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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Adviser: Trump withdrawal tweet a wish

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's national security adviser on Friday doubled down on his assertion that the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan will shrink to 2,500 early next year, while suggesting that Trump's tweet that all forces should be home by Christmas was more a wish than a reality.

Seeking to clarify a series of confusing statements about the American footprint in Afghanistan, Robert O'Brien appeared to take a shot at Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Milley in recent days said that the U.S. is executing a plan to reduce the number of troops to 4,500 in November, but talk of any further reduction would be "speculation."

Confusion about troop withdrawals from America's longest war — an emotional topic for the troops and their families — began Oct. 7, when Trump tweeted that "we should have the small remaining number of our BRAVE Men and Women serving in Afghanistan home by Christmas." When asked about those comments, O'Brien said Friday that Trump was just expressing a hope.

"I think what the president was doing is, he was expressing the same desire I think every president since the Revolu-

tionary War has said," O'Brien said during an online event hosted by the Aspen Institute. "Whenever we're at war, whether it was the Revolutionary War, the Civil War, World War I or World War II, all presidents ... want the troops home by Christmas."

Instead, O'Brien said, "We're on a path right now that looks like about 4,500 this fall and a smaller number in January and February, but if the conditions permitted, look we'd love to get people out earlier." And, echoing comments he made last week, O'Brien said, "in the early part of next year, we're going to be down to 2,500 troops."

Defense officials insist there are no plans to have all troops home from Afghanistan by the holidays or the end of the year. U.S. officials also said Friday that there currently is no approved plan to reduce the number to 2,500 by early next year. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations.

Trump's original tweet about Christmas alarmed Pentagon and State Department officials who fear that putting a definitive date on troop withdrawal could undercut negotiations to finalize ongoing peace negotiations between the Taliban and representatives of Afghan society, including the current Afghan government. They also

worry that a hasty withdrawal could force the U.S. to leave behind sensitive military equipment. And they continue to stress that the Taliban have still not met requirements to reduce violence against the Afghans, a key element of the U.S. withdrawal plan.

When asked about the tweet and plans to go to 2,500 by early next year, Milley told National Public Radio several days ago that the Pentagon had a conditions-based plan for troop withdrawal. He said he would not speculate beyond saying that there are 5,000 to 6,000 U.S. troops in the country now and that number is to be reduced to 4,500 in November.

"I think that Robert O'Brien or anyone else can speculate as they see fit," Milley said. "I'm not going to engage in speculation. I'm going to engage in the rigorous analysis of the situation based on the conditions and the plans that I am aware of and my conversations with the president."

Multiple U.S. officials said Friday that the Pentagon has not received an order to cut troops to 2,500. U.S. military leaders have consistently said that any reduction below 4,500 needs to be based on conditions on the ground, including a measurable reduction in attacks by the Taliban on Afghan troops. And they say they have not seen that yet.

New tech gives commanders detailed risk assessments

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A new digital tool that the Army is providing its commanders this month will give them a one-stop dashboard with their soldiers' detailed military and personal histories so they can better gauge issues that impact their unit's combat readiness.

Army officials said this week that the Commanders Risk Reduction Toolkit, or CRRT, will help company and battalion commanders better understand their individual soldiers, which could help them miti-

gate potential risky behaviors or other issues that could hurt their combat readiness. CRRT is the latest in a six-year project meant to help commanders reduce risk in their units, said Randy Lane, the chief of analytical assessments for the Army, who unveiled the new platform Wednesday during the virtual version of the Association of the U.S. Army's annual meeting and exposition.

"It provides a consolidated picture of soldier risk and trends that are intended to help leaders develop proactive strategies to reduce high-risk behaviors and strengthen soldiers

in units," Lane said during a virtual explainer video of the new toolkit. "This comprehensive picture helps command teams identify any risk history and strong performers who can help them sustain [combat] readiness and possibly reduce risk across their formation."

The dashboard gives commanders access to some 40 categories of information about their soldiers pulled from multiple databases. Commanders will be able to view soldiers' deployment histories, promotion timelines, awards that they have earned in service, and past scores on assessments like

fitness tests and marksmanship qualifications. They will also have access to health histories such as injuries, and information detailing any criminal activity, alcohol or drug abuse, suicide attempts, domestic violence incidents and abuse histories.

It will not provide most protected medical information.

Lane said the system would be fielded by the end of October to all active-duty Army commanders. Commanders in the Reserve and National Guard should receive it by early 2021, he said.

