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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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USS Ford heads to sea amid controversy

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The USS Gerald R. Ford headed out to sea Friday after completing 15 months of maintenance and upgrades and two days after a congresswoman and the secretary of the Navy sparred over ongoing delays to the service's newest aircraft carrier.

The Navy said Friday that \$13 billion Ford departed from Newport News Shipbuilding in Virginia for further at-sea testing in the Atlantic Ocean.

For years, the Ford has faced setbacks, delays and cost overruns largely related to new its technology. The ship's 11 weapons elevators, which are needed to load ordnance on planes, have been an ongoing problem. The Navy commissioned the ship in July 2017 without any working elevators. The ship's electromagnetic catapult system for launching aircraft has also faced issues.

The Ford's sea trials come amid tensions about the ship between Congress and the Navy.

On Wednesday, Navy Secretary Richard Spencer took issue with criticism from Rep. Elaine Luria, D-Va., who called the ship "a nuclear-powered floating berthing barge" during a House Armed Services Committee subpanel on readiness hearing. Luria raised concerns about the Ford's costs and delays, including the ship's troubled elevators.

"I look at her and other leadership on [Capitol] Hill who continually disparaged the Ford as a program, and I get a little upset," Spencer said during a discussion at the Brookings Institution, a Washington, D.C., think tank. "You could not ask for a better disinformation program for our competitors. And I truly mean that."

Luria responded, saying it is her role to question Navy leadership about the ship.

"I find it disappointing that the secretary finds congressional oversight disparaging," she said in the prepared statement. "I have yet to see a detailed plan to fix the multitude of problems with these new technologies. The Navy accepted the design of these systems and accepted the ship in an incomplete state."

On Friday, Spencer called the Ford's sea trials a great milestone.

"The Navy has diligently tackled issues associated with this first-in-class ship and will continue to do so," Spencer said in a prepared statement. "All are eager to demonstrate Ford's capacity to deliver combat power."

At sea, the ship's crew and engineers will test and validate several of the ship's systems and equipment that had been part of the 15-month repairs. As of Friday, four of the 11 weapons elevators are operational.

The work covered combat systems installations, throttle control improvements, propulsion system repairs and completion of 304 berthing spaces, the Daily Press of Newport News, Va., reported.

Once the sea trials are completed, the Ford will return to Naval Station Norfolk in Virginia and "enter a post-delivery test and trials period to certify fuel systems, conduct aircraft compatibility testing, certify the flight deck, and test the combat systems installed aboard the ship," according to the Navy.

Officials: Trump swayed on Syria by oil talks

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump was persuaded to leave at least several hundred troops behind in Syria only when he was told that his decision to pull them out would risk control of oil fields in the country's east, according to U.S. officials.

Trump had rejected arguments that withdrawing U.S. forces would benefit American adversaries, while endangering civilians and Kurdish allies, but tweeted Thursday that "we will NEVER let a reconstituted ISIS have those fields."

Defense Secretary Mark Esper on Friday confirmed that troops would remain in eastern Syria to prevent the oil fields from being retaken by Islamic

State.

Speaking at NATO headquarters in Brussels, Esper said that military planners were "considering how we might reposition forces in the areas," and that the deployment "would include some mechanized forces" such as tanks or other armored vehicles and support personnel.

A U.S. official with knowledge of operations in Syria said that Trump's interest in the oil provided an opportunity for the Pentagon, unhappy with the initial decision, to temper his insistence on a full withdrawal and allow counterterrorism operations and airspace control to continue.

"This is like feeding a baby its medicine in yogurt or applesauce," said the official, one of several who spoke on the condi-

tion of anonymity about internal U.S. deliberations.

The eastern oil fields in Deir al-Zour province, where most of Syria's relatively small and low-quality reserves are located, were once the primary source of income for the militants, who sold the oil to the Syrian government, Turkey and, reportedly, even to the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).

Massive U.S. and coalition air bombardments, beginning in 2015, drove ISIS underground or away from the area. Since then, the SDF has controlled it, in the presence of about 200 U.S. troops. According to people familiar with the operations, the SDF has continued selling the oil on the black market — largely to the Syrian

government.

Another U.S. official said the latest plan calls for several hundred troops, but "less than a battalion," spread across the region at several locations between the towns of Hasakah and Deir al-Zour. A battalion in most U.S. military units includes 800 to 1,000 troops. The official said these forces would be in addition to those already there, with the result conceivably approaching the 1,000 Trump initially ordered withdrawn.

Esper's announcement in Brussels capped two days of discussions at NATO headquarters that were dominated by anger directed at Turkey, a member of the alliance, for invading Syria.

Protests in Iraq turn deadly for 2nd day

Associated Press

BAGHDAD — At least seven more Iraqi protesters were killed Saturday in clashes with security forces in Baghdad and the southern town of Nasiriyah, as thousands took part in nationwide anti-government protests, officials said.

Thousands of protesters tried to reach Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone, home to embassies and government offices. Security forces fired tear gas as protesters tried to remove blast walls from a main bridge leading to the government district. By nightfall, the security forces had chased the protesters back to Tahrir Square, a central roundabout.

