, but because of who we are, and what our manamko' has taught us to be," said a party statement published by The Guam Daily Post on Saturday. "We did not extend our arms so that we can 'milk' the military or the federal government in return." Manamko' is a Chamorro word for elders.

Leon Guerrero's spokeswoman, Krystal Paco-San Agustin, said Monday the decision to host the sailors was done selflessly, without regard for what might be given in return.

State Department funds to counter rival China

BY CAITLIN DOORNBOS
Stars and Stripes

The State Department is spending \$200 million on programs for small island nations to counter “problematic behavior” by rival China in the Western Pacific, a department official said Tuesday.

The programs funnel money to nations such as Palau and Papua New Guinea to promote development and protect their fishing industries against unwarranted competition from China, said Sandra Oudkirk, deputy assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs during a teleconference with reporters Tuesday. Oudkirk said the funding supports sustainability, economic and security programming in the Pacific islands.

China’s “aggressive” behavior is threatening the region, she said.

“We’ve seen a range of increasingly problematic behavior including [China’s] assertion of unlawful maritime claims and the ongoing militarization of disputed features in the South China Sea, predatory economic activities including illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and investments that undermine good governance and promote corruption,” Oudkirk said.

Those actions have major economic effects for Pacific island nations, which rely on fishing to sustain their economies and feed their families, Oudkirk said.

“Fisheries have become — due to the crises in the tourism industry — an even more dominant part of these economies,” she said.

U.S. engagement with Pacific islands has grown along with China’s influence in the region. This year, the Defense Department has had talks with leaders of Palau and Papua New Guinea regarding possibilities of establishing U.S. military presences in their countries.

The Coast Guard has also taken steps to increase its presence in the region, “strategically homeporting” its newest fast-response cutters in Guam to help patrol fisheries, “enhance maritime domain awareness and enforcement efforts” with U.S. partners in the Western Pacific, national security adviser Robert O’Brien said on Oct. 23.

“China’s illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and harassment of vessels operating in the exclusive economic zones of other countries in the Indo-Pacific threatens our sovereignty, as well as the sover-

eignty of our Pacific neighbors and endangers regional stability,” he said last month.

Oudkirk said Pacific island nations are “essential partners in fostering a free and open Indo-Pacific.” The State Department’s \$200 million pledge aims to support these nations and help ensure the U.S. remains the preferred partner to work with in the region, she said.

Included in the funding are U.S. Agency for International Development programs to support development challenges and regional fishery activities and strengthen the “resilience of Pacific Island economies against volatility associated with natural disasters and economic shocks,” such as the coronavirus pandemic, according to a State Department factsheet.

Looking ahead, USAID next year will launch a \$15 million, five-year sustainable coastal fisheries management program that will “address some of the drivers of IUU fishing that’s degrading coastal fisheries right now,” Craig Hart, USAID deputy assistant administrator for Asia, said on the call Tuesday with Oudkirk.

“We always talk about at USAID the journey to self-reliance, and that is exactly what we are striving toward,” Hart said.

US-to-Philippines arms transfers include recon drone

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

A catalog’s worth of armaments worth nearly \$33 million, including 100 wire-guided missiles, 12 thermal imaging systems, two dozen 500-pound bombs and a reconnaissance drone, were delivered to the Philippines by U.S. officials this week, according to the State Department.

A \$14.79 million ScanEagle drone was transferred to the Philippine navy on Wednesday to increase its maritime surveillance and border security capabilities, according to a statement posted by the U.S. Embassy in Manila that day. The drone will operate out of Naval Station Leovigildo Gantioqui, the statement said.

The base is near Subic Bay, a former U.S. Navy base on the Philippines’ main island of Luzon that’s a regular port of call for U.S. warships.

“This new asset will complement the same kind being operated by the 300th Air Intelligence and Security Wing at the Antonio Bautista Air Base in Palawan, which is very close to the disputed areas in the West

Philippine Sea that need our consistent attention,” Armed Forces of the Philippines deputy chief of staff Vice Admiral Erick Kagaoan said of the drone, according to the embassy statement.

The drone handover followed a transfer of missiles and bombs on Monday.

“I am pleased to transfer (a) package of precision-guided missiles, munitions, including 100 TOW-2A missiles, 12 ITAS, and 24 MK-82s to the Armed Forces of the Philippines,” national security adviser Robert O’Brien said during a visit to the Philippines, according to a transcript of his remarks provided by the State Department.

President Donald Trump had pledged to provide \$18 million worth of missiles during a phone conversation with Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte in April.

