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DOD seeks answers on deaths in Niger

BY JOHN VANDIVER
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Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The U.S. military is searching for answers into the circumstances surrounding the deaths of four U.S. soldiers killed two weeks ago in an ambush in Niger as Defense Secretary Jim Mattis conceded Thursday that little about the attack is known, including how one soldier became separated from the rest of his unit.

"I will just tell you in this specific case, contact was considered unlikely," Mattis said at the Pentagon as he sought to quell speculation that Army Sgt. La David Johnson, who was found dead after a nearly 48-hour search, was left behind by his fellow soldiers.

"The U.S. military does not leave its troops behind," Mattis said, but offered no details about how Johnson was separated from the rest of the joint patrol with Nigerien troops who eventually found his body.

Marine Lt. Gen. Kenneth McKenzie, the director of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters later Thursday at the Pentagon that he would not share new details uncovered about the Oct. 4 attack publicly. He said he did not want to provide enemy forces information that they might find valuable.

But McKenzie did describe the attack as a sudden, chaotic fight "out in the middle of nowhere" that led to confusion on the ground.

Once the fighting ceased, additional resources were brought in to aid search-and-recovery

operations, he said.

"American troops might have been repositioned to operations in the immediate area, but I would tell you that within the battle space, either American or Nigerien or French, and in some cases all three at the same time, were engaged in active searches," he said.

"A lot of men and a lot of women searched very hard to find him. It took us a little while. We didn't leave him behind, and we searched until we found him and we brought him home."

Two weeks ago, the 40-person patrol was on a mission to meet with local leaders to discuss regional stability when they came under attack by militants in southwestern Niger near its border with Mali. The Pentagon has described the attackers as likely a local, self-radicalized group

aligned with Islamic State.

A firefight ensued, resulting in the deaths of Army Staff Sgts. Bryan Black, Jeremiah Johnson and Dustin Wright, who like La David Johnson, were assigned to the 3rd Special Forces Group at Fort Bragg, N.C.

French forces operating in the region launched a rescue operation, which included armed fighters and a medical evacuation unit that carried out the wounded, Mattis said. The U.S. soldiers who were killed were lifted out by contracted aircraft, he said.

Two American soldiers were wounded in the engagement. Their injuries were not considered life-threatening and they are recovering in the U.S., said Dana White, a spokeswoman for the Pentagon.

CIA director says ISIS remains big threat to US

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Islamic State militants are capable of orchestrating and carrying out an attack against the United States, possibly downing an airplane, even after being evicted from their self-declared Syrian capital of Raqqa, the CIA director said Thursday.

Mike Pompeo said the U.S. is threatened by other militant groups as well.

"IS' capability to conduct an external operation remains," Pompeo said. "But I wouldn't put them in a singular bucket. Al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula has for a long time had this mission statement, which includes the taking down of a commercial airliner bound for a western country. Certainly, among those would be the United States."

Speaking a day after President Donald Trump's acting homeland security chief invoked the possibility of another 9/11-style attack, Pompeo said America's enemies around the world "are intent upon using commercial aviation as their vector to present a threat to the West." However, he also worried about a terrorist capability "we just don't see."

The typically blunt threat assessment came during a wide-ranging discussion at a Washington think tank, in which Pompeo also underscored Trump's intent to counteract North Korea. He said Pyongyang is only months away from perfecting its nuclear weapons capabilities.

"They are closer now than they were five years ago, and I expect they will be closer in five

months than they are today, absent a global effort to push back against them," Pompeo said. "From a U.S. policy perspective, we ought to behave as if we are on the cusp of them achieving that objective."

On another nuclear concern, Iran, Pompeo stressed that Trump wants to ensure the U.S. foe has no pathway to developing the bomb. To that effect, he said, the Iran nuclear deal President Barack Obama and America's allies negotiated with Iran was insufficient.

The notion that the agreement would "curtail Iranian adventurism or their terror threat or their malignant behavior has now ... two years on, proven to be fundamentally false," said Pompeo, a former Republican congressman from Kansas who was keenly opposed to the

seven-nation accord when it was reached.

He said the Iran deal put the United States in a better place with respect to inspections of Iranian facilities. But from an intelligence perspective, he said, even more "intrusive inspection" is needed.

"The Iranians have on multiple occasions been capable of presenting a continued threat, through covert efforts to develop their nuclear program along multiple dimensions ... the missile dimension, the weaponization effort, the nuclear component itself," he said.

Trump has provided the CIA with the authority it needs to track Iran's compliance with the deal, he said.

Pompeo also said it's an "open secret" that Iran has links to al-Qaida.

US-backed Syrians claim victory in Raqqa

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Syrian Kurdish-led forces backed by the U.S. declared victory Friday over Islamic State in its former capital of Raqqa, declaring the northern Syrian city free of ISIS after a four-month battle.

At a news conference held inside the city, the Syrian Democratic Forces, as they are known, formally handed over administration of the devastated city to a council made up of local officials and tribal leaders and a 3,000-strong U.S.-trained police force tasked with governance and security.

In a highly symbolic move, the news conference was held inside the city's sports stadium, which ISIS militants had turned into an arms depot and a huge prison where they incarcerated and tortured their opponents.

"Our victory is one against terrorism, and the liberation of Raqqa marks the latest chapter in the fight against terrorists in Syria," said Talal Sillo, a spokesman and senior SDF commander.