Four people were killed when they were struck by tear gas canisters, security and medical officials said.

A second medical official said three protesters were shot dead by security guards when they attacked the office of a provincial official in the southern town of Nasiriyah. The town in the mainly Shiite south has seen especially violent protests in recent weeks and was placed under a 24-hour curfew on Friday along with the southern city of Basra.

At least 48 people have been killed since the protests resumed this week, after 149 were killed in a wave of demonstrations

earlier this month. The spontaneous, leaderless protests are directed at the political establishment that came to power after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion, which many blame for spiraling corruption and poor public services.

The Interior Ministry and the military issued statements Saturday saying some protesters have exploited the rallies to attack government buildings and political party offices. The protests against the Shiite-dominated government have been largely concentrated in Shiite-majority areas.

The ministry said some of its members were killed as police battled violent protesters but did not give a number. The military warned that it would take necessary and legal measures to deal with those it called saboteurs.

Iraqi officials said 12 of those killed Friday died in a fire they had set when they stormed the office of a government-backed militia in the southern town of Diwaniyah. A security official said protesters torched the offices of at least three militias in southern Maysan province.

All officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to reporters.

In Baghdad, Iraqi police had fired tear gas, rubber bullets and live shots on Fri-

day to break up protesters who gathered in the central Tahrir Square and later tried to cross the bridge leading to the Green Zone. The protesters returned in Saturday, clashing with security forces throughout the day.

The rallies have mainly been by young, unemployed men who are demanding jobs and better services. Young women appeared among the crowd in Baghdad for the first time Saturday, some handing out water to the protesters.

A widow who identified herself as Um Layth, or the mother of Layth, said she had asked her son and daughter to stay home because she feared for their safety. But the 60-year-old from outside of Baghdad said she came to protest, wanting a better future for her children. Her husband died in Iraq's eight-year war with Iran in the 1980s.

"I am not afraid if I die, but I want a better future for my children," she said. "If these parties and this government stay, they will have no future."

Iran emerged as a major power broker in Iraq after the 2003 invasion and has close ties to many of its most powerful political parties.

"Iraq is free. Iran out, out!" some protesters chanted in Tahrir Square.

US, other nations meet to discuss Afghan peace

Associated Press

ISLAMABAD — Representatives of Russia, China, the United States and Pakistan have agreed that negotiation is the only road to peace in Afghanistan, including an early resumption of direct U.S. talks with the Taliban.

The day-long talks in Moscow on Friday came ahead of an intra-Afghan dialogue to be hosted by China. The Beijing talks, which initially were to be held next week, have been postponed, according to officials familiar with the talks. Speaking on condition they not be identified because of they were not authorized to talk about the subject, they said the postponement would be brief but no new date was given.

When the China talks take

place, they will be the first face-to-face discussions between Afghan warring sides since July. Even President Ashraf Ghani, who has objected to any talks not led by his government, said late Friday that he would send representatives.

There has been no official announcement of a postponement, but previous intra-Afghan talks have been delayed while both sides squabbled over participants.

Earlier on Friday, a government official, who also spoke on condition of anonymity for the same reason, had said Ghani was opposed to participation in the talks.

It wasn't clear what changed Ghani's mind or whether he had requested a postponement, but a number of prominent Afghans from Kabul are expected

to attend the China meeting, including former President Hamid Karzai, who has been a strong proponent of direct talks with the Taliban. He participated in earlier sessions of talks with the Taliban held in Moscow.

The Taliban delegation to China will be led by Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, co-founder of the movement, who spent eight years in a Pakistani jail after he secretly opened peace talks in 2010 with Karzai, who was president at the time. Baradar was arrested in a joint American CIA and Pakistani anti-terrorism agency operation. Neither Pakistan nor the United States were ready for peace talks with the Taliban in 2010, Karzai previously told The Associated Press.

The Taliban are the stron-

gest they have been since being ousted in 2001 by a U.S.-led coalition holding sway in nearly 50% of the country.

In a draft statement released at the end of Friday's meeting in Moscow, China, Russia and Pakistan called on Washington to return to the negotiation table with the Taliban and sign an agreement that will set the stage for Afghans on both sides of the protracted conflict to start face-to-face negotiations on what a post-war Afghanistan would look like.

After nearly a year of direct talks, U.S. envoy Zalmay Khalilzad had all but signed a peace deal with the Taliban until President Donald Trump in September declared the talks dead after a series of Taliban attacks killed several people, including a U.S. soldier.

DOD awards \$10B contract to Microsoft

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon awarded its controversial \$10 billion cloud computing business to Microsoft on Friday evening, spurning a bid from Amazon, which had been expected to win the contract. President Donald Trump had expressed opposition to giving the lucrative award to a company led by Jeff Bezos, a regular target of his ire.

The announcement comes after an intense lobbying effort and a lawsuit filed by some of America's biggest tech companies, who accused the military of favoring Amazon in a process that has dragged on for more than a year. During that time, Trump and other administration officials made it clear that they did not want the contract

to go to Amazon. Federal acquisition laws forbid politicians, including the president, from influencing contract awards.