Two sailors test positive aboard USS Roosevelt

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Two sailors aboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt have been infected with the coronavirus, several months after a serious outbreak of the virus on the aircraft carrier derailed its deployment, Navy officials said Friday.

The sailors were at sea aboard the ship off the California coast when they self-reported symptoms of the virus, Cmdr. Zach Harrell, a spokesman for Naval Air Forces, said in a statement issued Friday.

The Navy statement confirmed a “small number” of sailors tested positive Thursday. However, The New York Times reported two sailors in the last three days tested positive for the virus. A Navy official confirmed there were two cases from the Roosevelt as of Friday.

The sailors received medical treatment and were evacuated off the Roosevelt for isolation. The other sailors who were in close contact with them have been quarantined after contact tracing, and they have all tested negative for the virus, according to Harrell.

“The number of sailors that were placed in quarantine amounts to less than one percent of the crew,” he said in the statement.

The Roosevelt has a crew of about 4,800 sailors, and the ship is expected to return to its homeport in San Diego in the next few days, according to Harrell.

On July 9, the Roosevelt returned to San Diego after a six-month deployment to the Indo-Pacific region, where the nuclear-powered aircraft carrier was sidelined by an outbreak of the coronavirus. On March 27, the ship arrived in Guam, where it remained for nearly two months as the virus spread among the ship’s crew, eventually infecting 1,273 sailors and killing one.

On Tuesday, the ship left its base in California to conduct routine operations in the eastern Pacific Ocean, according to the Navy.

Virus surges worry voters, poll workers in battleground states

Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. — Rising coronavirus cases in key presidential battleground states a little more than two weeks before Election Day are the latest worry for election officials and voters fearing chaos or exposure to the virus at polling places despite months of planning.

The prospect of poll workers backing out at the last minute because they are infected, quarantined or scared of getting sick has local election officials in Midwestern states such as Iowa and Wisconsin opening more early voting locations, recruiting backup workers and encouraging voters to plan for long lines and other inconveniences.

Confirmed virus cases and deaths are on the rise in the swing states of Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Wisconsin.

Wisconsin broke records this week for new coronavirus cases, deaths and hospitalizations, leading to the opening of a field hospital to handle COVID-19 patients.

Gov. Tony Evers said he plans to activate the Wisconsin National Guard to fill any staffing shortages at election sites.

While holding a competitive presidential election during a pandemic is “tricky business,” the governor said, “People are ready to have this election over, and I think it will be a successful election with very few hiccups.”

In Iowa, Scott County Auditor Roxanna Moritz opened additional early voting sites in and around Davenport, the state’s third-largest city, to try to reduce the number of people casting ballots on Election Day and to keep the virus from spreading in large precincts.

“We have to remember that there is this thing called COVID,” Moritz said. “Our numbers aren’t getting any better. The more people I can get to early vote, the better.”

The pandemic’s recent trajectory close to home has some voters reconsidering a lifetime habit of entering a voting booth on Election Day.

Tim Tompkins, a welding engineer in Iowa, took the day off work to cast an early ballot at the Bettendorf Community Center.

Tompkins, 62, said he and his wife, Pat, were afraid of coronavirus exposure in Election Day crowds but determined to vote, so they brought their own sanitizer to the community center Friday.

“We’d go through a vat of boiling COVID to get the current president out of office,” Tompkins said.

In some states, voting early still has carried health risks. Voters in Georgia, Texas

and elsewhere encountered hourslong lines that required congregating with hundreds of other people this week.

In Georgia, nearly a quarter of the workers in a warehouse, where Fulton County’s election supplies are kept and voting equipment is readied, tested positive for COVID-19.

The positive test results for 13 of the preparation center’s 60 workers shouldn’t delay election operations, county elections director Rick Barron said. Barron said Georgia’s most populous county is working to hire replacement staff and to implement additional safety measures, including daily rapid testing.

At some polling places, workers wore masks, gloves and face shields. Lines and voting stations were set up six feet apart, and the stations and pens were sanitized between users.

However, poll workers are not required to wear masks everywhere.

In Kansas, the secretary of state’s office did not make masks mandatory at the polls, drawing objections from some voters, particularly older ones.

Several election officials said they were confident they would have enough poll workers, sanitation supplies and protective gear to ensure Election Day goes smoothly and safely. But they are also encouraging voters to cast their ballots early, if they can.

In Ohio, county election boards have put elaborate plans in place to keep voters safe during in-person voting that began Oct. 6, Ohio Association of Election Officials spokesman Aaron Ockerman said.

Republican Secretary of State Frank LaRose updated a 61-point health and safety plan in late September that provides boards with detailed guidance on sanitation, use of personal protective gear, social distancing and other measures.