Iraqis, Kurds trade fire at border

Associated Press

IRBIL, Iraq — Iraqi federal and Kurdish forces exchanged fire at their shared border on Friday, capping a dramatic week of maneuvers that saw the Kurds hand over territory across northern Iraq.

Iraqi forces shelled Kurdish military positions north and south of Altun Kupri, a town of about 9,000 people just outside the country's autonomous Kurdish region, a day after Brig. Gen. Raad Baddai gave warning he was going to enter the town.

Organized Kurdish forces, known as the peshmerga, as well as irregular forces, responded with rocket fire.

By midday, Iraq's Defense Ministry said anti-terrorism forces, the federal police and the country's Iranian-backed Popular Mobilization Front militias had taken the town.

But the peshmerga's general command disputed that claim, saying Kurdish fighters fought off the advance and destroyed 10 Humvees and an Abrams tank.

Ercuman Turkmen, a PMF commander, said from inside the town his forces were being targeted by sniper fire. Speaking to the AP by phone, he said he had no orders to enter the Kurdish autonomous region.

There were no casualty reports but AP reporters saw ambulances outside the town.

The boundaries of the country's Kurdish region have long been disputed between Baghdad and Irbil, the Kurdish capital, but Kurdish forces this week withdrew in most areas to positions they last held in 2014, effectively restoring the contours of the map to the time before the rise of Islamic State.

They pulled out of nearby Kirkuk after brief clashes and handed over surrounding oil fields nearly without a fight, but they held on to Altun Kupri, making a symbolic last stand in front of the vastly more powerful Iraqi army.

"The Kurdistan Peshmerga Forces have resisted heroically in this confrontation and have recorded a great honor," the peshmerga general command said in a statement released at midday.

Altun Kupri is the last town on the federal side of the border on the road between Kirkuk and Irbil.

Kurdish forces entered Kirkuk in 2014 when Iraq's army melted away ahead of ISIS's blitz across northern and western Iraq.

The city, home to over 1 million Arabs, Kurds and Turkmen, emerged at the heart of the dispute over whether Kurdish authorities should return the territories it acquired during the war on ISIS. They have lost an important stream of oil revenues with the loss of the city, dealing a serious blow to aspirations for independence.

Kurdish leader Masoud Barzani championed a nonbinding vote for Kurdish independence in September.

Baghdad condemned it and instead demanded the return of the disputed territories, precipitating the crisis.

The peshmerga are vastly outmatched by Iraq's federal armed forces and the Iranian-sponsored militias that fight alongside them. Both the Kurds and the federal forces are accustomed to calling and receiving coalition air support as part of their shared war on ISIS.

"There's nothing we can do about it, honestly. I'm urging the coalition forces to come and help us," said peshmerga fighter Ibrahim Mirza. "No doubt we have martyrs."

Afghanistan: Dozens killed in mosque bombing

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — A suicide bomber targeted a Shiite mosque in a western Kabul, Afghanistan, neighborhood during evening prayers on Friday, killing at least 39 people, Afghan officials said. And in western Ghor province, a suicide blast struck a Sunni mosque, also during Friday prayers, killing 10 people.

No group immediately claimed responsibility for the bombings, the latest in what has been a particularly devastating week that saw Taliban attacks kill scores across the country.

In Kabul, Maj. Gen. Alimast Momand at the Interior Ministry said the blast wounded 45 people. The attacker was on foot and walked into the Imam Zaman Mosque, located in the city's Dasht-e-Barchi area,

where he detonated his explosives.

An eyewitness, Ali Mohammad, said the mosque was packed with worshippers, both men and women, at Friday prayers, the height of the Muslim week. The explosion was so strong that it shattered the windows of nearby buildings.

Local residents who rushed to the scene to help the victims were overcome with anger and started chanting, "Death to ISIS" — a reference to Islamic State, which has staged similar attacks on Shiite mosques in recent months.

Abdul Hussain Hussainzada, a Shiite community leader in Kabul, said they are sure that the Afghanistan ISIS affiliate was behind the attack. "Our community is very worried," Hussainzada told The Associated Press.

Dasht-e-Barchi is a sprawling neighborhood in the west of Kabul, where the majority of people are ethnic Hazaras, who are mostly Shiite Muslims, a minority in Afghanistan, which is a Sunni-majority nation.

As attacks targeting Shiites have increased in Kabul, residents of this area have grown increasingly afraid. Most schools have additional armed guards from among the local population.

ISIS in Afghanistan has taken responsibility for most of the attacks targeting Shiites, whom the Sunni extremist group considers to be apostates.

Earlier this year, following an attack claimed by ISIS on the Iraqi embassy in Kabul, the militant group effectively declared war on Afghanistan's Shiites.

Senate OKs budget, to move on to tax reform

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Republicans must now shift their focus to enacting President Donald Trump's sweeping tax plan, a far heavier lift than the \$4 trillion budget plan they've muscled through the Senate to lay the groundwork for the first tax overhaul in three decades.

The GOP on Thursday narrowly backed the budget plan, a prerequisite to major tax legislation. The Senate methodically worked through a pack of amendments, with Republicans rebuffing Democrats' successive attempts to reshape the blueprint and derail the tax cuts in the Senate. The final vote was 51-49, with deficit hawk Sen. Rand Paul, of Kentucky, the lone opposing GOP vote.

Republicans will have a far harder time approving a complex plan to bring steep tax cuts, especially for corporations, and overhaul the nation's tax system, which has sharply divided House Republicans on regional fault lines.

