

NDAA may protect vaccine refusers

BY COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

Service members who refuse the coronavirus vaccine would receive only honorable discharges from the military under Republican-sponsored legislation introduced Thursday.

The proposed amendment to the pending 2022 National Defense Authorization Act was introduced by Sen. Roger Marshall, R-Kan., who said it would protect troops who object to the vaccine mandated earlier this year by the Pentagon. Marshall said it was especially important to protect thousands of service members who have applied for religious-based exemptions to the vaccine, none of which have been approved to date by military officials.

“Think about the consequences

of a dishonorable discharge,” Marshall said Thursday, listing off several including the loss of medical and education benefits, gun-ownership rights and the ability to reenlist in another military branch. “This is a big issue. It is a big deal.”

Marshall’s bill largely matches language included in the House-passed version of the NDAA, the annual must-pass bill that authorizes Pentagon spending and sets policy priorities. The amendment Thursday was endorsed by 10 additional Republican senators — Kevin Cramer of North Dakota, Roger Wicker of Mississippi, Ron Johnson of Wisconsin, Rick Scott of Florida, John Kennedy of Louisiana, Tommy Tuberville of Alabama, Ted Cruz of Texas, James Lankford of Oklahoma, Shelley Moore-Capito of West Virginia

and Cindy Hyde-Smith of Mississippi.

“Notwithstanding any other provision of law, a member of the armed forces subject to discharge on the basis of the member choosing not to receive the [coronavirus] vaccine may only receive an honorable discharge,” reads the amendment to the NDAA, which the Senate has yet to vote on.

Meanwhile, it remains unclear what will happen to those service members who ultimately decline the vaccine and are not granted an exemption. Pentagon officials have said such individuals would likely face administrative actions or noncriminal punishments, such as rank reductions, long before commanders moved to court-martial them for failure to follow orders. A conviction for

failing to follow orders could lead to a dishonorable discharge and up to two years in prison, according to the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

However, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has called for “compassion and understanding” from commanders as they deal with subordinates who decline the vaccine, John Kirby, Austin’s top spokesman, said this week.

Marshall’s amendment does nothing to end the Pentagon’s mandate for the coronavirus or other vaccines. However the senator, a physician and former Army doctor, said he opposes the mandate, though he chose to get vaccinated.

“I support the vaccine,” Marshall said Thursday. “I don’t support mandates. I don’t support one-size-fits-all.”

Pfizer touts its new, experimental COVID-19 pill

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Pfizer Inc. said Friday that its experimental antiviral pill for COVID-19 cut rates of hospitalization and death by nearly 90% in high-risk adults, as the drugmaker joined the race for an easy-to-use medication to treat the coronavirus.

Currently most COVID-19 treatments require an IV or injection. Competitor Merck’s COVID-19 pill is already under review at the Food and Drug Administration after showing strong initial results, and on Thursday the United Kingdom became the first country to OK it.

Pfizer said it will ask the FDA and international regulators to authorize its pill as soon as possible, after independent experts recommended halting the com-

pany’s study based on the strength of its results. Once Pfizer applies, the FDA could make a decision within weeks or months.

Since the beginning of the pandemic last year, researchers worldwide have been racing to find a pill to treat COVID-19 that can be taken at home to ease symptoms, speed recovery and keep people out of the hospital.

Having pills to treat early COVID-19 “would be a very important advance,” said Dr. John Mellors, chief of infectious diseases at the University of Pittsburgh, who was not involved in the Pfizer study.

“If someone developed symptoms and tested positive we could call in a prescription to the local pharmacy as we do for many, many infectious diseases,” he

said.

On Friday, Pfizer released preliminary results of its study of 775 adults. Patients who received the company’s drug along with another antiviral shortly after showing COVID-19 symptoms had an 89% reduction in their combined rate of hospitalization or death after a month, compared to patients taking a dummy pill. Fewer than 1% of patients taking the drug needed to be hospitalized and no one died. In the comparison group, 7% were hospitalized and there were seven deaths.

“We were hoping that we had something extraordinary, but it’s rare that you see great drugs come through with almost 90% efficacy and 100% protection for death,” said Dr. Mikael Dolsten,

Pfizer’s chief scientific officer, in an interview.

Study participants were unvaccinated, with mild-to-moderate COVID-19, and were considered high risk for hospitalization due to health problems like obesity, diabetes or heart disease. Treatment began within three to five days of initial symptoms, and lasted for five days. Patients who received the drug earlier showed slightly better results, underscoring the need for speedy testing and treatment.

Pfizer reported few details on side effects but said rates of problems were similar between the groups at about 20%.

Top U.S. health officials continue to stress that vaccination will remain the best way to protect against infection.

Family, friends gather to honor Powell

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Friends, family and former colleagues gathered Friday at Washington National Cathedral to honor Colin L. Powell, the trailblazing soldier-diplomat who rose from humble Bronx beginnings to become the first Black chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and later served as the first Black secretary of state.

The funeral on a sunny and chilly day drew dignitaries and friends from across a wide political and military spectrum. They included former presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, former Secretaries of State James Baker, Condoleezza Rice and Hillary Clinton, former De-

fense Secretary Robert Gates, and the current chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Army Gen. Mark Milley, as well as other service chiefs.