Minnesota election officials have recruited all 30,000 poll workers they believe are needed to run the general election. They have cross-trained numerous others, including county and city workers, as reserves in case they’re needed, Risikat Adesaogun, a spokeswoman for Minnesota Secretary of State Steve Simon, said.

Officials in the battleground states reported no plans to close polling places, even if virus cases continue to spike.

“Obviously, we would try to open as many polling places as possible,” Nick Custodio, a deputy commissioner for Philadelphia’s election office, said. “We don’t want to close polling places unless that is what is advised.”

Trump changes course, OKs Calif. wildfire relief funds

Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — President Donald Trump's administration abruptly reversed course and approved California's application for disaster relief funds to clean up damage from six recent deadly and destructive blazes that have scorched the state, Gov. Gavin Newsom said Friday.

"Just got off the phone with President Trump who has approved our Major Disaster Declaration request. Grateful for his quick response," Newsom said in a brief statement.

Neither he nor the White House gave details on why the administration shifted positions less than two days after it initially denied the state's request for a declaration that officials said could provide the state with hundreds of millions of dollars.

The reversal came the same week the Pacific Gas and Electric utility cut off service to

more than 40,000 Northern California customers to prevent powerful winds from damaging equipment and sparking wildfires amid a fall heat wave. Electricity was restored to most customers by Friday evening, PG&E said.

White House spokesman Judd Deere previously said California's disaster declaration request "was not supported by the relevant data" needed for approval. He initially said Trump agreed with Federal Emergency Management Agency administrator Pete Gaynor, who said in a three-paragraph rejection letter that the damage "was not of such severity and magnitude as to be beyond the (state's) capabilities."

"The Governor and (GOP) Leader (Kevin) McCarthy spoke and presented a convincing case and additional on-the-ground perspective for reconsideration leading the President to approve the declaration," Deere said in a

statement after Trump's change of heart.

The state had planned to appeal the denial and believed it had a strong case, Brian Ferguson, a spokesman with the governor's Office of Emergency Services, said before the reversal.

Newsom asked for the major disaster declaration on Sept. 28 to cover fires in Fresno, Los Angeles, Madera, Mendocino, San Bernardino, San Diego and Siskiyou counties.

The 30-page request described the disasters and pointed out that damage assessments were incomplete because the fires were still raging and access was difficult.

Federal major disaster declarations allow for cost-sharing for damage, cleanup and rebuilding between the state and federal governments. They also activate relief programs led by FEMA.

Teacher decapitated in France; suspect dead

Associated Press

PARIS — A suspect shot dead by police after the gruesome beheading of a history teacher in an attack near Paris was an 18-year-old Chechen, officials said Saturday.

France's anti-terrorism prosecutor's office said that authorities investigating the horrific killing of Samuel Paty in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine on Friday have also arrested nine suspects, including the grandfather, parents and 17-year-old brother of the attacker.

Paty had discussed caricatures of Islam's Prophet Muhammad with his class, leading to threats and a complaint from a parent, police officials said. Islam prohibits images of the prophet, considering that they lead to idolatry. The officials could not be named because they were not authorized to discuss ongoing investigations.

The French anti-terrorism prosecutor opened an investigation for murder with a suspected terrorist motive, the prosecutor's office said.

A police official said the suspect in Friday's attack was shot dead about 600 yards from where Paty died.

He was armed with a knife and an airsoft gun — which fires plastic pellets — and police opened fire after he failed to respond to orders to put down his arms, and acted in a threatening manner. The official also could not be named because of the ongoing investigations.

French President Emmanuel Macron arrived quickly at the school Friday night to denounce what he called an "Islamist terrorist attack." He urged the nation to stand united against extremism.

"One of our compatriots was murdered today because he taught ... the freedom of expression, the freedom to believe or not believe," Macron said.

Feds to execute woman who killed victim, cut baby from womb

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A woman convicted of fatally strangling a pregnant woman, cutting her body open and kidnapping her baby is scheduled to be the first female inmate put to death by the U.S. government in more than six decades, the Justice Department said Friday.

Lisa Montgomery is scheduled to be executed by lethal injection on Dec. 8 at the Federal Correctional Complex in Terre Haute, Ind. She would be the ninth federal inmate to put to death since the Justice Department resumed executions in July after a nearly 20-year hiatus.

Montgomery was convicted

of killing 23-year-old Bobbie Jo Stinnett in the northwest Missouri town of Skidmore in December 2004.