“This assistance will support the Armed Forces of the Philippines’ efforts to defeat [the Islamic State — East Asia] in the Southern Philippines,” the State Department said in a statement Monday.

TOW — tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided — antitank missiles fired from

an Apache attack helicopter were used by U.S. forces in Iraq during the July 23, 2003, assault that killed Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein’s sons Uday and Qusay in the city of Mosul.

The ITAS — Improved Target Acquisition System — which also saw action in Iraq, is an antitank thermal imaging system that allows gunners to see differences in temperatures between men, machinery and the environment.

The MK-82 is a 500-pound unguided bomb that can be dropped by a variety of aircraft. A B-1 Lancer bomber, for example, can carry up to 84 of them, according to an Oct. 28, 2015, Washington Post report.

“This transfer underscores our strong and enduring commitment to our critical alliance,” O’Brien said, noting the allies’ battle against Islamic extremists and concerns over territorial disputes in the South China Sea.

Critics in the United States have objected to arms sales to the Philippines, where thousands of extrajudicial killings have occurred during Duterte’s war on illegal drugs.

Pentagon chief not among Biden's picks

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — President-elect Joe Biden has introduced the bulk of his national security Cabinet, but did not include the Defense Department in his rollout this week amid questions about whether he has settled on longtime defense expert Michele Flournoy as his Pentagon chief.

Flournoy's name has been considered at the top of Biden's list to run the nation's largest security agency, with frequent mention that she would be the first female secretary of defense.

Her prominence served to highlight the absence of a Pentagon nominee during an event in Delaware on Tuesday that included Biden's picks for secretary of state, intelligence director, chief of homeland security and United Nations ambassador, as well as White House national security adviser.

Tuesday's focus was on diplomacy and a shift away from Trump administration policies that Biden says have alienated allies and punished immigrants and refugees. But it was still notable that Biden didn't mention the Pentagon, or the ongoing wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

"It's a team that will keep our country and our people safe and secure, and it's a team that reflects the fact that America is back,"

Biden said. "Ready to lead the world, not retreat from it. Ready to confront our adversaries, not reject our allies. And ready to stand up for our values."

A Biden transition official brushed off the notion that the Pentagon pick was delayed or that the campaign risked a perception problem by not including a defense secretary now.

"This team has moved quickly across the board, and that includes in terms of the nominations and senior appointments we have put forward," a Biden transition official said.

According to a report in Politico, another contender for the Pentagon slot is Jeh Johnson, former homeland security secretary under Obama, who would become the first Black defense secretary if named to the position.

Tuesday's announcement included the return of the U.N. job to Cabinet rank and creation of a new Cabinet-rank post focused on climate change.

Flournoy holds centrist policy views that align with most of Biden's national security platform, although the two disagreed over aspects of the Afghanistan war when she was a senior Pentagon official in the Obama administration and Biden was vice president.

Officials close to Flournoy have preached

patience about the selection process, citing Biden's desire for expertise and diversity. But they also have acknowledged that no decision has been made yet.

Flournoy comes from the same cadre of professionals with credentials from the Obama administration and Washington think tanks as the nominees who were announced Tuesday. She also co-founded a security consultant firm with Antony Blinken, Biden's choice to be secretary of state.

Mark Jacobson, a former Pentagon official who is now assistant dean at Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, compared Tuesday's rollout with George W. Bush's Cabinet announcements.

The national security team of Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Colin Powell and national security adviser Condoleezza Rice was considered a unit for weeks, though Rumsfeld and Powell were formally announced 12 days apart in December, 2000.

"I wouldn't read too much into the fact that it's State, NSC and the U.N. ambassador as Biden's big three," omitting the Pentagon, Jacobson said. "It's still designed to instill a feeling among Americans that there is a competent team in there."

Purdue Pharma pleads guilty in opioid case

Associated Press

Purdue Pharma pleaded guilty Tuesday to three criminal charges, formally taking responsibility for its part in an opioid epidemic that has contributed to hundreds of thousands of deaths but also angering critics who want to see individuals held accountable, in addition to the company.

In a virtual hearing with a federal judge in Newark, N.J., the OxyContin maker admitted impeding the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's efforts to combat the addiction crisis.

Purdue acknowledged that it had not maintained an effective program to prevent prescription drugs from being diverted to the black market, even though it had told the DEA it did

have such a program, and that it provided misleading information to the agency as a way to boost company manufacturing quotas.

It also admitted paying doctors through a speakers program to induce them to write more prescriptions for its painkillers.