Amazon Web Services, or AWS, pioneered the lucrative cloud computing business more than a decade ago and currently holds a leading 48% market share, according to market-research firm Gartner. Microsoft is the second largest with a 15.5% share.

The cloud computing contract, known as JEDI, is not only the military's largest information technology contract award in history but also is expected to lead to other business across the federal government. Amazon was openly described by competitors and industry analysts as a clear front-runner due to its years of experience

handling classified data for the CIA. The military also gave the company its highest data management certification. Microsoft's designation was one step below Amazon's.

Few thought Microsoft would beat out Amazon for the massive contract, and legal analysts said the president's role in the procurement will almost certainly become the subject of litigation.

"It's crystal clear here that the President of the United States did not want this contract to be awarded to one of the competitors," said Franklin Turner, an attorney with the law firm McCarter & English. "As a result it's fairly likely that we will see a number of challenges that the procurement was not conducted on a level playing field."

House Dems get victory in ruling on investigation

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A judge has ordered the Justice Department to give the House secret grand jury testimony from special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia investigation, handing a victory to Democrats as they gather evidence for the impeachment inquiry against President Donald Trump.

In a Friday ruling that also affirmed the legality of the impeachment inquiry itself, U.S. District Judge Beryl Howell ordered the department to turn over the materials by Oct. 30. A Justice Department spokeswoman said it was reviewing the decision. The administration can appeal.

The ruling in favor of the House Judiciary Committee comes as Democrats

gather closed-door testimony from current and former government officials about the Trump administration's efforts to get Ukraine to investigate political rival, Joe Biden. The Mueller materials could reveal previously hidden details to lawmakers about Trump's actions during the 2016 election and become part of the impeachment push.

The material covered by Howell's order consists of redacted grand jury testimony mentioned in Mueller's report. The Justice Department says that information is the only piece of the document that key lawmakers have not had access to.

Democrats believe the still-redacted information could shed new light on key

episodes of the investigation, including discussions Trump is reported to have had with associates about the release of stolen emails during the campaign and conversations about a 2016 Trump Tower meeting at which Trump's eldest son expected to receive damaging information about Hillary Clinton. The judge said the materials could help lawmakers as they decide which witnesses to call for an impeachment inquiry and what additional lines of investigation should be pursued.

In a 75-page ruling accompanying the order, Howell slashed through many of the administration's arguments for withholding materials from Congress, including the need for continued secrecy.

US budget deficit hits \$984 billion, highest in 7 years

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The federal deficit for the 2019 budget year surged to \$984.4 billion, its highest point in seven years, and is widely expected to top the \$1 trillion mark in coming years.

The 26% surge from the 2018 deficit of \$779 billion that the government reported Friday reflected such factors as revenue lost from the 2017 Trump tax cut and a budget deal that added billions in spending for military and domestic programs.

Forecasts by the Trump administration and the Congressional Budget Office project that the deficit will top \$1 trillion in the current budget year. And the CBO

estimates that the deficit will stay above \$1 trillion over the next decade.

Those projections stand in contrast to President Donald Trump's campaign promises that even with revenue lost initially from his tax cuts, he would be able to eliminate the federal budget deficit with cuts in spending and increased growth generated by the tax cuts.

The budget showed that revenue rose 4% in the 2019 budget year, which ended Sept. 30, but that spending surged at twice that rate. Spending increased for defense programs and for the government's big benefit programs for the elderly, Social Security and Medicare.

Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin

asserted that Trump's economic program was nevertheless working, with unemployment at its lowest point in nearly 50 years. Mnuchin argued that to put the budget on a sustainable path, Congress must enact proposals "to cut wasteful and irresponsible spending."

So far, though, neither party has shown much interest in reducing the soaring deficits. Trump and Republicans seem content with the \$1.5 trillion tax cut measure that Congress passed during Trump's first year in office. And Democrats who are running to oppose him in next year's election have proposed their own expensive spending plans, including Medicare for All.

Calif. faces more fire danger, blackouts

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — Millions of Californians prepared Saturday to live in the dark again as the state's largest utility warned it might cut power for the third time in as many weeks because of looming strong winds and high fire danger.

Pacific Gas & Electric was to decide Saturday whether to black out 850,000 homes and businesses in 36 counties for 48 hours or longer throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, wine country and Sierra foothills.

The two previous shutdowns were done amid concern that gusty winds could disrupt or knock down power lines and spark devastating wildfires.

Weather forecasts called for record strong winds to lash much of the region over the weekend, with some gusts hitting 85 mph. It might be a record wind event, the National Weather Service warned.

A blaze Thursday destroyed at least six homes in the Santa Clarita area near Los Angeles and led to evacuation orders for up to 50,000 residents, although some were allowed back home Friday night after Santa Ana winds began to ease.

To the north, firefighters raced to make progress against a blaze near Geyserville in Sonoma County before ferocious "diablo winds" returned. The fire had burned 49 buildings, including 21 homes, and swept through 37 square miles of the

wine-growing region.