Trump, who made revamping the tax system a campaign pledge, told reporters Thursday that the budget "will be phase one of our massive tax cuts and reform."

In a post-midnight Twitter post, he hailed the vote as "Great news," saying that it is a "first step toward delivering MASSIVE tax cuts for the American people."

Enacting a tax overhaul by year's end is a prime goal of

Trump and the Republicans, who are looking for accomplishments following an embarrassing drought of legislative achievements and the collapse of several "Obamacare" repeal attempts. Republican lawmakers publicly admit that failure on taxes would be politically devastating with control of the House and Senate at stake in next year's midterm elections.

"It would be a complete disaster," Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., said after the final budget vote.

The budget blueprint, using Congress' twisty rules, greases the wheels for the tax package by enabling the Senate Republicans to catapult it through without fear of a filibuster — a delaying tactic meant to kill legislation — by Democrats. But the Republicans are split. A restive rump of House Republicans from high-tax states like New York, New Jersey, Illinois and California staunchly oppose the tax plan's proposed elimination of the federal deduction for state and local taxes. They maintain it would hurt low- to mid-income taxpayers and subject them to being taxed twice.

Their vocal opposition has led Republican leaders in Congress like House Speaker Paul Ryan, of Wisconsin, and Rep. Kevin Brady, R-Texas, who heads the tax-writing Ways and Means Committee, to hear out the fractious GOP members and seek a compromise with them.

Obama tells Dems to reject politics of fear

Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. — Former President Barack Obama called on fellow Democrats to reject politics of "division" and "fear" while rallying on Thursday with the party's candidates for governor in Virginia and New Jersey.

"Why are we deliberately trying to misunderstand each other and be cruel to each other and put each other down? That's not who we are," Obama said at the Virginia rally in front of several thousand supporters.

Stepping back into the political spotlight for the first time since leaving the White House in January, Obama did not mention President Donald Trump in his speeches at Richmond's convention center or at a Newark hotel. But he did tell crowds at both events that they could send a message to the rest of the country in the upcoming elections.

"Our democracy's at stake, and it's at stake right here in Virginia," Obama said.

Virginia and New Jersey are the only two states electing new governors this year, and those Nov. 7 races will be considered a bellwether of Democrats' strength in the face of Trump's victory last year.

New Jersey Democrat Phil Murphy, Obama's former ambassador to Germany, is facing Republican Lt. Gov. Kim

Guadagno. Virginia Lt. Gov. Ralph Northam, a Democrat, is running against Republican Ed Gillespie.

Obama's remarks came on the same day as Former President George W. Bush denounced bigotry in Trump-era American politics.

Obama bemoaned the rise of racial politics.

"Some of the politics we see now, we thought we put that to bed," Obama said. "That's folks looking 50 years back. It's the 21st century, not the 19th century."

The first black president offered himself as proof the country could move forward, telling the crowd in Richmond, the former capital of the Confederacy, that he is a distant relative to Confederate President Jefferson Davis on his mother's side.

Obama praised Northam, a pediatric neurologist, as a candidate who would well represent Virginia, and he accused Gillespie of running a fear-based campaign.

Obama's popularity is still undeniable. In an August NBC News/Wall Street Journal poll, 51 percent of Americans said they have a favorable opinion of Obama, while 35 percent had a negative opinion. In the same poll, 36 percent said they had a positive opinion of Trump and 52 percent had a negative opinion.

Health care legislation gets bipartisan support in Senate

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A bipartisan proposal to calm health insurance markets gained momentum Thursday when enough lawmakers rallied behind it to give it potentially unstoppable Senate support. Its fate was unclear as some Republicans sought changes that could threaten Democratic backing.

Republican Sen. Lamar Alexander, of Tennessee, and Democratic Sen. Patty Murray, of Washington, said their plan had 24 sponsors, divided evenly between both parties, for resuming federal subsidies to insurers. President Donald Trump has

blocked the money, and without it, insurers are already raising premiums and could flee unprofitable markets.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said all 48 Democrats — including two independents who support them — would back the measure in a vote. That meant that combined with the dozen GOP sponsors, there would be 60 votes for the plan, the number needed to overcome a filibuster.

The politically compelling arithmetic raises pressure on Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., to let the Senate consider the legislation. A McConnell spokesman of-

fered no new statement from him.

The growing Senate support also improved the chances that the proposal would become law, perhaps later this year as part of a must-pass measure financing the entire government.

The measure would still have to clear the House, where Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., and many conservatives have been cold to the idea, and win Trump's signature.

Two supporters of the bipartisan plan, GOP Sens. Lindsey Graham, of South Carolina, and Bill Cassidy, of Louisiana, said in a statement that it "will not pass unless concerns of the House are addressed."

Protesters drown out white nationalist

Associated Press

GAINESVILLE, Fla. — Counter demonstrators greatly outnumbered white nationalist Richard Spencer's supporters on Thursday at the University of Florida, their chants drowning out Spencer during his speech.

Outside, hundreds more people protested with signs and anti-Nazi chants alongside hundreds of police officers there to prevent violence.

Anti-Spencer protesters shouted, "Not in our town! Not in our state! We don't want your Nazi hate!" and "Let's go Gators" during his speech, frustrating the head of the National Policy Institute.