And it admitted paying an electronic medical records company to send doctors information on patients that encouraged them to prescribe opioids.

The guilty pleas were entered by Purdue board chairperson Steve Miller on behalf of the company. They were part of a criminal and civil settlement announced last month between the Stamford, Conn.-based company and the Justice De-

partment.

The deal includes \$8.3 billion in penalties and forfeitures, but the company is on the hook for a direct payment to the federal government of only a fraction of that, \$225 million. It would pay the smaller amount as long as it executes a settlement moving through federal bankruptcy court with state and local governments and other entities suing it over the toll of the opioid epidemic.

Members of the wealthy Sackler family who own the company have also agreed to pay \$225 million to the federal government to settle civil claims.

"Having our plea accepted in federal court, and taking responsibility for past misconduct, is an essential step to pre-

serve billions of dollars of value" for the settlement it is pursuing through bankruptcy court, the company said in a statement.

"We continue to work tirelessly to build additional support for a proposed bankruptcy settlement, which would direct the overwhelming majority of the settlement funds to state, local and tribal governments for the purpose of abating the opioid crisis," the statement read.

The ongoing drug overdose crisis, which appears to be worsening during the pandemic, has contributed to the deaths of more than 470,000 Americans over the past two decades, most of those from opioids both legal and illicit.

Restaurants grapple with no indoor dining

Associated Press

Waiters and bartenders are being thrown out of work — again — as governors and local officials shut down indoor dining and drinking establishments to combat the nationwide surge in coronavirus infections that is overwhelming hospitals and dashing hopes for a quick economic recovery.

And the timing, just before the holidays, couldn't be worse.

Restaurant owner Greg Morena in Los Angeles County was trying to figure out his next step after officials in the nation's largest county banned in-person dining for at least three weeks, beginning Wednesday. But he was mainly dreading having to notify his employees.

"To tell you, 'I can't employ you during the holidays,' to staff that has family and kids, I haven't figured that part out yet. It's the heaviest weight that I carry," said More-

na, who had to close one restaurant earlier in the year and has two operating at the Santa Monica Pier.

Randine Karnitz, a server in Elk River, Minn., said her boss laid her off last week after Gov. Tim Walz announced that bars, restaurants and gyms would close for four weeks as infections spiked to an all-time high and pushed hospitals to the breaking point.

"Well, your last day is tomorrow. You don't have a job. You can thank your governor for that," Karnitz said her boss told her.

She said her husband's hours also have been cut at his manufacturing job, forcing the family to postpone house repairs.

Karnitz, though, said that she supports a shutdown and that people who didn't take the virus seriously bear much of the blame.

"I just think that if we all would've done our part to begin with, we wouldn't be in this

predicament," she said.

Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards on Tuesday said he is limiting the number of customers in restaurants, gyms, salons, casinos, malls and other nonessential businesses to 50% of their capacity as the state sees a third spike in coronavirus cases and hospitalizations. Most bars will be restricted to takeout, delivery and outside seating.

Restaurant owners — most of whom underwent shutdowns in the spring and summer — are finding the new round of closings challenging as colder weather sets in. Many are offering curbside pickup but also trying to hold outdoor dining, even if it means setting up shelters or heaters.

But in Los Angeles County, restaurants and bars are prohibited from providing outdoor dining beginning Wednesday.

They will be limited to takeout and delivery.

Senators urge Pentagon to ramp up all virus testing

By NIKKI WENTLING

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Two U.S. senators are urging the Defense Department to test all service members and their families for the coronavirus in order to contain outbreaks in the military and limit the threat to national security.

Sens. Joni Ernst, R-Iowa, and Thom Tillis, R-N.C., called on the Pentagon to use rapid antigen tests on all service members, their families, civilian employees and contractors to find asymptomatic carriers of the virus. In the past week, the department set a record for the highest number of new

cases in one day among service members and reported an outbreak on a guided missile destroyer based out of Pearl Harbor in Hawaii.

"We urge you to immediately make plans to utilize the latest rapid antigen tests for coronavirus to detect the asymptomatic carriers of coronavirus," the senators wrote to Matthew Donovan, undersecretary of defense for personnel and readiness.

Rapid antigen tests can be done at home or by a health care provider. They're cheap to manufacture and deliver results in a matter of minutes, but they're not as reliable as the usual tests, referred to as PCR tests.

PCR tests are more labor-intensive and take longer to produce results.

Ernst and Tillis said in their letter that the rapid tests should be followed up by PCR tests and that the department has the resources to start. The action would "save lives, preserve hospital capacity and maintain military readiness," the senators said.