Montgomery drove from her Kansas home to Stinnett's house in Skidmore under the guise of adopting a rat terrier puppy, prosecutors said. When she arrived at the home, Montgomery used a rope to strangle Stinnett, who was eight months pregnant, but Stinnett was conscious and trying to defend herself as Montgomery used a kitchen knife to cut the baby girl from the womb, authorities said.

Prosecutors said Montgomery removed the baby from Stinnett's body, took the child

with her, and attempted to pass the girl off as her own.

Montgomery's lawyers argued that she had been suffering from delusions when she killed Stinnett, but a jury rejected her defense. Her lawyers had also argued that she was suffering from pseudocyesis, which causes a woman to falsely believe she is pregnant and exhibit outward signs of pregnancy.

The Justice Department on Friday also scheduled the execution of a man convicted in the 1999 killing of two youth ministers in Texas. Brandon Bernard, 40, is scheduled to be executed by lethal injection on Dec. 10.

Budget deficit hits \$3.1T amid pandemic

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The federal budget deficit hit an all-time high of \$3.1 trillion in the 2020 budget year, more than double the previous record, as the coronavirus pandemic shrank revenues and sent spending soaring.

The Trump administration reported Friday that the deficit for the budget year that ended on Sept. 30 was three times the size of last year's deficit of \$984 billion. It was also \$2 trillion higher than the administration had estimated in February before the pandemic hit.

It was the government's largest annual shortfall in dollar terms, surpassing the previous record of \$1.4 trillion set in 2009. At that time, the Obama administration was spending heavily to shore up the nation's banking system and limit the economic damage from the 2008 financial crisis.

The administration's final accounting of the 2020 budget year shows that revenues fell by 1.2% to \$3.42 trillion, while government spending surged 47.3% to \$6.55 trillion. That spending reflects the relief programs Congress passed in the spring to support the economy as millions of Americans were losing their jobs.

Many of the benefit programs expired in late July or early August, and so far Democrats and Republicans have been unable to agree on legislation to re-instate them.

Colorado

DENVER — Colorado on Friday released its distribution plan for an approved coronavirus vaccine when it becomes publicly available as the state faced a deadline to submit it to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The distribution plan prioritizes three groups of people for the order in which people in those groups will be eligible to get vaccines. The first group of recipients is broken down into three levels of prioritized people and the second has two levels.

In the first phase, the priority recipients will be assisted living facility workers, home health care workers and outpatient pharmacists. Next are police officers, firefighters, public health workers and corrections staff. The third level of vaccine recipients are nursing home and assisted living patients.

Illinois

SPRINGFIELD — Illinois set another record Friday for coronavirus infections, fueled by a large increase in testing.

The Illinois Department of Public Health reported 4,554 confirmed cases, a 13% jump from the record set a day earlier. There were also 38 additional deaths, bringing the total in Illinois lost to COVID-19 since the pandemic began to 9,165. There have been 336,174 confirmed cases.

Testing for the illness has steadily ramped up and with it the rate of positive test results, which is now at 5.1% statewide.

Kentucky

LOUISVILLE — A surge in daily COVID-19 cases continued in Kentucky Friday as officials reported an outbreak at a state prison.

Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear said there were 1,319 newly reported cases, the third day in a row the state surpassed 1,200 positives. There were four reported deaths.

Beshear continued to urge residents to wear masks in public and limiting gatherings to 10 people.

An outbreak at the Little Sandy Correctional Complex in Elliott County has infected 17 inmates and two staff, according to Beshear. The governor said the entire prison will be tested.

Nevada

RENO — Nevada's test positivity rate for COVID-19 has continued to rise following a steady two-month decline after Gov. Steve Sisolak raised the size limit for public gatherings.

The 14-day rolling average

for the positivity rate — which measures community transmission of the virus — stood at 8.4% on Thursday for the third consecutive day. That's the highest it's been since 8.6% on Sept. 5, according to the weekly Nevada Health Response Situation Report released Friday.

The World Health Organization recommends a rate of 5% or below, a rate Nevada hasn't dropped below since mid-June.

New York

A federal judge has refused to block Gov. Andrew Cuomo's order limiting worship to as few as 10 congregants in communities seeing spikes in coronavirus infections.

Ruling in a lawsuit brought by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn, U.S. District Court Judge Nicholas Garaufis said in an order Friday that even though the rules harm religious groups, it is not in the public interest to block them if they are helping prevent a wave of new infections.

The ruling doesn't end the lawsuit but denied the church's request for a temporary injunction.

Tennessee

NASHVILLE — The White House quietly told Tennessee early this week that "a statewide mask mandate must be implemented" to curb its growing spread of COVID-19, strong instructions that the White House and governor did not discuss publicly before the report emerged in a records request.