Three or four skirmishes occurred during the long afternoon after single Spencer supporters confronted the protesters, trying to speak and to rile the crowds up. One man, wearing a white shirt with swastikas drawn on, was punched and was chased out

of the area. At least three others were surrounded quickly by crowds who shouted them down, chanting, "Whose streets? Our streets!" and pushed them until they left the area or were chased behind police lines.

The Alachua County Sheriff said two people were arrested. Sean Brijmohan, 28, was charged with possession of a firearm on school property. The office said in a tweet that he had brought a gun onto the campus after being hired by a

media organization as security. David Notte, 34, was charged with resisting an officer without violence.

Five people had minor injuries and were treated immediately by fire rescue teams, authorities said.

The school estimated it would spend \$600,000 on security to ensure no repeat of violent clashes connected to a white nationalist gathering in Charlottesville, Va., that left one dead in August.

Witness offers details about rampage shooting in Md.

Associated Press

ABERDEEN, Md. — A witness to the deadly rampage inside a Maryland granite company said the suspect, Radee Prince, had gathered a small group of his co-workers together by saying "come with me, I want to say something to everybody." Without another word, he opened fire.

The witness, a man who worked at the countertop-making company for a year and a half, said that when Prince arrived Wednesday morning, he responded to a polite greeting with harsh language describing Advanced Granite Solutions and its workers. Then he tried to talk individually to a few employees.

"He talked to me first," said the man, who spoke Thursday to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity because he was afraid of retaliation and worried about his family's immigration status. "Then I saw him talk to another friend. Nobody listened to him because his reaction was to start a fight."

The employee said Prince had approached him a month ago and angrily accused him of gossiping. Since then, the man had been even more worried about Prince.

Prince, 37, of Elkton, Md., had a history of violence with co-workers, especially when he believed people were talking behind his back, according to court documents. Authorities have not released a motive, but the witness said Prince's aggressiveness had been escalating recently.

Prince is accused of fatally shooting three colleagues and critically wounding two others. Authorities said he then drove to Wilmington, Del., and shot an acquaintance at a used-car lot. He was captured after a 10-hour manhunt.

Prince faces charges of murder, attempted murder, assault and use of a firearm to commit a felony. At his arraignment Thursday in Delaware, he pleaded not guilty.

According to an affidavit, officers found a .380-caliber semi-automatic they saw Prince throw away while running from

them, and they found the same size shells at the Wilmington shooting scene. Police think it's the same gun he used in the Maryland shooting.

The granite company employee said he worked on a small fabrication team, and that several of his colleagues had complained before Wednesday to supervisors about Prince's behavior.

Just before the shooting, Prince walked out to his SUV and put on a black jacket, the witness said. Then he walked back inside and stood near a machine with an odd look on his face. Prince then called the man's name, and asked him and his colleagues to come toward him.

"I was nervous," the witness said, adding that he believes he was the one Prince was trying to target.

The man said once the group gathered around, Prince shot Enis Mrvoljak, 48, of Dundalk, then Bayarsaikhan Tudev, 53, of Arlington, Va. He also killed Jose Hidalgo Romero, 34, of Aberdeen, authorities said.

Benefit concert held in Vegas for survivors of mass attack

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Some survivors of the Las Vegas mass shooting said they were ready for closure, though they confessed feeling engulfed by anxiety and security fears while gathering in a large group for the first time since the attack.

Theresa Almada, 49, drove Thursday evening from San Diego back to Las Vegas to attend a country music concert benefiting victims of the dead-

ly shooting. Fifty-eight people were killed and hundreds more were wounded Oct. 1 at the Route 91 Harvest Festival on the Las Vegas Strip. Gunman Stephen Paddock opened fire from the 32nd floor of the Mandalay Bay casino-hotel tower, unleashing more than 1,000 bullets into the crowd.

Almada was physically unharmed and was able to run back to her hotel, but she said she feels immense anxiety that

comes in waves. She gathered at the Thursday night benefit concert with fellow survivors wearing matching orange T-shirts and bracelets. Almada said she hopes she'll feel some sense of closure and can begin to heal from the traumatic experience.

Big & Rich had performed at the festival about 90 minutes before Paddock opened fire. The band, whose hits include "Save a Horse (Ride a Cowboy)" and

"Lost in This Moment," had left the festival grounds after their performance the night of the shooting but have taken the tragedy personally.

"Those are our people. That's who we identify with. That's who we make music for, so to see them suffering like that, it's really painful to watch," Rich said.

The tickets for the concert were free and all were taken.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Group takes in alligator that outgrew bathtub

AK WASILLA — It was an odd day earlier this week for one Alaska animal control officer who took a call about an alligator outgrowing its bathtub.

KTUU-TV reported a Wasilla resident called 911 after realizing the more than 4-foot-long alligator named Allie couldn't live in a tub anymore.

Rescue group Valley Aquatics took Allie in. Sheridan Perkins, owner of the rescue group, said Allie is a 3-year-old American alligator.

Perkins said she has thought about re-homing Allie in Florida.

Teens break into house, throw party, get arrested

CO PARKER — Six teenagers who are accused of breaking into a Parker house and throwing a party have been arrested.

KMGH-TV reported that Mike Cox, who owns the house and recently put it up for sale, returned home from dinner on Friday night to find sheriff's deputies and teenagers at his house.

Authorities said dozens of teens got into Cox's house and posted photos and videos of themselves drinking in it on social media.

The teens left a broken window in the basement and broken glass in a shower.