Like the rest of the country, coronavirus cases among the military have surged in recent weeks. As of Tuesday, nearly 29,000 service members were sick with the virus and 11 had died. The 11th death was announced last week as a 52-year-old member of the Hawaii National Guard.

Calif. OK'd unemployment benefits in inmates' names

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — California's system for paying unemployment benefits is so dysfunctional that the state approved more than \$140 million for at least 20,000 prisoners, local and federal prosecutors said Tuesday, detailing a scheme that resulted in claims filed in the names of well-known convicted murderers like Scott Peterson and Cary Stayner.

From March to August, more than 35,000 inmates were named in claims filed with the California Employment Development Department, with more than 20,000 being

paid, according to Sacramento County District Attorney Anne Marie Schubert. At least 158 claims were filed for 133 death-row inmates, resulting in more than \$420,000 in benefits paid.

"It involves rapists and child molesters, human traffickers and other violent criminals in our state prisons," Schubert said.

The list includes Peterson, who was sentenced to death after being convicted of killing his pregnant wife following a trial that riveted the nation. The California Supreme Court recently overturned Peterson's death sentence and has ordered a lower court to

review his murder conviction.

Peterson's attorney, Pat Harris, said while Peterson's name surfaced during the investigation, there is no evidence Peterson received unemployment aid from the state.

Prosecutors blamed the Employment Development Department, which has been overwhelmed by more than 16.4 million benefit claims since the pandemic began in March.

Prosecutors said in its haste to approve benefits, the department did not check unemployment claims against a list of prisoners, as many other states do.

Teen charged with hitting deer decoy with vehicle

VT PLAINFIELD — An 18-year-old from Barre is facing charges after allegedly running over a deer decoy in Plainfield, the Department of Fish and Wildlife said.

Game wardens had set up a deer decoy operation in a field. A vehicle turned into the field and ran over one of the decoys.

Wardens who were monitoring the decoys attempted to stop the fleeing vehicle, which crossed a private driveway and hit a ditch before driving away at speeds exceeding 70 miles per hour.

After receiving a tip, the wardens located the vehicle and the teenager who admitted to the actions.

Chef's stolen 2-ton barbecue smoker found thanks to tip

MN MINNEAPOLIS — A Minnesota chef whose business was suffering because of the coronavirus pandemic showed up to work to find his 2-ton custom-built barbecue smoker was stolen over the weekend — but was found, thanks to a tip from a good Samaritan.

Thomas Boemer, chef and co-owner of Revival and Revival Smoked Meats, said the steel-and-aluminum smoker, which is roughly the size of an SUV, was stolen from the parking lot of his former Corner Table restaurant in south Minneapolis, the Star Tribune reported.

A good Samaritan called the restaurant and said they saw the smoker parked in a Minneapolis alley.

Boemer said he called police, who later helped him hitch the slightly damaged smoker to his SUV.

Man accused of setting girlfriend on fire during an argument

TX HOUSTON — Houston police were looking for a 60-year-old man who is accused of setting his girlfriend on fire, seriously injuring her.

Investigators said that Harold Lynn Celestine got into an argument with his girlfriend, Lasheak Wilborn, 40, as they visited another person's home.

Police allege that during their fight, Celestine set Wilborn on fire.

The person they were visiting, Robbie Hollingsworth, helped Wilborn and put out the fire.

Wilborn was severely burned while Hollingsworth, 56, suffered a minor burn to his shoulder.

9 people indicted in scheme to steal equipment

RI PROVIDENCE — Nine people were indicted for their alleged roles in a theft ring that stole about \$700,000 worth of excavators, boats, personal watercraft, all-terrain vehicles, and trailers from dealers in four New England states, federal prosecutors said.

The group stole three Bobcat excavators, 10 personal watercraft, four boats, eight all-terrain vehicles, and 10 trailers valued at nearly \$700,000 between November 2019 and July 2020, from businesses in Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Hampshire, prosecutors said.

The suspects face charges including interstate transportation of stolen property, receipt of stolen goods, and conspiracy to commit interstate transportation of stolen property.

Police: Woman attacked with baseball bat at Walmart

NC BURLINGTON — Police in North Carolina said a woman was arrested and charged with striking another woman with a baseball bat at a Walmart.

The Burlington Police Department said in a news release that officers were called to the store in response to reports of assault.

The police news release said the victim and suspect didn't appear to know each other and the motive for the attack is unclear.