The Oct. 11 state report for Tennessee, where Republican Gov. Bill Lee has let counties decide whether to require masks in public, first came to light in a records request by WUOT-FM. The Associated Press obtained the report from the Knox County Health Department afterward.

The report takes the strongest tone to date in urging Tennessee to act, though Lee has made it clear for months that he did not think masks should be required across the state.

Utah

SALT LAKE CITY — One of Utah's largest hospitals had no beds left Friday in its regular intensive-care unit as the governor declared the state's weeklong spike in coronavirus cases "unsustainable."

The University of Utah Health had to set up extra ICU beds staffed by doctors and nurses working overtime to care for its critical patients this week as the unit hit 104% capacity, said Chief Medical Officer Dr. Russell Vinik.

"We've cut back where we can but it's precarious," he said. "We are very concerned about flu season, particularly if people don't get vaccinated. We can't take another hit."

Health officials again reported near record-breaking levels of new coronavirus cases Friday, meaning hospitalizations could continue to rise.

Vermont

The Vermont Department of Health is investigating an outbreak of COVID-19 cases related to youth and adult recreational hockey and broomball teams in central Vermont, officials said Friday, and the governor directed skating rinks to halt reservations through Oct. 30.

The outbreak is linked to people who practiced or played at the Central Vermont Memorial Civic Center in Montpelier earlier this month, officials said. So far, the Health Department has identified 18 confirmed cases among players and several close contacts and most are in adults.

"So far, there is no indication of community spread of the virus," said Patsy Kelso, state epidemiologist, at the governor's bi-weekly virus briefing.

In a Friday night release, Gov. Phil Scott said his order barring Vermont's ice skating rinks from accepting new reservations for two weeks is meant to prevent a rush of new users from high-risk areas.

The Health Department's contact tracing team is continuing to reach out to people who may be affected, Kelso said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Another jetpack flier spotted near airport

CA LOS ANGELES — Officials were investigating a report from an airline crew member that someone was flying in a jetpack as the plane approached Los Angeles International Airport to land — the second such report in about six weeks.

“A China Airlines crew member reported seeing what appeared to be someone in a jetpack roughly seven miles northwest of the airport,” the Federal Aviation Administration said.

On Aug. 29, authorities received separate reports from two airline pilots that someone was flying in a jetpack at around 3,000 feet as their planes approached LAX.

Mayor resigns month after shoplifting charge

TN FAIRVIEW — A middle Tennessee mayor accused of shoplifting nearly \$300 worth of items from a Target store resigned from his post.

John Blade, 53, stepped down as mayor of Fairview nearly a month after he was accused of paying for just one item and stealing several others in a self-checkout lane, according to a Spring Hill Police Department report obtained by news outlets.

A store loss prevention officer reported Blade took more items than he paid for, exited the store, returned and repeated the act again, authorities said. He allegedly took more than 40 household goods and personal care items, according to the police report.

Van carrying 80 dogs overturns on interstate

VA SALEM — A van carrying 80 dogs overturned on an interstate in Virginia,

causing some of the animals to be injured and others to escape the vehicle, police said.

The crash occurred on Interstate 81 in Roanoke County, according to Virginia State Police Sgt. Rick Garletts. It is unclear how many of the animals were injured or how many had escaped.

The Fort Lewis Fire Department said in a Facebook post that the van belonged to a rescue group that was transporting the dogs to other rescue groups.

Man who smashed TV station door arrested

AL MOBILE — Police in Alabama arrested a wig-wearing suspect accused of smashing through the glass front door of a local television station.

A man, 27, allegedly used a tire iron to bust through the glass and into the front lobby of WKRG-TV’s studio in Mobile, according to police and video of the encounter recorded by the station. He was wearing a long blue wig and a mask as he climbed through the shattered door, yelling.

A Mobile police investigator told the station it appeared the man was under the influence of a narcotic and may have had mental health issues, WKRG reported.

Elon Musk firm designs people mover tunnel

NV LAS VEGAS — A company nearing completion of a short underground motorway for electric cars at the expanded Las Vegas Convention Center wants to build a people mover tunnel system beneath the Las Vegas Strip.

Billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk’s tunneling opera-

tor, called The Boring Co., dubs the project the “Vegas Loop.”

It would drill underground from downtown Las Vegas to the newly opened Allegiant Stadium, a distance of about 7 miles, according to a presentation to the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority.

The concept includes a loop of about 15 miles, with perhaps 50 stations where passengers would board self-driving electric Tesla vehicles.