As guests gathered in the cavernous cathedral that has hosted the funerals of several past presidents, including Dwight D. Eisenhower, the U.S. Army Brass Quintet played a range of tunes, including “Dancing Queen” by Abba, a favorite of Powell’s. As Powell’s wife, Alma, and other family members were seated, the quintet played a hymn called “Mansions of the Lord.”

President Joe Biden attended but was not scheduled to speak. Two recent presidents did not attend — Bill Clinton, who

is recovering from an infection, and Donald Trump, who Powell had criticized.

Eulogists were Madeleine Albright, who was Powell’s immediate predecessor as the nation’s top diplomat; Richard Armitage, who was deputy secretary under Powell and had known him since they served together in the Pentagon during the Reagan administration; and Powell’s son Michael.

Powell died Oct. 18 of complications from COVID-19 at age 84. He had been vaccinated against the coronavirus, but his family said his immune system had been compromised by multiple myeloma, a blood cancer for which he had been undergoing treatment.

More than 53K evacuees yet to be resettled

Los Angeles Times (TNS)

HOUSTON — When Taliban fighters hunting for Ahmad Shoaib Durgee knocked on his door in Kabul, Afghanistan, he scrambled to escape with his family of six to reunite with his sister in Sacramento, Calif.

Two months after they were flown to the U.S., they remain among 53,200 evacuees held at Fort Lee, Va., and seven other military camps nationwide.

Durgee, 37, who qualified for a visa because he had worked as a security guard for American officials, says he feels fortunate to have been evacuated to a camp where he doesn’t have to live in a tent. But he’s itching to leave military housing. After hearing that those headed to California face longer waits, he changed his requested destination to Richmond, Va., where he has friends.

Each afternoon he looked for his name in Fort Lee’s daily stack of “departure files,” those selected for resettlement.

“I ask them, ‘When my turn comes?’ They say, ‘You will be notified,’” Durgee said recently.

Since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August, 124,000 people have been evacuated to the U.S., including 67,000 Afghan allies. Of those Afghans, 10,000 have been resettled with the help of nonprofit agencies in communities across the nation, according to the Biden administration.

A Biden administration official attributes the pace of resettlement to staff shortages, logistics issues and medical problems, including a measles outbreak among some transferred to U.S. camps. Nonprofit agencies tasked with resettling Afghan evacuees say they have been overwhelmed by the influx. Government officials say they are seeking to increase the pace. But there’s no deadline for resettling evacuees waiting at the military camps.

Congress approved \$6.3 billion in added funding in September, but resettlement agencies said that has yet to reach them as they struggle to house evacuees. Most still wait in the camps, where Biden administration officials said an additional 30,000 are anticipated to arrive from Afghanistan during the next year.

In September, the administration announced a pilot program that would allow groups of at least five individuals to apply to become “sponsor circles,” helping Afghan evacuees to resettle for at least three months. The program would supplement federal resettlement programs run by nine agencies nationwide with several hundred local affiliates.

“We’re trying to prioritize getting those who were on the longest off the quickest,” said Curtis Ried, deputy to former Delaware Gov. Jack Markell, whom Biden appointed in September to coordinate Afghan resettlement.

Ried said the focus is resettling Afghans “in a way that’s effective and sets people up for success.”

Before they leave the camps, Afghans are assigned a resettlement agency at their destination. That agency receives \$1,225 from the federal government for each evacuee’s initial expenses.

About 3,000 evacuees have left the camps without waiting for help from a resettlement group after they were granted humanitarian parole and vetted, including Afghan American citizens, green card and visa holders, and others with close ties in the U.S., according to the administration. In doing so, these evacuees lose access to the assistance that would have been awarded to the resettlement agency, although they’re still eligible for food stamps, Medicaid and other federal aid.

Those who requested to be resettled to states and cities that are already home to many of their fellow Afghans — Maryland, Virginia, Washington and California, particularly Sacramento — have faced some of the longest waits. That’s because U.S. officials have encouraged them to resettle in other states to avoid overwhelming the local resettlement agencies and schools. Some states, such as Oklahoma, have offered evacuees incentives such as free housing (280 Afghan evacuees have been resettled there, according to the Biden administration).

Biden's bill on brink of House approval

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — With nearly no votes to spare, Democratic leaders tried resolving lingering concerns of moderate lawmakers Friday in hopes of finally pushing President Joe Biden's multitrillion-dollar domestic agenda through the House.

Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and other leaders met privately with a handful of centrists who say they want an official cost estimate from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office before voting on a 10-year, \$1.85 trillion social and environment bill. Democrats can lose no more than three votes in the narrowly divided House to pass the legislation.

Biden, meeting reporters to tout a strong monthly jobs report, said he was returning

to the Oval Office "to make some calls" to lawmakers. He said he would ask them to "vote yes on both these bills right now."

Leaders want to pass that legislation, and a separate five-year, \$1 trillion package of road and other infrastructure projects, to quickly notch accomplishments just days after a gubernatorial election defeat in Virginia and disappointing contests elsewhere. They also want the votes to occur before Congress leaves by the weekend for a week-long recess.