The suspect, Candice Coles, 31, was charged with felony assault with a deadly weapon inflicting serious injury and was being held at the local jail.

Wichita State graduates are finalists in mask design contest

KS WICHITA — Two recent Wichita State University graduates are among the finalists for a \$1 million prize pool in a contest that seeks to design a better mask.

The Wichita Eagle reported that Jared Goering and Spencer Steinert are in the top 10 after beating out nearly 1,000 other mask designs from 70 countries.

They hope to win the \$500,000 grand prize or a \$250,000 secondary prize, and they also want to take their mask to market.

Both men are graduates of Wichita State's innovation design master's program, and they're both in an apparel start-up called Montana Shirt Co.

The point of the XPRIZE contest is to

solve some of the issues surrounding masks, such as slippage, fogging and heat, that have become common during the coronavirus pandemic.

Man dies after returning to burning trailer for his pants

SC RIDGEWAY — A man who escaped a trailer fire in South Carolina died when he went back into the mobile home to get his pants, an official said.

Fire personnel found Henry Hill Jr., 68, on the floor of the trailer in Ridgeway, Kershaw County Coroner David West said in a statement. Hill had smoke inhalation and thermal burns on his body from the heat.

Two other people who lived in the home had escaped the fire, West said.

Police say man fired flare into fuel-soaked car

CO DENVER — A man was arrested on suspicion of reckless endangerment and arson after firing a flare gun into his car, which was holding items soaked with gasoline, outside a Denver police station, police said.

Nothing ignited but police were investigating whether Derick Smialek, 37, intended to trigger an explosion.

Police said surveillance cameras showed Smialek at first pacing around his car outside the station before firing the flare gun. He also went into the station and made comments to officers, according to the document, but his statements were redacted.

Police said Smialek has previous felony convictions which bar him from having weapons that can fire explosive cartridges, so he was also being held on a suspicion of being a previous offender in possession of a weapon.

'Hazardous' train trestle to be demolished at board's request

ME PORTLAND — The Maine Department of Transportation plans to demolish the southern half of the former Grand Trunk Railroad train trestle at the request of the Board of Maine Harbor Commissioners.

Commission Chairman Daniel Haley Jr. said that large pieces have fallen into the water creating a "serious hazard to navigation" for boaters.

Maine DOT spokesman Paul Merrill said the work would likely begin Nov. 30 and be completed by the end of the year.

From The Associated Press

College hoops traditions quarantined

Associated Press

There is a tradition at Taylor University, a small NAIA school in Indiana, where the entire crowd sits in complete silence until the men's basketball team scores its 10th point of the game and sets off a wild celebration.

Thanks to the scourge of COVID-19, there will be no Silent Night game this year. Only silence.

The game has been played on the Friday before finals week for decades, but the pandemic forced the university to call it off this year. The standing room-only crowd, including hundreds of students dressed in their pajamas, will stay at home, unable to sing the old Christmas standard of the same name at the end of the game.

As the college basketball season begins this week, there is a disheartening absence of tradition. The population of Krzyzewskiville at Duke will be zero, the Oakland Zoo at Pittsburgh a little more tame. The Orange Crush at Illinois will be less in-

timidating and the ghost-like sound of "Rock Chalk Jayhawk" at Kansas will be merely echoes from thousands of previous wins.

"Without doubt, this is a difficult announcement for us to deliver to our Taylor community," interim president Paige Comstock Cunningham said in announcing the cancellation of Silent Night, "but the health of each student, faculty and staff member, as well as that of our families, must be our primary objective."

Indeed, very little has been normal since sports returned from a long shutdown with the NBA and NHL playoffs held in largely fanless bubbles and Major League Baseball played before oceans of empty seats. The NFL season brought small numbers of fans, as did the return of college football in some locations, but the sense of electricity has still been missing.

That will be even more pronounced for college hoops, where fans packed into arenas

ranging from the tiny (G.B. Hodge Center at South Carolina-Upstate, capacity 878) to the massive (Carrier Dome at Syracuse, capacity 35,446) are close enough to the action that they can see and smell the sweat dripping from the players.

Fans in such close proximity create massive homecourt advantages at places such as Allen Fieldhouse (Kansas) and turn venues such as Cameron Indoor Stadium (Duke) into nightmares for opposing teams.

"I'm starting my 41st year here, so I've benefited greatly from having that sixth man to create one of the best environments in sport, not just in basketball," Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski said. "We'll see. After we play a couple of games, I'll let you know how good or how bad it is. I will tell you this, though: I know overall it's an advantage for us."