Several thousand people living in small communities in neighboring Lake County were warned to be ready to evacuate if an order is given. The area was the scene of a 2015 wildfire that killed four people and burned nearly 2,000 homes and other buildings.

High winds this weekend could ground water-dropping aircraft, disperse fire retardant and drive hot embers far ahead of the flames to set new blazes, Cal Fire Division Chief Jonathan Cox said.

"You can't fight a fire that's spotting ahead of itself a quarter of a mile, half a mile, in some cases a mile ahead of itself," he said.

No cause has been deter-

mined for any of the current fires, but PG&E said a 230,000-volt transmission line near Geyserville had malfunctioned minutes before that fire erupted Wednesday night.

The utility acknowledged that the discovery of the tower malfunction had prompted a change in its strategy.

"We have revisited and adjusted some of our standards and protocols in determining when we will de-energize high-voltage transmission lines," Andrew Vesey, CEO of Pacific Gas & Electric Co., said at a briefing Friday.

The weekend forecasts detail what could be the strongest winds of the year coupled with bone-dry humidity.

Sanders, Biden confront concerns over their age

Associated Press

MARSHALLTOWN, Iowa — Bernie Sanders insists he feels better than ever less than a month after heart surgery, but his return to the campaign trail last week sparked new questions about the unusually old age of the Democratic Party's leading 2020 presidential candidates.

Both Sanders, 78, and Joe Biden, 76, suggest their age isn't a major issue, but voters, particularly older voters, aren't so sure.

Gordon Lundberg, 71, a retired Lutheran pastor from Ames, said candidates' health is a key issue for him because he understands how it feels to age. He's leaning toward Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts because, even though she's 70, "she's the most liberal and she's not got one foot in the grave yet."

"Bernie's just too darn old. And so is Biden," Lundberg said. "They look old, they sound old, they are old. They fall in the shower, and they get heart

attacks!"

Lundberg is not alone.

Polling has suggested that a significant number of Americans believe a candidate in his or her late 70s is too old to be president. If elected, Sanders would take office having already exceeded the average U.S. life expectancy of 78.6 years, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics. Biden would be just a few months away.

Warren would be the oldest new president in history, eclipsing Trump, who himself eclipsed Ronald Reagan. Biden and Sanders would be older on their first day in office than Reagan, a two-term president, was on his last.

While Biden, the former vice president, has often laughed off questions about his age, the issue is one that Sanders has been forced to confront more directly as he returned to Iowa last week.

Official: No short list of vaping illness suspects

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Health officials acknowledged Friday they are still looking at a wide range of products and chemicals that could be causing the U.S. vaping illness outbreak.

A large majority of the more than 1,600 people who have been sickened said they vaped products containing THC, the high-inducing ingredient in marijuana, but it's likely something else — or perhaps several things — are to blame, officials say.

"We don't have a short list" of suspect substances, Mitch Zeller of the U.S. Food and Drug Administration told reporters Friday. And there may be more than one cause of the illnesses, he said.

The outbreak appears to have started in March. Illnesses have been reported in every state except Alaska, many of them teens and young adults. At least 34 have died.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has been defining cases through a diagnosis of exclusion: People who

vaped and developed severe breathing problems are counted when viruses and other potential causes are ruled out.

At times, it's been unclear if doctors were seeing a single condition. Some reports suggested patients had "lipoid pneumonia," with their lungs clogged and inflamed by fatty oils. Others have pointed to the kind of chemical burns that might come from poisonous gases.

But microscopic images may be pointing to another understanding of how vaping can disrupt the lungs' delicate balance.

A study published this week focused on certain white blood cells that were collected in the damaged lungs of eight THC-vaping patients.

Researchers concluded the cells did not appear to have sucked up fatty oils inhaled from outside the body, but rather the debris from cells that died after some chemical exposure. The patients, they believe, were suffering different manifestations of the same thing.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Convicted bank thief robs bank next door

MD ANNAPOLIS — Police in Maryland were looking for a man accused of robbing a bank that's next door to the Annapolis bank he was convicted of robbing in 2007.

Annapolis police said in a news release that local and federal authorities were looking for Fletcher Dorsett, 51. Sgt. Amy Miguez said Dorsett is a suspect in a robbery at a Wells Fargo Bank on Oct. 16, where a man got away with money after handing an employee a note.

Newsoutletsreported Dorsett was released from federal prison last month after serving a sentence for robbing a Bank of America in 2007 that's next door to the Wells Fargo Bank.

Powered parachute crash injures pilot

FL JACKSONVILLE — Officials said a pilot flying a powered parachute was injured in a crash at a Florida business park.

The Florida Times-Union reported that the propeller-driven parachute hit a pine tree in Jacksonville.

Jacksonville Fire and Rescue Department spokesman Tom Francis said the pilot fell about 30 feet after hitting the tree. Some construction workers pulled the pilot from the dangling seat.

Hunter dies after deer he'd shot attacks him

AR YELLVILLE — Officials in Arkansas said a hunter died after he was attacked by a deer that he'd shot and believed to be dead.