Leaders have said complete CBO figures won't be available for days or more. "We're working on it," House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md., said of the talks. By late morning, a House procedural vote was underway that started over three hours earlier

as behind-the-scenes discussions continued.

House passage of Biden's larger measure would send it to the Senate, where it would face certain changes and more Democratic drama. That's chiefly because of demands by Sens. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona to contain the measure's costs and curb or drop some of its initiatives.

But House approval of the smaller, bipartisan infrastructure measure would send it directly to the White House, where Biden would be certain to take a victory lap. That bill, projected to create mountains of jobs, had been blocked by House progressives to pressure moderates to back the larger family and climate change legislation.

New grand jury set as Trump probe continues

Associated Press

NEW YORK — New York prosecutors investigating former President Donald Trump's business dealings have convened a new grand jury to hear evidence in the probe as the previous panel's term was set to run out, a person familiar with the matter told The Associated Press Thursday.

The development comes as the Manhattan district attorney's office is weighing whether to seek more indictments in a case that has already resulted in tax fraud charges against Trump's company, the Trump Organization, and its longtime CFO Allen Weisselberg.

Trump himself remains under investigation after District Attorney Cyrus Vance Jr. led a multiyear fight to get access to the Republican's tax records.

The person was not authorized to speak publicly and did so on condition of anonymity. The news of the new grand jury was first reported by The Washington Post.

Investigators working for Vance and New York Attorney General Letitia James have

spent more than two years looking at whether the Trump Organization misled banks or tax officials about the value of the company's assets, inflating them to gain favorable loan terms or minimizing them to reap tax savings.

As part of a continuing civil investigation, James' office issued subpoenas to local governments in November 2019 for records pertaining to Trump's estate north of Manhattan, Seven Springs, and a tax benefit Trump received for placing land into a conservation trust. Vance issued subpoenas about a year ago seeking many of the same records.

James' office has also been looking at similar issues relating to a Trump office building in New York City, a hotel in Chicago and a golf course near Los Angeles. Her office also won a series of court rulings forcing Trump's company and a law firm it hired to turn over troves of records.

Prosecutors have also been weighing whether to seek charges against the company's chief operating officer Matthew Calamari Sr.

US hiring rebounded in October, 531K jobs added

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — America's employers stepped up their hiring in October, adding a solid 531,000 jobs, the most since July and a sign that the recovery from the pandemic recession is overcoming a virus-induced slowdown.

Friday's report from the Labor Department also showed that the unemployment rate fell to 4.6% last month, from 4.8% in September. That is a comparatively low level but still well above the pre-pandemic jobless rate of 3.5%.

The economy's emergence from the pandemic, by most measures, remains on course. Service companies in such areas as retail, banking and warehousing have reported a sharp jump in sales. More Americans bought new homes last month. And consumer confidence rose in October.

Still, the recovery would gain strength from a sustained acceleration in hiring. The economy grew at a healthy 6.5% annual rate in the first half of the year as vaccinations spread and Americans showed themselves more willing to travel, shop, eat out and attend entertainment events. Yet

the delta variant held economic growth in the July-September quarter to just a 2% annual rate and slowed hiring.

Friday's report showed not only that employers accelerated their hiring in October but also that the job gains in August and September weren't as weak as initially reported. The government revised its estimate of hiring for those two months by a combined 235,000 jobs.

Last month, hiring was spread across nearly every major industry, with only government employers reporting a job loss. Shipping and warehousing companies posted a gain of 54,000 jobs. Retailers added 35,000. The battered leisure and hospitality sector, which includes restaurants, bars, hotels and entertainment venues, gained 164,000 jobs.

And employers, who have been competing to fill jobs from a diminished pool of applicants, raised wages at a solid clip: Average hourly pay jumped 4.9% in October compared with a year earlier. Yet even a gain that strong is barely keeping pace with recent surges in consumer price inflation.

Iran claims 20% enriched uranium gains

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran's atomic agency said Friday that its stockpile of 20% enriched uranium has reached over 463 pounds, the latest defiant move ahead of upcoming nuclear talks with the West.

In a report carried by semi-official Tasnim and Fars news agencies, spokesman Behrouz Kamalvandi said the atomic agency had produced well beyond a 265 pound target for 20% enriched uranium set by parliament.

Under the historic 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and the world powers, Iran was not meant to enrich uranium above 3.67%. Enriched uranium above 90% can be used for nuclear weapons.

After months of delays, the European

Union, Iran and the U.S. announced Wednesday that indirect talks to resuscitate the deal would resume on Nov. 29 in Vienna.

The nuclear deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, promises Iran economic incentives in exchange for limits on its nuclear program, and is meant to prevent Tehran from developing a nuclear bomb. Tehran insists its program is peaceful.

Kamalvandi also said that so far his agency has also produced 55 pounds of 60% enriched uranium, a level that only countries with nuclear weapons have the physical capabilities to produce.

The U.S. unilaterally pulled out of the nuclear deal in 2018 under then-President Donald Trump, but Britain, France, Germany,

China and Russia have tried to preserve the accord.

Tehran's strategy of deliberately violating the deal is seen as an attempt to put pressure particularly on Europe to provide it with incentives to offset crippling American sanctions re-imposed after the U.S. pullout.