24 dogs seized after animal neglect complaint

SD WHITEWOOD — Authorities rescued 24 dogs after responding to a complaint at a home near Whitewood, in far western South Dakota.

The Lawrence County Sheriff’s Office said deputies discovered several neglected animals at the residence and eventually seized two dozen of the dogs. There were also dogs on the property that had already died.

The Western Hills Humane Society in Spearfish was providing the rescued dogs with shelter and medical care.

Judge reprimanded for sexting in judicial robe

TN COOKEVILLE — A Tennessee judge was publicly reprimanded for engaging in sexually explicit communications with a woman who formerly had a child custody matter before him and another woman whose law firm does business with his court, among others.

A letter of reprimand sent to Circuit Court Judge Jonathan Lee Young from the Tennessee Board of Judicial Conduct stated, “The messages include content ranging from flirtatious to overtly sexual. Most of these communications depict you in

your judicial robe.”

In addition to the public reprimand, Young is required to attend a judicial ethics training, refrain from engaging in further misconduct and recuse himself from all cases involving a list of specific attorneys that was not disclosed publicly.

State police arrest six for blocking highway

RI PROVIDENCE — Six adults and a juvenile used a rented box truck, two cars and several traffic cones to briefly block a Rhode Island highway, state police said.

The adults were charged with disorderly conduct and conspiracy after all four lanes of Interstate 95 northbound in Providence were blocked for approximately seven minutes and traffic backed up for about a half mile.

They were demanding that Columbus Day be changed to Indigenous People’s Day, local activist Amanda Toussaint told The Providence Journal.

Man accused of impersonating officer

IA DES MOINES — A Des Moines man was accused of impersonating a police officer and displaying a stun gun after pulling over a car.

WHO-TV reported that Dewey Moraine, 54, was charged with two counts of assault while displaying a dangerous weapon and one count of impersonating a public official.

A criminal complaint said Moraine flashed his lights to get the victim to stop. The complaint said Moraine “sparked” a stun gun while yelling at the victim to exit the vehicle.

Police said they found two stun guns and a black air soft pistol in Moraine’s vehicle.

From wire reports

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Astros win third straight, even series

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — The blowback from a sign-stealing scandal three years ago and a losing record during the pandemic-shortened regular season don't mean a thing to Dusty Baker and the Houston Astros.

Like them or loathe them, the Astros are on the cusp of a third World Series in four seasons and joining the 2004 Boston Red Sox as the only teams to rally from a 3-0 deficit to win a seven-game series.

George Springer and Jose Altuve delivered big hits, Framber Valdez pitched six brilliant innings and the Astros beat the Tampa Bay Rays for the third straight time, 7-4 Friday to force a deciding Game 7 of the AL Championship Series.

It's been a stunning turnaround in a series that had been going the Rays' way as they opened a 3-0 lead.

"We're not through writing history," Baker said. "We're hoping we can have a happy

ending to this historic season and historic year.

"This team's battled back big time," added Baker, hired to bring some stability to a team rocked by a sign-stealing scandal it used en route to the 2017 title that was uncovered last offseason. "You've got to love this team, or some people hate this team, but I mean you've at least got to respect this team, the way that they've worked."

Houston chased starter Blake Snell in the fifth before Springer hit a go-ahead, two-run single and scored on Altuve's double. Carlos Correa, who hit a walkoff home run in Thursday night's 4-3 win, added an RBI single.

"We're relentless and when we said we didn't want to go home, we really meant that," Correa said. "We want to keep playing baseball and we don't want this to be the end of our season. We took care of these three games and now we've got to take one more. If we don't win that game, then it's all

meant nothing. We've got to go out there tomorrow and get that win. It'll be great."

Earlier this week, some of the Astros watched a documentary on the 2004 Red Sox, who after falling behind 3-0 won four straight games to stun the New York Yankees for the AL pennant before winning their first World Series in 86 seasons.

Otherwise, big league clubs leading 3-0 in a best-of-seven postseason series are 37-1.

Houston also is trying to become the first team to win a pennant with a losing regular-season record (29-31). The Astros have been criticized for their role in a cheating scandal en route to the 2017 title that was uncovered last offseason.

Manuel Margot homered twice and drove in three runs for the Rays. Despite blowing a 3-0 series lead, they remain one win from the second World Series in franchise history — and one loss from joining the 2004 Yankees in ignominy.

"We've just got to bounce

back," Rays manager Kevin Cash said. "This isn't the scenario that we wanted leading 3-0, but this is a resilient group. Encouraged that the offense kind of got going there. Look for some carryover.