Police: Toddler given gun to chase victim

SC WARRENVILLE — Authorities said they have charged a man with murder after he gave a 3-year-old boy a gun and told him to chase the victim around the yard of a South Carolina home.

Aiken County Sheriff's Sgt. Stephen Shunn said witnesses told deputies that Timothy Johnson, 24, was shot in the chest Tuesday afternoon after the gun fired while the child was carrying it outside a home in Warrentonville.

Shunn said in a statement that Albert Davis, 31, is charged with murder, possession of a stolen handgun and contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

Shunn told The Associated Press that deputies are still investigating why Davis gave the child the gun.

Cops: Man tried to rob market to pay drug fines

PA ALLENTOWN — Police said a Pennsylvania man broke into a market so he could get money to pay his court fines for marijuana possession.

Allentown police arrested Edwin Cuadrado, 20, in the attempted burglary at Heresh's Market early Monday.

Police said Cuadrado was wearing a black coat, a head covering and gloves — despite temperatures in the 60s — when he threw a heavy object at the market's door.

Police said Cuadrado acknowledged smashing a window so he could try to open the store's door, telling investigators he owed money for his previous drug conviction.

Cuadrado remained jailed Tuesday on burglary, criminal trespass and criminal mischief charges.

New memorial honors military dead since 9/11

GA COLUMBUS — A new memorial at the National Infantry Museum remembers all the American servicemembers killed since Sept. 11, 2001.

More than 3,000 people, including uniformed soldiers from neighboring Fort Benning, gathered at the museum in Columbus on Monday to dedicate the Global War on Terrorism memorial.

Retired Gen. John Abizaid helped plan and raise money for the \$2 million memorial. The Ledger-Enquirer reported he told attendees that "courage, commitment and dedication are necessary to secure the common good."

The memorial includes eight granite panels listing nearly 7,000 soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines who have died while serving since 9/11. A beam taken from the north tower of the World Trade Center sits atop concrete columns representing the two towers. There are also statues of nine bronze figures representing an infantry squad.

Charges dropped in eye drop poisoning case

UT SALT LAKE CITY — Prosecutors have dropped a misdemeanor charge against a Utah woman accused of using eye drops to secretly poison her husband.

Court records show Davis County prosecutors explained the dismissal by saying more investigation was needed in the case against Chandra Read, 33.

The case was filed after her husband found a black bag full of empty eye-drop bottles with the tops removed in August, after he'd been sick for months.

Authorities said his symptoms, including blurred vision and a 40-pound weight loss, also were side effects of ingesting the active ingredient in eye drops, Tetrahydrozoline.

Police said they later found 11 empty boxes, 10 empty bottles and 6 unopened boxes of the eye drops in the Clearfield house.

Candidate touts apparent hoax idea

PA PHOENIXVILLE — A Philadelphia-area mayoral candidate said he was serious when he vowed to investigate the use of drug-sniffing bunnies if elected — even though it appears to stem from an internet hoax.

The Philadelphia Inquirer reported Republican nominee Dave Gautreau broached the idea last week at a Phoenixville mayoral forum. The candidate told the newspaper he had been told about the idea at a gathering and thought he had confirmed with someone in Lancaster the rabbits were in use there. Last year, the idea surfaced in an April Fools' post by Amherst, N.Y., police and on a satire page called People of Lancaster.

Gautreau said in a since-removed Facebook post he takes his mayoral run seriously and is looking for "creative ways" to fight the war on drugs.

Corvette crashes into newspaper office

NJ PLEASANTVILLE — A New Jersey newspaper scored an easy scoop.

A Corvette crashed into the newsroom of the Press of Atlantic City newspaper in Pleasantville.

The newspaper reported the car's driver fell asleep Tuesday before driving through an intersection, jumping a curb, traveling about 75 feet and then slamming into the newspaper's office.

No one in the office was hurt. The crash shattered two first-floor windows and knocked over several filing cabinets.

The female driver and a male passenger are being questioned by police.

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Turner, Taylor share NLCS MVP honors

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Justin Turner and Chris Taylor shared MVP honors in the NL Championship Series, repaying a Dodgers organization willing to roll the dice on players whose big league careers were stalled.

In Turner's case, it was then-bench coach Tim Wallach who rediscovered him playing in a Cal State-Fullerton alumni baseball game four years ago, after his career appeared all but over.

In Taylor's case, it was Los Angeles' willingness to gamble that an offseason of grueling workouts would enable the young utilityman to rebuild his swing in a matter of months.

The co-MVPs turned up in the interview room together after the Dodgers eliminated the reigning World Series champion Chicago Cubs 11-1 in Game 5. They were champagne-soaked with hats turned backward, a pair of goggles still perched on Turner's head. Fittingly, they doused each other with praise.

"He's a dynamic player and a table setter," said Turner, who hit .333 for the series, with two home runs and seven RBIs. "When he goes, we usually go as a team."

"I talk to him as much as I can. He's one of the reasons I decided to make the changes I did," said Taylor, who finished at .316 with two homers and three RBIs. Both men also walked five times, as many as the entire Cubs roster.

Before Los Angeles punched its first World Series ticket since 1988, manager Dave Roberts said Taylor had been a "fringy, 4-A player" with his old swing — good enough to play comfortably in Triple-A, but too often overmatched in the major leagues.

With a new look at the plate, the 27-year-old was part of the most valuable duo on the field throughout this series.