On Sept. 15, Iran's nuclear chief Mohammad Eslami said Tehran removed surveillance cameras belonging to the United Nations nuclear watchdog because of unfulfilled commitments by other signatories of the nuclear deal.

U.S. President Joe Biden and European leaders criticized Tehran last week for what it saw as accelerated and provocative nuclear steps as Iran continues to enrich uranium to higher levels.

Countries pledge to phase out coal, but with caveats

Associated Press

GLASGOW, Scotland — In the fight to curb climate change, several major coal-using nations announced steps Thursday to wean themselves — at times slowly — off of the heavily polluting fossil fuel.

The pledges to phase out coal come on top of other promises made at the U.N. climate summit in Glasgow, Scotland, that the head of an international energy organization said trimmed several tenths of a degree Celsius from projections of future warming. But outside experts called that “optimistic.”

Optimism also abounded in relation to the promises on coal, which has the dirtiest carbon footprint of the major fuels and is a significant source of planet-warming emissions.

“Today, I think we can say that the end of coal is in sight,” said Alok Sharma, who is chairing the conference of nearly 200 nations, known as COP26.

Critics say that vision is still obscured by a lot of smoke because several major economies still have yet to set a date for ending their dependence on the fuel, including the United States, China, India and Japan, which was targeted outside the summit venue Thursday by protesters clad as animated characters.

What nations have promised varies. Some have pledged to quit coal completely at a future date, while others say they'll stop building new plants, and even more, including China, are talking about just stopping the financing of new coal plants abroad.

The British government said pledges of

new or earlier deadlines for ending coal use came from more than 20 countries including Ukraine, Vietnam, South Korea, Indonesia and Chile.

Some came with notable caveats, such as Indonesia's request for additional aid before committing to bring its deadline forward to the 2040s.

Meanwhile, Poland, the second-biggest user of coal in Europe after Germany, appeared to backtrack on any ambitious new commitments within hours of the announcement.

“Energy security and the assurances of jobs is a priority for us,” Anna Moskwa, Poland's minister for climate and environment, said in a tweet, citing the government's existing plan which “provides for a departure from hard coal by 2049.” Earlier in the day, it had seemed that Poland might bring that deadline forward by at least a decade.

Campaigners reacted angrily to the apparent U-turn.

“Moskwa has underscored that her government cannot be trusted to sign a postcard, let alone a responsible climate pledge,” said Kathrin Gutmann, campaign director of the group Europe Beyond Coal.

Separately, more than two dozen countries, cities and companies joined the Powering Past Coal Alliance, whose members commit to ending coal use by 2030, for developed countries, and no later than 2050 for developing ones. Banks that are members pledge not to provide loans for the worst types of coal-fired power plants.

Meanwhile, the United States, Canada, Denmark and several other nations signed a different pledge to “prioritize” funding clean energy over fossil fuel projects abroad.

While not completely ruling out financial support for coal-fired power plants, the countries said they would refrain from any “new direct public support” for coal except in limited circumstances.

That move was seen as a significant step by environmental campaigners, who said that it could push international lenders to stop providing loans for new fossil fuel projects.

A U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss officials' thinking, said that while the U.S. hadn't opted to join the coal phase-out pledges, its commitment to a clean energy future was clear. The Biden administration wants to reach 100% carbon pollution-free electricity by 2035.

Underlining the urgent need for action on coal, a new analysis by scientists at Global Carbon Project found emissions from the fuel increased dramatically in 2021, not just from pandemic-struck 2020 levels, but even when compared to pre-pandemic 2019 levels. The world spewed 16.2 billion tons of carbon dioxide from coal burning, 5.7% more than last year, said the group, which tracks annual carbon pollution.

That was mostly spurred by a dramatic increase in China, which hit a new peak of coal emissions this year of 8.4 billion tons of carbon dioxide, more than half the globe's coal emissions, the report said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Drivers warned to watch out for 'lusty deer'

MO KANSAS CITY — Police officials and the AAA auto club are urging drivers to be especially cautious this time of year as collisions with deer become more frequent.

The Kansas City Star reported that cooler weather and shorter daylight hours mean it's breeding season for deer. Kansas City, Mo., police said on Twitter that "lusty deer" are on the move "and won't let your car get in the way of their quest for loving."

AAA's Nick Chabarria said deer-related crashes rise sharply in the mid-autumn. In 2020, the Missouri State Highway Patrol cited 3,639 crashes involving deer, killing five people and injuring 348.

Sugar beet harvest could set sweet record

MI BAY CITY — The Michigan sugar beet harvest could set a record this year.

Michigan Sugar is anticipating 34 tons per acre from roughly 900 farmers, up from a record of 31.6 tons in 2015, MLive.com reported.

The state's beet growing area covers roughly 20 counties and includes much of the Thumb region.

"Once again, our world-class growers have done a phenomenal job caring for their sugar beets and, with a little help from Mother Nature, we will now reap the benefits," executive vice president Jim Ruhlman said.

Michigan Sugar was consid-

ering whether to ask growers to leave some beets in the ground.