Arkansas Game and Fish Commission spokesman Keith

Stephens said Thomas Alexander, 66, shot a buck with a muzzleloader while hunting near Yellville.

Stephens told Springfield, Mo., television station KY3 the buck attacked Alexander when the hunter approached the animal to see if it was dead. He said Alexander, who suffered multiple puncture wounds, later died at a hospital.

Woman burned after car hits pump, starts fire

AZ CHANDLER — Authorities said a 21-year-old man was arrested after his car hit a gas pump at a Chandler convenience store, causing an explosion and fire that injured a woman.

Police said the man apparently realized he had parked at the wrong pump, got into his car and sped around the pumps, striking a gas pump and starting the fire that burned a woman filling up her car.

Jail records said Clemente Torres was booked on suspicion of aggravated assault, endangerment and other crimes.

Town to make largest chicken topiary

GA FITZGERALD — Why did the tourists cross the road? One south Georgia town hopes it will be to see a giant bushy chicken statue.

Fitzgerald Mayor Jim Puckett told local news outlets that the town is building the world's largest chicken topiary, a 62-foot steel-framed chicken with plants growing on it.

Wild Burmese chickens have long roamed Fitzgerald. Puckett aims to leverage that reputation to draw tourists.

The city is spending \$150,000 on the topiary, designed to top the 56-foot tall steel "Big Chicken" at a Kentucky Fried Chicken in Marietta.

State trooper charged with exposing himself

MA WRENTHAM — A Massachusetts State Police trooper faces charges for allegedly drunkenly exposing himself and punching a man in the face during a concert last summer.

Police said Andrew Patterson, 32, masturbated in front of a woman and punched her boyfriend during a Luke Bryan show in June.

Patterson was charged with lewd, wanton and lascivious conduct.

Man shot 15 times walks into hospital

PA PHILADELPHIA — Philadelphia police said a man who was shot 15 times walked into a hospital emergency room and is expected to survive.

The shooting unfolded in the city's Kensington section.

Police found 23 spent shell casings on the scene, but no victim. That's when word came about a gunshot victim at a hospital.

Police Chief Inspector Scott Small said the 27-year-old was in critical condition, but was expected to survive.

Mystery object that hit home remains unknown

KY BURGIN — The Federal Aviation Administration said a mysterious object that seemingly dropped from the sky and damaged a Kentucky man's mobile didn't come from an airplane.

Tommy Woosley said a heavy, nearly footlong canister-type object hit his home in Burgin, about 75 miles southeast of Louisville, two weeks ago.

But the FAA and Norfolk

Southern Railway said their transportation units have nothing to do with the object that lodged into the siding of his home.

The National Guard and nearby Fort Campbell military base have also shrugged responsibility.

The object has been turned over to the Mercer County Sheriff's Office for further investigation.

Officer stops man from setting himself on fire

NY NEW YORK — Authorities are hailing a police officer who prevented an emotionally disturbed man from lighting himself on fire after he poured what was believed to be gasoline on himself near the World Trade Center.

Policecredited Officer Ramon Hernandez's "quick reaction & training" after the 48-year-old "suicidal man" was taken into custody near West and Vesey streets in Manhattan.

The man was later hospitalized.

Bear moved after eating out of school's trash

FL OCALA — Florida wildlife officials said they've captured and relocated a black bear that had been eating out of a trash bin at an elementary school.

The Ocala Star-Banner reported that Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission trapped the bear and moved it to the Ocala National Forest.

Officials said the bear had been visiting Ocala Springs Elementary School at night for weeks and eating chicken feed used by the school's agriculture club.

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Pitchers power Astros to Game 3 win

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Josh James sailed a change-up high and tight to Ryan Zimmerman, going to a full count with two on and the Houston Astros clinging to a two-run lead in the fifth inning.

Catcher Robinson Chirinos called for another change. James shook him off.

Chirinos put down the same signal.

"It was one of those situations where I trusted him," James said. "He knew what to call and I just threw it." James' second change-up spun off the inside corner and would have been ball four, but Zimmerman swung over it. The Nationals wasted an opportunity yet again as the Astros won 4-1 Friday night and clawed back to 2-1 in the World Series after losing the first two games at

home.

Astros pitchers baffled batters when it mattered most, shutting down an October offense of uncanny timeliness.

Washington had a .314 average with runners in scoring position in its first 12 postseason games, 68 points higher than any of the other nine postseason teams. The Nationals threatened in each of the first six innings Friday but went 0-for-10 with runners in scoring position and stranded 12. On a night of pitching dangerously, Zack Greinke and the Astros' bullpen kept escaping.

"A lot more runs could have been scored there," Zimmerman said. "Had a chance a couple times but, yeah, that's baseball."

Houston pitchers had just one 1-2-3 inning, by Will Harris in the seventh, just the fourth

time the Astros retired the side in order in the Series.

Unsustainable in the long run, but on this night good enough.