"There's no doubt the momentum has shifted, but I would bet on this team being very capable of bouncing back," he said.

Valdez, who lost the opener of this series 2-1 to Snell, held the Rays to one run and three hits while striking out nine and walking three in his third career postseason start. He allowed Willy Adames' RBI double in the second.

Astros closer Ryan Pressly pitched for the third straight day and got three outs for his second save to go with a win in Game 5. He allowed Yoshitomo Tsutsugo's one-out single, then induced Mike Brosseau's game-ending double-play grounder, a call upheld in a video review. Pressly threw nine pitches, all for strikes, raising his three-day total to 39.

Dodgers top Braves, stave off elimination in NLCS

Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — One Will Smith outdid another Will Smith to keep the season alive for the Los Angeles Dodgers.

A common name, a special result for the Dodgers catcher.

Smith hit a go-ahead, three-run homer off the Atlanta Braves reliever with the same name, Corey Seager homered twice and the Dodgers avoided elimination with a 7-3 win in Game 5 of the NL Championship Series on Friday night.

"I'll always bet on our Will Smith," Dodgers manager Dave Roberts said.

Smith connected in the sixth against — of all people — Will Smith, the fourth of six Braves pitchers in their bullpen night that started with a couple of postseason firsts by A.J. Minter.

"For him to come through for us in that spot. I'm happy to

see him expressing himself," Dodgers right fielder Mookie Betts said of his teammate who rarely shows emotion but was clearly pumped up by his big blast.

Betts got that decisive sixth started with an infield single, and the first-year Dodger and former AL MVP had a running, shoestring catch in right field that turned into an inning-ending double play. His snag took an Atlanta run off the board after a replay challenge right before Seager's first homer.

"You're talking about momentum shifts, that's the play of the year," Roberts said. "I just thought there was no way he was going to make that play."

Game 6 was Saturday afternoon, with a pitching rematch from the series opener: lefty Max Fried for the Braves and right-hander Walker Buehler for the Dodgers. Both gave up one run in Game 1, which At-

lanta won 5-1 after a four-run ninth. Atlanta is looking to get into the World Series for the first time since 1999.

"I knew it was going to be a really hard series, regardless of what situation you're in," Braves manager Brian Snitker said. "I feel good (Saturday) with Max on the mound. I feel really good with him going out there. Hopefully we can score a few runs and support him and wrap this thing up."

Blake Treinen, the third of seven Dodgers pitchers and the Game 1 loser in relief, pitched two perfect innings for the win. Inconsistent closer Kenley Jansen struck out the side in a non-save situation to end it, which Roberts called a highlight for him.

Betts had a stolen base after his sixth-starting single before Justin Turner's one-out hard grounder that got Betts caught in a rundown. The Braves then

brought in their lefty named Will Smith to face left-handed batter Max Muncy, who drew a walk before the Dodgers' catcher named Will Smith hit a full-count pitch 404 feet to left-center for a 4-2 lead.

"It got the team going. that energy bounces off of each other," Smith said.

It was the first time since at least 1961 that a batter homered off a pitcher with the same name in the regular season or postseason, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

The Dodgers extended their lead in the seventh when Chris Taylor hit a two-out double and scored on a single by Betts before Seager hit a ball into LA's bullpen in right-center.

Seager's four homers and 10 RBIs have already tied NLCS records, with at least one more game for the Dodgers to play — two if they want a chance to get to the World Series.

Rams have knack for fast starts

Associated Press

THOUSAND OAKS, Calif. — Fast starts are nothing new for the Los Angeles Rams, having scored four opening-drive touchdowns in five games this season.

They want to keep that momentum going in their NFC West opener at San Francisco on Sunday.

“Really, going into games we feel like everything’s going to work,” wide receiver Robert Woods said. “We are going out there, playing fast and executing. And I feel like once we go out there and we’re running our first few plays and starting off the game, we’re setting the tone for how we’re going to attack ‘em the rest of the game.”

Success on early drives has been a reliable trend for coach Sean McVay, especially in the division. The Rams (4-1) have turned their initial possession into points 12 times in 18 NFC West games under McVay, including three touchdowns and three field goals last season.

The offense got into the end zone to start two games against the 49ers in 2019, but the Rams lost both en route to a 3-3 record against San Francisco,

Seattle and Arizona. It was the first time since McVay became head coach that Los Angeles did not have a winning record against the NFC West, coinciding with his first team that failed to make the postseason.