Beaches see record year for sea turtle nests

FL FORT LAUDERDALE — Biologists were taken by surprise by a record number of leatherback turtle nests found along some South Florida beaches this year.

The 79 nests laid by endangered turtles along beaches in Broward County this year is nearly double the previous record, the South Florida SunSentinel reported. The previous record was 46 in 2012, and the record low for leatherback nests was 12 in 2017.

"It's difficult to say why Broward County saw such an increase in leatherback nesting this season," Stephanie Kedzuf, a biologist for Broward County who specializes in sea turtles, told the newspaper.

Police: Man set home ablaze clearing cobwebs

CO BOULDER — A Colorado man was arrested after investigators said he set his mother's house on fire while trying to get rid of cobwebs with a blowtorch.

The Boulder Daily Camera reported the 39-year-old man was taken into custody after the fire near Longmont. He faces charges of first-degree arson, criminal mischief causing \$20,000 to \$100,000 in damages, possession of a controlled substance and violation of a protection order.

No one was injured in the fire. Investigators said the man acknowledged using a blowtorch to clear cobwebs in the crawl-

space under the home, and he tried to put out the fire for an hour by himself before calling emergency crews. The blaze caused about \$100,000 in damages.

Man sentenced for theft of his employer's guns

KY BOWLING GREEN — A Kentucky man was sentenced to almost seven years in federal prison and ordered to pay restitution after admitting he stole more than 300 guns from the pawn shop where he worked.

U.S. District Judge Greg N. Stivers sentenced Brandon Wayne Parker, 41, of Horse Cave, to 82 months and ordered him to pay \$99,588 in restitution, federal prosecutors said in a news release.

Parker was employed by Master Pawn in Horse Cave, which is a federally licensed firearms dealer. In a plea agreement, Parker admitted stealing about 335 firearms from the shop between November 2016 and August 2018. He also admitted providing false information on federal firearms purchase forms by entering identification information of legitimate purchasers without their knowledge, the release said.

Bridge damaged again by too large vehicle

VT LYNDON — A covered bridge in the Vermont town of Lyndon has been hit and damaged again by a vehicle that was too large to pass through the structure.

A van being carried on a flatbed trailer hit the roof structure boards of the Millers Bridge,

the Caledonian Record reported. Three boards broke off and fell to the ground. The driver immediately stopped and backed the truck out of the bridge before causing more damage, the newspaper reported.

The contact was again captured on video by a nearby resident. The driver got out of the truck, removed the boards from the road and stayed at the scene, the video showed.

4 properties named to Historic Places register

TN NASHVILLE — A rural church, a theater, an urban house and a former school in Tennessee have been added to the National Register of Historic Places, state officials said.

Lauderdale High School in Ripley was built in 1912 and it served as a place where Black children received instruction during Jim Crow and segregation, the Tennessee Historical Commission said. The school also was a civic and social center before it closed in 1969.

The once-segregated Dixie Theatre in Lewisburg was built on the city's courthouse square in 1936, officials said. The theater closed in 1985 before it reopened in 1995.

The Daniel Hanley House in Memphis was built in 1912 and is an example of an American Foursquare residence. Parker's Chapel Missionary Baptist Church and Cemetery in Portland includes a 1956 brick church building, a 1970 concrete block fellowship hall and a cemetery that dates back to 1885.

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Irish prepare for Navy's unique offense

Associated Press

SOUTH BEND, Ind. — Sometimes you must switch gears to get to the finish line. No. 8 Notre Dame will need to do that Saturday when it renews its rivalry with Navy.

A week after holding off North Carolina, the Fighting Irish (8-1, No. 10 CFP) host a Navy team (2-6) that has provided its share of scares.

Just ask No. 2 Cincinnati, which escaped Annapolis with a 27-20 victory over coach Ken Niumatalolo's crew. Yes, the same Bearcats who three weeks earlier ended Notre Dame's 26-game home winning streak.

Kelly is 8-2 coaching against Navy, but preparing for its triple-option offense is always a hassle.

"We didn't see it last week and we won't see it next week," Kelly said. "So, you have to shift gears; you're not doing things you normally do. So, it's really

getting out of a comfort zone more than anything else. And that's difficult because you're so used to getting into routines. Navy gets you out of that routine."

Navy, which is 103-73 with 11 bowl appearances under Niumatalolo, has struggled with injuries on its offensive line and in the secondary. But the Midshipmen have shown up and competed, losing close games against Houston and SMU, which are now both ranked. They rallied last week to win 20-17 at Tulsa.

"I've never been around a group like this that, in spite of their record, they come to work every week," Niumatalolo said.

Navy didn't complete a pass against Tulsa — sophomore Tai Lavatai only attempted three — but rushed for 302 yards behind Carlinos Acie (3 carries, 80 yards) and Chance Warren (10-70), Lavatai (18-64) and fullback Isaac Ruoss (13-49). The Mid-

shipmen had the ball for 37:18.

Niumatalolo knows his defense, led by linebackers Diego Fagot and Johnny Hodges, will be challenged by the Irish offense led by Kyren Williams, who piled up a career-best 191 rushing yards and 261 overall against the Tar Heels.