Just about every school has unique traditions that have been quarantined.

Michigan State is only allow-

ing friends and families of players and coaches, meaning the raucous Izzone section will be on hiatus. The handful of people allowed for Indiana games won't be singing the "William Tell Overture" at the under-8 timeout of the second half with the same gusto. Chants of "I Believe" at Utah State, "O-H-I-O" at Ohio State and "Boomer Sooner" at Oklahoma will feel very different when they are merely audio recordings.

Fans are locked out of the Palestra, the old Philadelphia gym that has served as the Big 5 home for 65 years. Saint Joseph's, Villanova, La Salle, Penn and Temple have long had their rivalry games intertwined in the fabric of Philly sports. But the Quakers are not playing this season because the entire Ivy League is shut down and the "Big 4" just doesn't have the same ring to it.

"It's been hard trying to get my arms around this entire situation," said Temple coach Aaron McKie.

Pandemic has opening week of season in disarray

Associated Press

Wichita State landed in Sioux Falls, S.D., on Monday afternoon, masked up and looking forward to tipping off the season in the Crossover Classic.

A few hours later, the Shockers announced they were out of the tournament after multiple positive COVID-19 tests. Event organizers said the tests came from two players who were retested before the final decision was made.

"The kids were excited because they were going to get to compete against someone," said Wichita State interim coach Isaac Brown, whose team had been practicing since June. "Just to get here and find out that we're not able to play in the tournament — they were

disappointed."

Eight months after the coronavirus shut down college basketball at tournament time, the sport returns this week with dozens of teams opening their seasons as early as Wednesday and the pandemic still raging. It has already forced cancellations and postponements across the country, leading to a chaotic scramble to schedule opponents willing to drop everything to play.

No. 2 Baylor, 9 Duke and the No. 3 UConn women have all canceled games because of COVID-19.

The Shockers were the sixth team to pull out of the South Dakota tournament alone — only West Virginia and Memphis are left from the original

slate — though the event is going ahead with replacement teams and without fans.

"It's been a wild ride," said Lea Miller-Tooley, the tournament director. "We've learned a lot, but we've really been able to hang in there."

Texas A&M, Creighton and Wichita State are the most recent programs to drop out or be removed from the Crossover Classic field. Utah, Ohio State and Dayton already had backed out. South Dakota State, Utah State, St. Mary's, Northern Iowa, Western Kentucky and Virginia Commonwealth have stepped in as replacement teams. VCU was quickly added after Wichita State was removed. The Rams had been scheduled to play in

the Volunteer Classic this week, but that event was canceled.

A day after UConn announced it was pausing its women's season for 14 days following a positive coronavirus test, organizers of the Hall of Fame Women's Challenge tournament canceled this weekend's event, which was to feature the Huskies and No. 6 Mississippi State.

UConn coach Geno Auriemma said he was not sure his program can make up those games or a scheduled Dec. 4 showdown with No. 5 Louisville that also has been canceled. He said he has been spending a lot of time reassuring players that things are going to be fine.

CFP rankings: Alabama tops the list

Associated Press

Alabama was No. 1 in the first College Football Playoff rankings of the season Tuesday night, followed by Notre Dame, Clemson and Ohio State.

Texas A&M was fifth and Florida sixth, giving the Southeastern Conference three of the top six teams. Alabama is No. 1 in the CFP rankings for a record 19th time.

Unbeaten Cincinnati from the American Athletic Conference at seventh has the best ranking for a non-Power Five team in the seven-year history of the selection committee's top 25.

No. 8 Northwestern, Georgia and Miami rounded out the top 10.

Another unbeaten team from outside the Power Five was not so highly regarded by the committee. BYU was slotted 14th, behind No. 11 Oklahoma (6-2) and No. 13 Iowa State (6-2), among others. The Cougars were No. 8 in the latest AP Top 25.

The highest-ranked Pac-12

team was Oregon at 15th. Southern California was 18th.

Much like this entire college football season played in a pandemic, the rankings schedule has been delayed and truncated this year.

The 13-person selection committee usually starts ranking teams around Halloween and produces six rankings before the final ones that determine which 12 teams will play in the semifinals and major bowl games.

This is the first of four reveals leading up to the only ones that really count, scheduled to be released on Dec. 20.

The coronavirus pandemic didn't stop the selection committee from meeting in person as usual at the Gaylord Hotel in Grapevine, Texas, just outside Dallas. And the playoff itself is scheduled to go off as scheduled with the semifinals on Jan. 1 in the Rose Bowl and Sugar Bowl, and the championship game Jan. 11 at Hard Rock Stadium in Miami Gardens, Fla.