"To really try to shoot the moon as far as committing to a swing change, he did that," Roberts said. "And it really paid off."

Turner, meanwhile, had already established himself in three previous playoff appearances as one of the most dangerous hitters in the postseason. Then he served notice in Game 2 that he'd be a similar force against the Cubs.

His walk-off home run in that one was the Dodgers' first in the postseason since Kirk Gibson in 1988, a feat he remembered watching as a 4-year-old at his grandmother's house in Southern California.

"One of my first baseball memories," Turner said.

Los Angeles beats Cubs, advances to World Series

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Enrique Hernandez put a Hollywood ending on an LA story three decades in the making.

Fueled by a home run trilogy from their emotional utilityman, Clayton Kershaw and the Los Angeles Dodgers are finally going to the World Series.

Hernandez homered three times and drove in a record seven runs, Kershaw breezed through six crisp innings and Los Angeles ended the Chicago Cubs' title defense with an 11-1 rout in Game 5 of the NL Championship Series on Thursday night.

"It feels good to hear World Series," Kershaw said. "It's been a long time coming for this team."

After years of playoff heartache, there was just no stopping these Dodgers. With Kershaw firing away at the top of a deep pitching staff and co-NLCS MVPs Justin Turner and Chris Taylor leading a tough lineup, one of baseball's most storied franchises captured its first pennant since Hall of Famer Tommy Lasorda managed Los Angeles to its last championship in 1988.

The Dodgers will host the New York Yankees or Houston Astros in Game 1 of the World Series on Tuesday night. The Yankees have a 3-2 lead in the ALCS heading into Game 6 at Houston on Friday night, so one more New York win would set up another chapter in an old October rivalry between the Yankees and Dodgers.

Los Angeles made the playoffs eight times in the previous 13 seasons and came up short each time, often with Kershaw shouldering much of the blame. The three-time NL Cy Young Award winner took

the loss when his team was eliminated by the Cubs in Game 6 of last year's NLCS at Wrigley Field.

The ace left-hander was just OK in his first two starts in this year's postseason, but Los Angeles' loaded lineup picked him up each time. Backed by Hernandez's powerful show in Chicago, Kershaw turned in an efficient three-hit performance with five strikeouts in his sixth career playoff win — matching Burt Hooton for the franchise record.

When Kenley Jansen retired Willson Contreras on a liner to shortstop for the final out, the party was on. The Dodgers poured out of the dugout and mobbed their dominant closer near the mound, and a small, but vocal group of Los Angeles fans gathered behind the visitors' dugout and chanted "Let's go Dodgers! Let's go Dodgers!"

Kris Bryant homered for Chicago, but the NL Central champions finished with just four hits in another tough night at the plate. Each of their eight runs in the NLCS came via the long ball, and they batted just .156 for the series with 53 strikeouts.

Long playoff runs in each of the last two years and a grueling five-game NL Division Series against Washington seemed to sap Chicago of some energy, and its pitching faltered against sweet-swinging Los Angeles. Jose Quintana was pulled in the third inning of the final game, and the Cubs never recovered.

Hernandez connected on the first two pitches he saw, belting a solo drive in the second for his first career playoff homer and then a grand slam in the third against Hector Rondon. He added a two-run shot in the ninth against Mike Montgomery.

Baker not returning to Nats' bench

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Dusty Baker's time as the manager of the Washington Nationals is over after two seasons, two NL East titles and zero playoff series victories.

The Nationals announced Friday that they would not be bringing Baker back. His two-year deal with the club is expiring.

The contracts for the members of Baker's coaching staff also are finished. The team said it will work with its new manager to fill those positions.

The moves come the week after Washington was eliminated from its NL Division

Series against the Chicago Cubs with a 9-8 loss at home in Game 5. The Nationals also were bounced from the postseason in the NLDS round in 2016 — also with a Game 5 loss at home by one run, that time against the Los Angeles Dodgers.

This outcome, essentially, is what Baker was worried about as far back as spring training in February, when he made clear his desire for a new contract, knowing his was up after 2017.

Despite a host of injuries, the Nationals went 97-65 this season, finishing 20 games out in front in their division.

Carr's late TD leads Raiders past Chiefs

Associated Press

OAKLAND, Calif. — The Oakland Raiders scored two apparent game-winning touchdowns that didn't count. The Kansas City Chiefs forced incompletions on back-to-back plays that ended with 0:00 on the clock only to have the game extended by penalties.

On a wild night that featured many premature celebrations, it was the Raiders who finally ended up on top.

Derek Carr shook off the two overturned touchdown passes to connect for the winner to Michael Crabtree after the game was extended by two defensive holding penalties, and the Raiders snapped a four-game losing streak with a 31-30 victory over the Chiefs on Thursday night.

"There's something about that that is exhilarating," Raiders coach Jack Del Rio said. "We tapped into that. Our guys came in with a great mindset and we were determined to leave here with a victory."

It sure didn't come easy as the Raiders (3-4) had to overcome a nine-point deficit in the fourth quarter against the Chiefs (5-2) and then drive 85 yards in the final 2:25, getting a fourth-and-11 conversion to Jared Cook that set the wild finish.

The Raiders had an apparent go-ahead touchdown pass to Cook with 18 seconds left overturned when replay ruled he was

down at the 1. An offensive pass interference on Crabtree wiped out another touchdown on the next play.