Chirinos, who also homered in the sixth inning Friday, spent six hours watching video before Game 1 at Minute Maid Park, examining Nationals' plate appearances all the way back to 2017.

"How they're taking spins, how they're swinging at fastballs, where they're putting better swings," he said. "We're in the World Series. You have to put the time, the effort in this situation."

James relieved Greinke after Asdrubal Cabrera's two-out double put runners on second and third. James' 0-2 pitch sent Zimmerman sprawling, a fastball near the batter's head.

"I think it scared me more

than anything, but that's part of the game," said Zimmerman, who was slow to get up.

Zimmerman took two balls, fouled off two, and took the first change-up. Then came the key moment.

"I know Zimmerman chases the change-up," Chirinos said. "JJ wanted to throw the slider. I didn't think it was the right pitch in that situation. Something I saw."

James wasn't hard to persuade.

"I knew if I got it relatively in the zone, around the zone, I could get him to swing, hopefully some soft contact or get him to swing and miss," he explained.

James, who got the win, combined with Brad Peacock, Harris, Joe Smith and Roberto Osuna to shut down the Nats the rest of the way.

Game 3 no celebration for Nationals star Soto

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Juan Soto found that playing in the World Series on his birthday was no piece of cake.

The Washington star outfielder turned 21 on Friday, and the party took place at Nationals Park with about 40,000 of his closest friends in attendance for Game 3 against the Houston Astros.

Over the first two games, Soto went 4-for-7 with two doubles, a home run and three RBIs.

"He's been really good," manager Dave Martinez said. "I just hope he hits at the age of 21."

Alas, the Birthday Boy had a rough night at the plate and in the field, and the Astros held a celebration of their own with a 4-1 victory to cut Washington's lead to 2-1.

"It doesn't matter. There's another day, another baseball game," Soto said. "It's just business. I'm still happy it's my birthday, and tomorrow's another day. We'll come in, play baseball and try to enjoy."

Before the game, former sluggers Alex Rodriguez and David Ortiz presented Soto with a cake near home plate prior to batting practice.

Then, Soto was serenaded with "Happy Birthday" by fans in left field while warming up for the second inning. He tipped his

cap in return.

Those were the highlights. If he's lucky, that's what Soto will remember about his milestone birthday. What he would like to forget is going 0-for-4 with three strikeouts and an error in left field.

His teammates were not much better. The Nationals stranded 12 and went 0 for 10 with runners in scoring position.

"We just missed when we needed it," Soto said.

Playing in front of a packed crowd at the first World Series game in Washington since 1933, Soto and the Nationals put on a disappointing performance that gradually quieted the crowd and got the fans to pocket their red rally towels.

In the first inning, Soto hit an infield grounder with two outs and a runner on second. He walked in the third, struck out with a man on in the fifth and struck out again in the seventh.

Worst of all, he made the final out, keeping the bat on his shoulder while looking at a third strike from Roberto Osuna.

He was also uncharacteristically ineffective on defense. Soto sailed a throw from left field over the catcher trying to get a runner at the plate in the second, and was charged with an error in the third when he fumbled a ball into the corner, allowing Jose Altuve to reach third base on a double.

Soto became the first player to make an error on his birthday in the World Series since Atlanta shortstop Rafael Belliard in 1995.

Only one player has homered on his birthday in the Series: Willie Aikens for Kansas City in 1980.

Before the game, someone mentioned that Soto — now 21 — would be able to toast himself with champagne. He said yes, he could.

There was nothing much to celebrate on Friday night. But there's still a chance Soto can drink and spray plenty of bubbly at the end of the Series, which now is assured of going at least five games.

No matter how it turns out, it's been one heck of a year. After batting .282 with 34 homers and 110 RBIs in the regular season, Soto helped the Nationals win the NL wild-card game with a clutch single against Milwaukee.

He hit a key home run off Clayton Kershaw in the deciding Game 5 of the NL Championship Series victory over the Los Angeles Dodgers and was instrumental in helping the Nationals win the first two games against Houston.

Soto said his talk with Big Papi and A-Rod was productive, hearing advice from players who had already been in these big-game situations.

NBA roundup

Murray carries Nuggets in overtime

Associated Press

DENVER — Jamal Murray scored seven of his 27 points in overtime and the Denver Nuggets beat Phoenix 108-107 Friday night after the Suns' Ricky Rubio tied it in regulation.

Rubio dribbled up the court and launched a three-pointer as Malik Beasley grabbed his arm with 1.8 seconds remaining. The Phoenix newcomer made all three free throws.

Murray hit two free throws with 19.4 seconds remaining in OT to give the Nuggets the lead. Devin Booker took a last-second shot for Phoenix, but it was blocked by Torrey Craig.

Nikola Jokic finished with 23 points, 14 rebounds and 12 assists. In overtime, Murray took over. His winning free throws came soon after Gary Harris swatted the ball away from Frank Kaminsky down low.

Celtics 112, Raptors 106: Jaylen Brown had 25 points, hitting a key three-

pointer in the closing minutes, to help host Boston hold off Toronto.