Because of the strange sea-

son, these initial committee rankings had more intrigue than normal and several questions to answer.

"We embraced the chaos," committee chairman Gary Barta, who is Iowa's athletic director, told ESPN.

How did the committee treat the non-Power Five unbeaten?

Cincinnati (8-0) should be thrilled. BYU (9-0), not so much. Even though the Cougars lead the FBS in scoring margin at 33 points per game.

Barta said the Cougars' schedule, which had to be rebuilt because Power Five conferences mostly decided to play only league games due to the pandemic, wasn't tough enough to warrant a better ranking.

"Right now BYU's best win is over Boise State, and in that game I think (the Broncos) got down to their third-string quarterback," Barta said.

No non-Power Five team had ever ranked better than 12th in the first rankings. The best ranking in any selection committee top 25 by a team from

outside the Power Five had been No. 8 for unbeaten UCF in the final 2018 rankings.

At worst, Cincinnati is lined up nicely to win out and grab the spot guaranteed to the top Group of Five conference champion in the New Year's six bowls.

The contenders for that spot if Cincinnati collapses down the stretch are Coastal Carolina from the Sun Belt at 20, Marshall from Conference USA at 21 and the Bearcats' AAC rival, Tulsa, at 25.

BYU is not only outside the realistic playoff race, but the Cougars would still need to rise a few spots to have a shot at getting an at-large invite to one of the lucrative New Year's Six games.

"Great motivation for our guys," BYU coach Kalani Sitake said on ESPN while mostly taking the high road about the rankings.

A bid to the Fiesta, Cotton or Peach bowls would be worth \$4 million to the independent Cougars.

Gophers ax game with Badgers, cite COVID

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — For the first time in 114 years, the Minnesota-Wisconsin game has been bumped off the schedule.

Minnesota called off its annual battle with Wisconsin for Paul Bunyan's Axe — which was slated for Saturday afternoon — due to an uptick in COVID-19 cases within the program. The decision made Tuesday by Minnesota will also likely make the 18th-ranked Badgers ineligible for the Big Ten championship game, because of two earlier canceled games.

Utah's game against Arizona State — scheduled for Sunday — was also added Tuesday to

the cancellation list because the Sun Devils still don't have enough scholarship players available due to numerous COVID-19 cases that include coach Herm Edwards.

By the end of the day, Utah was rescheduled to play Washington on Saturday. The Huskies had their scheduled game with Washington State canceled last Sunday.

No. 24 Tulsa's game on Saturday against Houston also was postponed because of Houston's COVID-19 issues.

Ten scheduled games this week involving FBS teams have been postponed or canceled. The Minnesota-Wisconsin game and the Utah-Arizona State game won't be made up.

Tulsa and Houston have no common open dates left and will only be able to reschedule the game if neither team is in the American Athletic Conference championship game on Dec. 19.

Minnesota athletic director Mark Coyle and president Joan Gabel made the decision at the recommendation of athletic medical director Dr. Brad Nelson, who's on the conference's COVID-19 task force, after consultation with Big Ten officials.

Minnesota said nine players and six staff members have tested positive for COVID-19 in the last five days. There were additional presumptive positive tests that turned up Wednesday from daily antigen

testing, with the program awaiting confirmation of those results.

Coyle talked this week with Wisconsin athletic director Barry Alvarez about what the Badgers went through with their cancellations.

According to Big Ten protocols this season, teams must play at least six games to be eligible for the conference championship game on Dec. 19. If the average number of league games played by all Big Ten teams is below six, programs must play no less than two fewer league games than that average to be eligible. Wisconsin (2-1) has two games left on its schedule and won't reach the six-game minimum.

Washington's Young off to stellar career

Associated Press

Chase Young fired up his teammates before Washington's latest game by telling them they only get 16 days out of 365 in a year to do this job. He kept repeating that message before they took the field and then played like it in a victory.

"Today was one of the days," Young recalled. "I just tell them to play with passion."

There's no passion lacking or days off for Young, the No. 2 pick in the draft who has been a game-altering force in his rookie season. He may not lead the league in sacks like his mom expected, but Young is taking on opposing double- and sometimes triple-team attention and leading the best pass defense in the NFL.

"We see him as a leader on this team," veteran defensive end and franchise sacks leader Ryan Kerrigan said. "We all kind of feed off his energy."