"They're good, a really good football team like they always are," he said. "In 2019, with one of our better teams (7-1 and ranked No. 23) we went in there and they crushed us (52-20)."

Middie impersonator

Walk-on Chase Ketterer, a former option quarterback at New Prairie High School 25 miles west of Notre Dame, tried to replicate Lavatai in practices this week. Ketterer came to Kelly's attention in 2019 when he played against the coach's son, Kenzel, a defensive end at South Bend St. Joseph. Ketterer rushed for 2,496 yards and ac-

counted for 43 TDs that season.

"It's been a busy week," Ketterer said Tuesday. "Practice doesn't start until 4. We were out here at 3 o'clock doing walk-throughs and watching film. It's definitely been a busy week."

Navy on their minds

Preparing for Navy is not a one-week thing. Kelly makes sure practice time is given to Navy during the spring and pre-season, and the players also work on things during summer workouts.

"We understand we won't be able to replicate the speed at which they run the triple (option)," said linebacker JD Bertrand, Notre Dame's leading tackler with 71.

"Playing Navy, you've just got to do your job," added defensive lineman Jayson Ademilola, who has 32 tackles, 4.5 for losses. "It's all 11 guys knowing what their assignment is."

No. 24 Ragin' Cajuns pull away from Panthers

Associated Press

LAFAYETTE, La. — Montrell Johnson had two fourth-quarter touchdown runs and No. 24 Louisiana-Lafayette scored all its points on its final three possessions to rally for a 21-17 victory over Georgia State on Thursday night.

The Ragin' Cajuns (8-1, 6-0 Sun Belt) locked up the conference's West Division title for the fourth consecutive season and won their eighth straight game after a season-opening loss at Texas. Louisiana-Lafayette also qualified for the Sun Belt championship game.

Johnson rushed for 98 yards, with scoring runs of 3 and 13 yards, the second with 2:32 left to cap a winning 71-yard drive. Louisiana-Lafayette held the Panthers on downs at midfield in the final minute.

Georgia State (4-5, 3-2), winless against the Cajuns in five

meetings, took a 17-14 lead with 5:25 left on Tucker Gregg's 1-yard run.

"We knew this was going to be tough," said Louisiana-Lafayette coach Billy Napier, whose team is 14-3 in one-possession games in his four seasons. "We had the five-day turnaround and were trying to clinch the West against a very underrated team. This was a squad that's won three in a row and they're highly motivated since they're still in the East Division race, and all of a sudden we're in a dogfight."

The Cajuns were shut out for most of the first three quarters by the Panthers, two-touchdown underdogs who took a 10-0 third-quarter lead on Darren Grainger's 37-yard scoring pass to tight end Roger Carter.

Louisiana-Lafayette had scoring chances, driving inside the 10 twice in the first half,

but failed on two fourth-down tries. Levi Lewis threw incomplete in the end zone on fourth down on Louisiana-Lafayette's first possession, and was sacked for a 6-yard loss on fourth down from the 6 just before halftime.

"We believe in the value of touchdowns in the red zone," Napier said. "You can kick field goals all you want in the red zone, we did that the first year we were here and it cost us a lot of games. Our guys know that we're going to be aggressive."

The Panthers, who had at least three first downs on each of their first-half drives, got a 39-yard field goal from Noel Ruiz, his longest of the year, with 5:05 left in the opening quarter on their first possession.

Both teams squandered scoring chances before Geor-

gia State made it 10-0 midway through the third quarter thanks to the game's only turnover. Antavious Lane picked off Lewis' pass at midfield, and Grainger hit Carter with a 37-yard scoring pass three plays later.

Lewis came back to lead a 75-yard drive on Louisiana-Lafayette's next possession, hitting Peter LeBlanc for a 13-yard score with 2:47 left in the third period. Then, after forcing a short Panthers punt, the Cajuns marched 50 yards in only six plays before Johnson scored from 3 yards out to give Louisiana-Lafayette its first lead at 14-10 with 13:11 left.

Georgia State responded with a 15-play, 75-yard drive, all on the ground, and ate up 7:46 of clock time before Gregg ran for a key fourth-down conversion at the Cajuns 1 and then scored one play later.

Kraken top Sabres behind Eberle's 3 goals

Associated Press

SEATTLE — Jordan Eberle scored three goals in a 9:41 span in the second and third periods for the first hat trick in Seattle franchise history as the expansion Kraken beat the Buffalo Sabres 5-2 on Thursday night.

The loss capped a long, emotional day for the Sabres that began with the trade of former captain Jack Eichel to the Vegas Golden Knights and ended with Buffalo's third straight loss on its West Coast swing.

Eberle had his fourth career hat trick to help Seattle snap a two-game losing streak. He scored his first of the night with 1:35 left in the second, struck again at 1:50 of the third and capped the natural hat trick at 8:06.

Morgan Geekie opened the scoring for the Kraken, Jaden Schwartz had two assists and an empty-net goal, and Philipp Grubauer made 19 saves.

Bruins 5, Red Wings 1: Patrice Bergeron scored his first four goals of the season, Brad Marchand had four assists and host Boston beat Detroit.

Marchand assisted on all four of Bergeron's goals, Mike Reilly scored his first of the season and Charlie McAvoy had a pair of assists for Boston. Jeremy Swayman finished with 14 saves for the Bruins.