Jayson Tatum had 25 points and nine rebounds for the Celtics and Kemba Walker scored 11 of his 22 points in the fourth quarter.

Pascal Siakam had 33 points to lead the defending champion Raptors.

Timberwolves 121, Hornets 99: Karl-Anthony Towns had 37 points, 15 rebounds and eight assists in Minnesota's victory at Charlotte. Towns was 13-for-18 from the field, hitting four three-pointers.

Mavericks 123, Pelicans 116: Luka Doncic highlighted his triple-double by scoring eight of his 25 points in the final five minutes in Dallas' victory at New Orleans. Doncic also had 10 rebounds and 10 assists.

Nets 113, Knicks 109: Kyrie Irving scored 26 points and made a go-ahead three-pointer with 22 seconds left and host Brooklyn held off New York. Irving, who scored 50 points in an overtime loss

to Minnesota in his Nets debut, scored five consecutive points down the stretch after the Knicks took a three-point lead. Spencer Dinwiddie added 20 points.

Wizards 97, Thunder 85: Thomas Bryant had 21 points and 11 rebounds to help Washington win at Oklahoma City. Rookie forward Rui Hachimura scored 19 points and Bradley Beal added 17. Shai Gilgeous-Alexander scored a career-high 28 points for the Thunder.

Bulls 110, Grizzlies 102: Zach LaVine scored 37 points and rookie Coby White had 21 of his 25 points in the second half in Chicago's comeback victory at Memphis.

Trail Blazers 122, Kings 112: Damian Lillard scored 13 of his 35 points in the fourth quarter and Portland pulled away to win at Sacramento.

Lakers 95, Jazz 86: Anthony Davis had 21 points and seven rebounds during his home debut, and LeBron James had 32 points, 10 assists and seven rebounds in host Los Angeles' victory over Utah.

NHL roundup

Avs rip Knights in Bellemare's Vegas return

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Pierre-Edouard Bellemare was a little lost as a visitor to T-Mobile Arena.

While the rest of his Colorado Avalanche teammates knew their way around the visitors' locker room, Bellemare was a newcomer, even after spending the past two seasons with Vegas.

Everything looked familiar once Bellemare got onto the ice.

Nadem Kadri and Matt Calvert each scored twice, Bellemare had a goal and two assists against his former team and the Avalanche beat the Golden Knights 6-1 on Friday.

Cale Makar also scored for Colorado, which improved to 8-1-1.

In a matinee on the Las Vegas Strip on the observance of Nevada Day, it was the Avalanche's day in Bellemare's first game against his former team since signing with Colorado in the summer.

The Avalanche, who have scored at least one goal in 23 of their 30 regulation periods, dominated Vegas from the drop, sparked by Bellemare's goal 28 seconds

into the game.

The Golden Knights' former fourth-line center intercepted Mark Stone's cross-ice pass, skated around Deryk Engelland and sent a shot past Marc-Andre Fleury to give the Avalanche a 1-0 lead.

Capitals 6, Canucks 5 (SO): Nicklas Backstrom scored the shootout winner and Washington rallied from a four-goal deficit to win at Vancouver.

The Canucks led by four goals late in the second period, but couldn't withstand a late comeback by the Capitals.

Evgeny Kuznetsov and Michal Kempny each had two goals for the Capitals. Lars Eller had a goal and an assist.

Sabres 2, Red Wings 0: Linus Ullmark made 41 saves, Sam Reinhart scored his fifth goal and red-hot Buffalo won at Detroit.

Reinhart also assisted on Jake McCabe's first goal of the season, and the Sabres (9-2-1) won for the seventh time in nine games. Jack Eichel had two assists.

Maple Leafs 4, Sharks 1: Morgan Rielly broke a tie with 5:29 left and host Toronto beat San Jose, spoiling Patrick Marleau's

return to Scotiabank Arena.

The 40-year-old Marleau spent the last two seasons with the Maple Leafs.

Ilya Mikheyev had a goal and an assist, Jake Muzzin and Auston Matthews added goals, and Frederik Andersen made 16 saves for Toronto.

Islanders 4, Senators 2: Nick Leddy scored his second goal of the first period on a penalty shot and New York won at Ottawa for its sixth straight victory.

Matt Martin and Derick Brassard also scored and Thomas Greiss made 30 saves to help the Islanders improve to 6-3-0 and drop the Senators to 2-6-1. Tyler Ennis scored twice for Ottawa.

Coyotes 5, Devils 3: Barrett Hayton scored his first NHL goal early in the third period, Antti Raanta made 32 saves and Arizona overcame two deficits to beat Jack Hughes and win at New Jersey.

Nick Schmaltz, Michael Grabner, Oliver Ekman-Larsson and Clayton Keller also scored to help the Coyotes win for the fifth time in six games. Hughes, the No. 1 pick in this year's draft, scored once and set up goals by Sami Vatanen and Pavel Zacha.

Freshman QB Slovis, USC top Colorado

Associated Press

BOULDER, Colo. — USC's fabulous freshman kept the Trojans unbeaten against Colorado.