Young's energy is undeniable and his presence unmistakable. With dreadlocks flowing out of the back of his helmet above the No. 99 burgundy and gold jersey, he's a menace to linemen trying to block him and quarterbacks hoping to avoid him.

His 3½ sacks are most among rookies, and that number is lower than Young would

like because he missed a game with a groin injury and offenses are already geared toward slowing him down.

"He has gotten double-teamed an awful lot," coach Ron Rivera said. "A couple times he's been tripped where he's been chipped and then you see a tackle block with the guard turning that way or you see two tight ends and a tackle back-stepping. He's handled it."

If there was any doubt about how Young would handle the spotlight of being a Heisman Trophy finalist, top draft pick and local star in Washington, he has erased it and taken any criticism in stride. The most has come from his mom, who gave him a C+ grade halfway through the season.

While Carla Young may be her son's harshest critic, his teammates are his biggest fans.

"He's a big-time player," said receiver Terry McLaurin, who also played with Young at Ohio State. "I tell him before every game, 'Be the best player on the field,' and you got to take that to heart, and I think that he is."

Young doesn't act as if he's the best at anything, continually vowing he'll get better. He brushed off a costly roughing-the-passer penalty in the final minute of a loss to

Detroit as a "rookie mistake" and forced a fumble near the goal line a week later.

Speaking to reporters after that mistake, when he could have easily dodged the camera waiting in the bowels of Ford Field, showed those outside the organization what members of it have known for months.

"I don't really see him as a rookie," Kerrigan said. "With where he's at in terms of his development and with where he's at mentally, he's not a rookie."

Young is still technically a rookie, just nine games into his pro career and looking forward to feasting his first Thanksgiving game when Washington visits the Dallas Cowboys — with first place in the NFC East at stake.

"Thanksgiving: LeBron gonna be watching," Young said. "Everybody gonna be watching. It's that time to get that money, for sure."

Young is earning it so far, helping teammates pile up the sacks. Second-year pass rusher Montez Sweat leads Washington with six, Kerrigan is a half-sack behind and the entire defense benefits from Young's play that is still a work in progress.

"I'm developing," he said. "You definitely haven't seen my best ball yet. I'll tell you that right now."

Argentinian soccer great Maradona dies at 60

Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina — Diego Maradona, the Argentine soccer great who was among the best players ever and who led his country to the 1986 World Cup title before later struggling with cocaine use and obesity, has died. He was 60.

The office of Argentina's president will decree three days of national mourning because of Maradona's death on Wednesday, and the Argentine soccer association expressed its sorrow on Twitter.

Maradona died two weeks after being released from a Buenos Aires hospital following brain surgery.

Famed for the "Hand of God" goal in which he punched the ball into England's net during the 1986 World Cup quarterfinals, Maradona captivated fans over a two-decade career with a

bewitching style of play that was all his own.

Alabama's Saban tests positive for COVID-19

Coach Nick Saban of No. 1 Alabama has tested positive for COVID-19 just days before the Iron Bowl with No. 22 Auburn.

Team physician Dr. Jimmy Robinson and head trainer Jeff Allen said in a joint statement that the positive test came Wednesday morning.

"He has very mild symptoms, so this test will not be categorized as a potential false positive," the statement said. "He will follow all appropriate guidelines and isolate at home."

He had previously received a false positive ahead of the game with Georgia but didn't have any symptoms that time.

He was cleared to coach in the

game after subsequent tests leading up to the game came back negative.

Rays's Arozarena arrested in Mexico

Tampa Bay Rays outfielder Randy Arozarena has been arrested in Mexico's Yucatan state for a situation involving an apparent custody dispute, two weeks after he won the Babe Ruth award for the Most Valuable Player in the postseason.

The Yucatan state prosecutors' office confirmed Tuesday that Arozarena was detained "for problems relating to his expartner." The office did not explain what those problems were, but video posted on social media suggested it may have involved a dispute over a child. Arozarena had not been formally charged yet. Mexican law al-

lows a two-day period for prosecutors to decide whether to bring charges.

Normally suspects are held in jail pending that decision.

Ravens-Steelers game moved to Sunday night

The Thanksgiving night game between the Ravens and Steelers has been switched to Sunday because of coronavirus issues with Baltimore.

The NFL announced the move Wednesday, but did not specify a time of game nor which network would televise it. Previously, it was scheduled for NBC's prime-time telecast.

Baltimore placed outside linebacker Pernell McPhee on the reserve/COVID-19, joining running backs Mark Ingram and J.K. Dobbins and defensive tackle Brandon Williams.