But holding calls on Ron Parker and Eric Murray set the stage for the final play. Carr hit Crabtree in the front corner of the end zone from 2 yards out to tie it at 30.

"If there's one thing about Crab, it doesn't matter what happens throughout the rest of the game, he always shows up," Carr said. "Obviously he did at the end there — twice. Made two big plays for us."

Giorgio Tavecchio won it with the extra point, setting off the final celebration and sending the Chiefs to consecutive losses for the first time in two years.

Here are some other takeaways:

Comeback Carr: Carr completed 6 of 11 passes for 97 yards on the final drive for his league-leading 12th fourth-quarter comeback since the start of the 2015 season. Carr finished the game 29-for-52 for 417 yards and three touchdowns, while throwing no interceptions and taking no sacks.

"No. 4 kept making plays," coach Jack Del Rio said. "This is a special, special win."

Smith's stats: Smith delivered another big performance in his scintillating start to the season. He threw for 342 yards and three touchdowns, including a lucky one on a pass that bounced off safety Keith

McGill's hands and went right to Albert Wilson for a 63-yard score. Smith has already equaled last year's season total with 15 touchdowns and is yet to throw an interception.

Bowman's boost: The Raiders got a big boost from the addition of linebacker NaVorro Bowman, who played 60 snaps and called the defensive signals just three days after joining Oakland following his release from San Francisco. Bowman had a team-high 11 tackles but struggled at times in pass coverage. His biggest play came when he hit his former 49ers teammate Smith hard on a blitz to force a fourth-quarter punt.

"I felt bad when I did it because Alex is my guy," Bowman said. "I've known him for a while. I was excited to play this game and show the coaches I'm committed to this organization."

Beast Mode tossed: The game took an odd turn midway through the second quarter after Kansas City's Marcus Peters hit Carr late, angering the Raiders. Offensive linemen Kelechi Osemele and Donald Penn confronted Peters and Lynch sprinted off the Oakland sideline to join the fray. Lynch, who considers Peters a family member, ended up shoving line judge Julian Mapp and getting ejected. Peters also was called for a personal foul on the play.

No. 25 Memphis rallies to knock off Houston

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Down 17 in the second half on the road, there was no panic in No. 25 Memphis.

The Tigers kept their focus and finished with a victory.

Riley Ferguson threw for 471 yards and had a 21-yard TD pass with 1:28 left, Patrick Taylor rushed for a career-high four touchdowns and Memphis rallied to beat Houston 42-38 on Thursday night.

"Offensively, to go from being shut out in the first half, not playing our best ball, a lot of mistakes, everything that could probably go wrong in the first half did," Memphis coach Mike Norvell said. "But, I came into the locker room and there was something about their eyes. No panic. They came out and absolutely responded."

Ferguson was 33-for-53 and found Sean Dykes to cap an eight-play, 80-yard drive that took 1:49 to give Memphis (6-1, 3-1 American) its only lead.

"We said we had to stay focused," Ferguson said. "We knew we would be able to score as long as we didn't hurt ourselves. We knew we had to regain our focus and stop shooting ourselves in the foot."

Anthony Miller caught 10 passes for 178 yards, and Tony Pollard had nine catches for 91 yards. Memphis finished with 501 yards but only 30 rushing yards.

"It was just ground and pound," Taylor said about his four touchdown runs. "It was taking advantage of every opportunity that they gave me when they gave me the ball."

Houston (4-3, 2-2) was driv-

ing when Kyle Postma fumbled at the Memphis 49, with T.J. Carter recovering with a minute remaining. After Memphis punted, Postma's pass was intercepted by Carter with 24 seconds remaining to end the game.

"It came down to finishing and securing of the ball at the end of the game," Postma said.

Dillon Birden finished with 106 yards and a touchdown on 21 carries, and Duke Catalon rushed for 65 yards and a career-high three touchdowns as Houston built a 17-0 lead at the half and 31-14 advantage with 1½ minutes left in the third quarter.

"We have to play well in crunch time and to do that we have to understand our assignments and the situation and what's on the line," Houston

coach Major Applewhite said.

The Cougars led 38-28 with 6:44 left after Postma found Steven Dunbar for an 8-yard touchdown pass. Taylor cut the lead to three with a 5-yard run with 5:14 left. After Memphis forced a Houston three-and-out, Ferguson capped the comeback.

"We talked today that our term is unwavering focus no matter what happens," Norvell said. "We were in a hostile environment. There were emotional swings, momentum swings. We were trying to stay focused on doing our job because the next play could be make all the difference in the game, and our guys did that."

Postma finished 29 of 40 for 315 yards, and Linell Bonner caught eight passes for 121 yards for Houston. The Cougars had 554 yards.

NHL roundup

Edmonton gets by Blackhawks in OT

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Mark Letestu scored on a power play with 15.8 seconds left in overtime to give the Edmonton Oilers a 2-1 victory over the Chicago Blackhawks on Thursday night.

Letestu beat Anton Forsberg on the short side with a one-time shot from the left circle after taking a pass from Oscar Klefbom. Edmonton's 4-on-3 advantage was set up after Patrick Kane was called for hooking at 3:45.

Edmonton's Cam Talbot made 30 straight saves after giving up a fluke goal to Kane on Chicago's first shot. The Oilers snapped a four-game skid.

Forsberg, Chicago's backup, stopped 40 shots in his second start this season, but the Blackhawks lost their second straight and third in four games. No. 1 goalie Corey Crawford got the night off following a 5-2 loss at St. Louis on Wednesday night.