Panthers 5, Capitals 4 (OT): Eetu Luostarinen scored 1:55 into overtime and host Florida beat Washington for its best 10-game start at 9-0-1.

Luostarinen's centering pass went off a Capitals player and into the net. The Panthers' previous best 10-game start was 7-0-3 in 1996-97.

Islanders 6, Canadiens 2: Brock Nelson scored a career-high four goals to help visiting New York beat Montreal.

Playing the eighth of 13 straight road games to open the season while their new arena is finished, the Islanders scored more than four goals for the first time this season. Montreal allowed five goals or more for the sixth time this season.

Maple Leafs 2, Lightning 1 (OT): William Nylander scored on a power play at 3:43 of overtime to lift host Toronto past Tampa Bay.

John Tavares tied it for Toronto with 41.1 seconds left in regulation and goalie Jack Campbell off for an extra attacker. In overtime, Tavares was slashed on a breakaway by Lightning captain Victor Hedman, and Nylander scored his team-leading fifth goal of the season on a one-timer.

Golden Knights 5, Senators 1: Jonathan Marchessault scored twice and visiting Vegas beat Ottawa to cap a busy day.

In the morning, Vegas acquired injured forward Jack Eichel in a trade with the Buffalo Sabres. Eichel will have artificial disk replacement surgery soon.

Mattias Janmark, Brett Howden and Alex Pietrangolo also scored for Vegas, and Robin Lehner made 38 saves against his former team. Brady Tkachuk scored for Ottawa, and Filip Gustavsson stopped 35 shots.

Penguins 3, Flyers 2 (OT): Kris Letang stuffed a wrap-around past Carter Hart 1:57 into overtime to lift host Pittsburgh over Philadelphia.

Playing in his first game

since Oct. 19 following a bout with COVID-19, Letang helped the Penguins end a three-game losing streak on a night they played without star center Sidney Crosby and head coach Mike Sullivan. Crosby tested positive for COVID-19 on Wednesday and Sullivan joined him just hours before the opening faceoff. Assistant coach Todd Reirden directed the team in Sullivan's absence.

Blues 5, Sharks 3: Brandon Saad scored twice in his second game back from the COVID-19 list and visiting St. Louis used a three-goal second period to beat San Jose.

Saad scored a short-handed goal in the first period and tied it in the second with an even-strength goal as he looked back up to speed after four games following a positive test for COVID-19.

Stars 4, Flames 3 (OT): Jamie Benn scored at 2:59 of overtime in visiting Dallas' victory over Calgary.

Benn took a drop pass from Joe Pavelski and sent a shot just inside the goal post and past goalie Jacob Markstrom.

Taylor leads way as Colts find footing against Jets

Associated Press

INDIANAPOLIS — Jonathan Taylor ran with power, ran with burst, and even caught a few passes. He did it all — making life easier for his Indianapolis Colts teammates against the New York Jets.

And he became a national star Thursday night in the process.

Taylor rushed for 172 yards and two scores, Carson Wentz threw three touchdown passes and the Colts pulled away for a badly needed 45-30 victory.

Taylor, who had a game-sealing 78-yard TD run, also had two catches for 28 yards. Nyheim Hines ran for 74 yards and a score on six carries as he sliced through the Jets' defense for 260 yards on

the ground.

"We had a one-play drive for 75 yards or something like that and that's the best drive you can have," Wentz said. "He and Nyheim, those guys played unbelievable. Those guys up front, they did a tremendous job."

After suffering a stunning overtime loss against Tennessee on Sunday, the Colts spent their short week searching for answers.

Taylor provided most of them.

His shifty, 21-yard TD run broke a 7-7 tie early in the second quarter. And with Jets quarterback Mike White already out with an injured arm, the Colts (4-5) were off to the races in their first prime-time home game since De-

cember 2017.

Taylor's longest run of the night made it 42-10 midway through the third quarter and helped Indy finish with the highest single-game rushing total in the NFL this season.

"It takes the pressure off the passing game when you run like that," coach Frank Reich said. "But you could feel it early, you could feel us really dominating the line early."

Nothing went right for the Jets, who have lost seven consecutive night games.

White left in the first quarter after he said two fingers on his right hand went numb — just four days after he threw for 405 yards and three TDs in his first NFL

start. White said he couldn't grip the ball and watched the final three quarters from the sideline after throwing a 19-yard TD pass to Elijah Moore that made it 7-7.

But after White departed in this one, it was all Colts.

Jets running back Ty Johnson lost a fumble near midfield and Wentz capitalized quickly with a 1-yard shovel pass to Jack Doyle for a 21-7 lead.

The Jets answered with a short field goal late in the first half, but Wentz countered with an 11-yard TD pass to Michael Pittman to make it 28-10. Wentz followed that with a 2-yard scoring pass to offensive lineman Danny Pinter in the third quarter before Taylor struck again.

Thunder storm back to shock Lakers

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored 11 of his 28 points in the fourth quarter and the Oklahoma City Thunder overcame a 19-point deficit to beat the Los Angeles Lakers for the second time this season, 107-104 on Thursday night.