Freshman Kedon Slovis threw for 406 yards and four TD passes, including scores of 44 and 37 yards to Michael Pittman Jr. in the fourth quarter, and Southern California escaped Folsom Field with a 35-31 win Friday night over the hard-luck Buffaloes, who fell to 0-14 against the Trojans.

The difference-maker was the 37-yarder with 2:15 left that gave USC its first lead since early in the second quarter.

"Honestly the line just held up and Kedon threw me a great ball in stride and I just kind of ran around the defense," said Pittman, whose 44-yard TD cut Colorado's lead to 31-28 with about 11 minutes left.

Also coming up huge for the Trojans

were fellow freshmen Amon-Ra St. Brown (37-yard TD run), Kenan Christon (85 rushing yards, TD reception), Drake London (seven catches for 85 yards).

Christon and London also recovered fumbles by Slovis that kept alive two touchdown drives.

"That was a great college football game tonight," Trojans coach Clay Helton said. "We knew walking in here that Colorado plays great ball at their place. I couldn't be any more proud of every man in that room."

The Trojans (5-3, 4-1 Pac-12) improved to 14-0 all-time against Colorado with their first win in four road games this season and they handed the Buffaloes (3-5, 1-4) their fourth straight loss.

"This is our opportunity at a championship," Helton said. "We needed this game

to be able to still control our own destiny. On the road, in a tough environment, tonight with a team that was playing really good football. To walk out of here still on top of the Pac-12 South is special."

Big breaks

USC caught a couple of big breaks on the winning touchdown drive.

The first came when Slovis was strip-sacked by outside linebacker Jamar Montgomery for a 10-yard loss but Christon recovered for the Trojans.

Slovis then hit London for 19 yards and on third-and-1 from the 50, Quincy Jountti looked like he was stuffed, but the officials spotted the ball for a first down, and four plays later, Pittman took a short pass and weaved his way through the Colorado secondary for the go-ahead score.

Sports briefs

Woods' 64 gives him 2nd-round Zozo lead

Associated Press

INZAI CITY, Japan — Tiger Woods produced a round that would have had the spectators roaring.

Teeing off in front of empty stands, Woods shot a second straight 6-under 64 on Saturday to take a two-stroke lead over Gary Woodland after the second round of the rain-hit Zozo Championship.

"I'm surprised that I was able to score as well as I have, usually that takes a little bit of time," Woods said. "But this golf course is a little bit on the softer side. I've been able to strike my irons pretty well this week so far and that's been nice."

Organizers of the PGA Tour's first tournament in Japan took the unusual step of closing the Accordia Golf Narashino Country Club course to spectators for Saturday's second round over safety concerns.

"Today was just one of those days where we did this at Congressional one year when the derecho (storm) came through there and it was just like a ghost town," Woods said. "This was a

little bit different. When you make a putt and you kind of put your hand up, you're like, hmm, don't really need to put your hand up because there's no one clapping."

It was in stark contrast to Thursday's opening round when huge crowds followed the American.

Torrential rain washed out play on Friday causing the second round to be moved to Saturday after the course took on more than eight inches of rain. Flooding and mudslides in towns in the surrounding area left at least nine people dead, expanding damage in areas still recovering from recent typhoons.

With the course in remarkably good condition, Woods picked up where he left off after a 64 in Thursday's opening round with a birdie on the first hole. It was one of seven birdies on the day that gave him a 36-hole total of 12-under 128, two shots ahead of Woodland (66).

Woods took the lead on the par-4 17th when his approach shot landed a foot from the hole and the Masters champion

made the easy birdie putt before another birdie on the par-5 18th with darkness setting in. His only bogey came on the par-4 second hole.

Report: Andonovski will coach U.S. women

U.S. Soccer is expected to name Vlatko Andonovski as the new head coach of the women's national team.

A person with knowledge of the deal said Andonovski, the current coach of the Reign FC in the National Women's Soccer League, is expected to sign a contract with U.S. Soccer in the coming days.

U.S. Soccer announced a news conference to name the new coach on Monday in New York City.

Andonovski, 43, was considered the front-runner for the job after Utah Royals coach Laura Harvey and North Carolina coach Paul Riley removed their names from consideration.

Andonovski replaces Jill Ellis, who led the U.S. team to back-to-back World Cup titles during her tenure as coach.

Andonovski has been a head coach in the NWSL for the past seven seasons. He was coach of now-defunct FC Kansas City from the league's inception in 2013 until the club folded in 2017. He won two league titles with the team.

Andonovski was named head coach of the Reign in late 2017 when Harvey went to Utah.

The Reign weathered a number of injuries this season and the absences of several players during the World Cup to make the playoffs for the second straight season. The Reign fell 4-1 to the North Carolina Courage last Sunday in the league semifinals. This season's championship match between the Courage and the Chicago Red Stars is set for Sunday in Cary, N.C..

Andonovski, a native of Skopje, Macedonia, played for several teams in Europe before embarking on a professional indoor soccer career in the United States.

Among his first duties with the U.S. team will be preparing it for qualification for the 2020 Olympics in Tokyo.