Lightning 2, Blue Jackets 0: Defenseman Mikhail Sergachev scored his first two NHL goals and Andrei Vasilevskiy made 43 saves for his fifth career shutout in visiting Tampa Bay's victory over Columbus.

Nikita Kucherov assisted on both goals to push his NHL-leading points total to 14. His goals streak was stopped at seven games.

Bruins 6, Canucks 3: Patrice Bergeron had a goal and three assists in his season debut, moving up to seventh on his team's career scoring list in host Boston's victory over Vancouver.

Anders Bjork scored twice, Brad Marchand had a goal and two assists and David Krejci and David Pastrnak each had a goal and an assist.

Islanders 4, Rangers 3 (SO): John Tavares scored in the shootout to give the visiting New York Islanders their eighth win in the last nine games against the crosstown New York

Rangers.

Anders Lee, Brock Nelson and Mathew Barzal scored in regulation, and Jaroslav Halak stopped 38 shots to help the Islanders recover after blowing a two-goal lead in the third.

Blues 4, Avalanche 3: Jaden Schwartz and Vince Dunn scored 52 seconds apart in the second period and visiting St. Louis overcame three crazy plays down the stretch to beat Colorado.

Paul Stastny added a goal and an assist to give him 601 career points.

Devils 5, Senators 4 (OT): John Moore scored 1:20 into overtime and visiting New Jersey used three straight goals to beat Ottawa.

No. 1 draft pick Nico Hischier scored his first two goals for New Jersey. Kyle Palmieri and Marcus Johansson also scored to help the Devils improve to 4-0-0 on the road and 6-1-0 overall.

Predators 1, Flyers 0: Pekka Rinne stopped 28 shots and Colton Sissons scored in the third period to lift visiting Nashville past Philadelphia.

Sissons got his second goal of the season early in the third, giving the Western Conference champions their fourth win in five games.

Hurricanes 2, Flames 1: Jeff Skinner had a goal and an assist to help visiting Carolina beat Calgary.

Skinner opened the scoring in the second and set up Justin Williams' goal 1:09 into the third.

Stars 5, Coyotes 4: Tyler Seguin scored a pair of third-period goals and visiting Dallas sent winless Arizona to its seventh straight defeat to begin the season.

Seguin put in the rebound of Jamie Benn's shot at 8:20 of the third, less than 90 seconds after the Coyotes had pulled even.

NBA roundup

Thunder rout Knicks behind Westbrook's 80th triple-double

Associated Press

OKLAHOMA CITY — Much has changed about the Thunder. One thing hasn't — Russell Westbrook still gets triple-doubles.

The reigning MVP had 21 points, 16 assists and 10 rebounds, and Oklahoma City beat the New York Knicks 105-84 on Thursday night in their first regular-season game with All-Star additions Paul George and Carmelo Anthony. It was Westbrook's 80th career triple-double.

Anthony liked watching Westbrook's dynamic play from a new perspective.

"You guys are used to it," Anthony said. "I'm used to watching it. I'm used to going up against it. Now, to be on the other side of that on the same team as him, and to reap those benefits of what he can bring to the game — I'm excited about what we started out tonight, what we created tonight and where we're headed."

George, who was acquired in an offseason trade with the Indiana Pacers, led the Thunder with 28 points. He said he wasn't used to getting so many open looks, but Westbrook took pressure off of him.

"It's great," George said. "The game comes so easy. I know I'm going to get those easy opportunities like I did tonight. It's only going to make me better."

Anthony, who was traded from the Knicks to the Thunder right before training camp began, had 22 points against his former team.

"That chapter's closed," Anthony said. "No more Knicks talk."

Kristaps Porzingis had 31 points and 12 rebounds for the Knicks. Enes Kanter, who joined the Knicks in the deal that sent Anthony to the Thunder, finished with 10 points and seven rebounds.

Clippers 108, Lakers 92:

At Los Angeles, Blake Griffin scored 29 points, DeAndre Jordan added 14 points and 24 rebounds, and the Clippers spoiled Lonzo Ball's quiet NBA debut for the Lakers.

Lou Williams added 12 points in the Clippers' first game since Chris Paul spurned the perennial playoff team after six years and forced an offseason trade to Houston. The Clippers will have a new look this season, but they were still miles ahead of their Staples Center co-tenants in both teams' season openers.

Ball had three points, four assists and nine rebounds in 29 minutes during the first game for the No. 2 overall pick from UCLA.

Ball is expected to revitalize his hometown team this season, but the rookie started out with all the nerves and mistakes that might be expected from any 19-year-old point guard with the weight of a 16-time NBA champion franchise on his slender shoulders. Along with a handful of good-looking passes and a three-pointer late in the first half, he went 1-for-6 from the field and committed two turnovers.

Brook Lopez scored 20 points in his debut for the Lakers, and Jordan Clarkson added 18.

Raptors 117, Bulls 101: Jonas Valanciunas had 23 points and 15 rebounds, C.J. Miles scored 22 points in his debut with his new team and host Toronto beat short-handed Chicago.

Norman Powell added 15 points, Delon Wright had 13, and Kyle Lowry 12.

The Raptors were 13-for-29 from long range and had 26 assists on 39 baskets. Lowry had nine assists, and DeMar DeRozan and Wright each had five. Miles was 6-for-9 from three-point range and had five rebounds.