Kenrich Williams scored nine of his 13 points in the final period for the Thunder, who haven't beaten anybody in their eight games this season except the vaunted Lakers — both times while rallying from enormous deficits, and both times with LeBron James sidelined. James sat out the rematch with an abdominal strain.

Anthony Davis had 29 points and 18 rebounds despite spraining his right thumb near halftime for the Lakers, whose three-game winning streak ended with just their second

loss in seven games. Carmelo Anthony had another big game off the bench, scoring 21 points with five three-pointers — including two in the final minute while LA's rally fell short.

Russell Westbrook scored 27 points for the Lakers, but the veteran guard made a comical turnover against his former team with 21 seconds left and a chance to tie the game.

Celtics 95, Heat 78: Jaylen Brown scored 17 points and visiting Boston played airtight defense for a second consecutive night to beat Miami.

Dennis Schroder scored 14 points, Aaron Nesmith had 13 and Romeo Langford added 12 for Boston, which swept a back-to-back in Orlando and Miami by giving up an average of 78.5 points on 33% shooting. The Celtics topped the Magic 92-79 on Wednesday.

Jimmy Butler scored 20

points for Miami, which lost point guard Kyle Lowry to a sprained left ankle in the third quarter as part of an utterly forgettable night. The Heat shot 35%, 9-for-41 from three-point range and managed a total of 55 points in the final three quarters.

Suns 123, Rockets 111: Devin Booker scored 27 points, Landry Shamet added 19 and host Phoenix pulled away late to beat Houston.

Phoenix has won three straight to reach 4-3. Houston has dropped five straight overall and five in a row to the Suns. Booker added nine rebounds and five assists.

Kevin Porter Jr. scored a season-high 20 points for the Rockets.

76ers 109, Pistons 98: Seth Curry scored 23 points, Tyrese Maxey added 20 and short-handed Philadelphia beat host

Detroit.

Joel Embiid had 19 points and nine rebounds for Philadelphia. Playing for the second straight night, the 76ers used only eight players. Furkan Korkmaz (wrist) sat out, while former Pistons forward Tobias Harris remained sidelined due to COVID-19 protocols.

Jeremi Grant scored 27 for Detroit.

Jazz 116, Hawks 98: Jordan Clarkson bounced back from his worst game of the season, scoring 30 points to lead visiting Utah past Atlanta despite star guard Donovan Mitchell sidelined by a sprained right ankle.

Clarkson was coming off a miserable game Tuesday night, going 0-for-11 from three-point range and 1-for-13 overall to finish with just two points in a victory over Sacramento.

Trae Young scored 21 points for the Hawks.

NBA looking into accusations of racism by Suns owner

Associated Press

PHOENIX — The NBA has asked a law firm to investigate the Phoenix Suns after a published report on Thursday detailed allegations that owner Robert Sarver has a history of racist, misogynistic and hostile incidents during his 17-year tenure in charge of the franchise.

ESPN said it talked to dozens of current and former team employees for the story, including some who detailed inappropriate behavior by Sarver. Most of the allegations are from anonymous sources but a few are on the record.

In ESPN's report, Sarver denied or disputed most of the allegations through his legal team. The Suns also strongly denied the report in a lengthy statement released Thursday.

"I would entirely welcome an impartial NBA investigation which may prove our only out-

let for clearing my name and the reputation of an organization of which I'm so very proud," Sarver said.

Sarver will get his wish. The NBA released its own statement from executive vice president of communications Mike Bass saying the allegations were "extremely serious" and that the league has asked the Wachtell Lipton law firm to "commence a comprehensive investigation."

"The NBA and WNBA remain committed to providing a respectful and inclusive workplace for all employees," Bass said. "Once the investigation is completed, its findings will provide the basis for any league action."

Among the allegations: Former Suns coach Earl Watson said Sarver was upset that Golden State forward Draymond Green used the n-word during a game in 2016 and that the owner repeated the n-word

several times when voicing his displeasure. Watson said he told Sarver that he can't use that word.

Watson was the Suns' coach for all or part of three seasons before being fired three games into the 2017-18 season.

Sarver said in his statement that Watson was "clearly not a credible source."

"While there is so much that is inaccurate and misleading in this story that I hardly know where to begin, let me be clear: The n-word is not part of my vocabulary," Sarver said. "I have never called anyone or any group of people the n-word, or referred to anyone or any group of people by that word, either verbally or in writing. I don't use that word."

Watson released his own statement through the Toronto Raptors, where he is now an assistant coach.

"I am not interested in engag-

ing in an ongoing battle of fact," Watson said. "Instead, I want to applaud the courage of the numerous players, executives, and staffers for fighting toxic environments of racial insensitivity, sexual harassment, and micro-aggressions with their truth."

"Basketball and 17 years in the NBA has allowed me the financial privilege to speak my truth, but we can't forget about those who must remain silent for fear of losing their jobs."

The report also details a story about how Sarver passed around a picture of his wife in a Suns bikini to employees. The report says more than a dozen employees also said Sarver had a history of "making lewd comments in all-staff meetings."

Suns guard Devin Booker — who is the team's longest-tenured player at seven years — was the only one on the current roster who played for Watson.