The Rams won all six division games in 2018, and their 4-2 mark in 2017 included a Week 17 loss to San Francisco, where McVay sat numerous starters having already secured the NFC West title and a home playoff game in the wild-card round.

“If you win most of your division games, you’re probably going to be in the playoffs,” quarterback Jared Goff said. “And every game counts the same, but these ones always count a little bit more and you’re always looking forward to them a little bit more, so we’ll be ready to go.”

The notion of starting a game using scripted plays began with legendary San Francisco coach Bill Walsh, but McVay does not treat them as being written in stone. Instead, he narrows down a set of plays to use based on how the offense has performed in practice.

“These are the plays you feel good about, we’ve executed at a

pretty high level,” McVay said. “The players feel comfortable, and these are definitely those plays that you want to get off. But to say you do these openings and you go right down the list, that’s not just how you call a game.”

To Goff, those plays go beyond the “priority” status McVay assigns to them.

“We run some of our best stuff on that first drive,” Goff said. “We obviously have some stuff that we want to get up throughout the game and set things up certain ways, but a lot of times in that first drive is some of our best runs, our best play-actions, our best keepers, our best screens. It’s a mix and match of some of the stuff that we really have loved throughout the week. And it’s always good to start fast and something that we put an emphasis on.”

Goff and his teammates have mostly been up to the challenge this season, only failing to generate points when Samuel Slocum missed a 53-yard field goal to start Week 3 at Buffalo. That drive stalled when Goff was sacked on consecutive plays, a rare instance of the offense not being completely in sync on its first chance to move the ball.

Bears still have room to improve

Associated Press

The Chicago Bears are off to their best start in eight years. They’re just not racking up style points to go with those victories.

There is plenty of room to improve, particularly on offense, despite a 4-1 record heading into the game at Carolina on Sunday. But they’re winning. And coach Matt Nagy will take that over the alternative.

“Where you stay excited is that you are 4-1 as a team because ultimately in the end that’s what matters,” he said. “Now you get there, you want it to look better but that’s what we’re working towards right now, and that’s what we got to get to as soon as we can.”

The Bears have their best record through five games since the 2012 team jumped to a 7-1 start. Their top 10 defense held Tom Brady in check last week, with Khalil Mack sacking the six-time Super Bowl champion twice in a 20-19 victory.

But they’re not making it easy on themselves.

They had to rally from 17 down in the fourth quarter to take the opener at Detroit and trailed by 16 in the fourth two weeks later at Atlanta before squeezing past the Falcons. Against Tampa Bay, they trailed 13-0 in the first half.

Nagy laid into the offense afterward, venting about lapses in execution. He was particularly peeved about imprecise route running, missed chances for quarterback Nick Foles, and breakdowns in blocking technique.

“None of that is personal,” Nagy said. “Some of it is just me being able to explain to them and to us that just in all areas that we can be better. None of it is blame. There’s zero blame of saying, ‘Hey, this is your fault or this is our fault.’ This is where we are at and we have to lock in a little bit more.”

The Bears rank 27th both in total offense and rushing.

Virus Outbreak

Jags latest team with positive test

Associated Press

The Jacksonville Jaguars are the latest NFL team dealing with a positive COVID-19 test.

The Jaguars said Saturday that a practice squad player has tested positive for the coronavirus. The initial result was confirmed by a second test Friday evening. The player was quarantined, and the team is reviewing contact tracing data to determine what further precautions need to be taken.

The Jaguars (1-4) host Detroit (1-3) on Sunday and plan to play as scheduled.

Jacksonville decided to hold football activities remotely Saturday as part of NFL protocols.

It could benefit the team that it typically separates practice squad players from guys on the 53-man roster, creating an extra level of protection to help prevent an outbreak.

The Jaguars are the fourth NFL team to deal with COVID issues in recent days, joining Atlanta, Indianapolis and New England.

The Patriots canceled practice Friday and later placed center James Ferentz on the reserve/COVID-19 list. He became the fifth player on the team to test positive.

The Colts had four positive tests that came up negative upon retesting. The Falcons re-

turned to their facility one day after abandoning it because of a second positive.

New England already twice had the original Week 5 matchup against Denver postponed following four earlier positive coronavirus tests by players, including quarterback Cam Newton and cornerback Stephon Gilmore. The game is scheduled for Sunday in Foxborough, Mass., but now could be in jeopardy.

Newton and Gilmore, the reigning Defensive Player of the Year, returned to practice this week for the first time since testing positive for the virus.

College football roundup

Wilson rallies No. 14 BYU past Houston

Associated Press

HOUSTON — Down by double-digits late in the third quarter, BYU did not panic.

The Cougars scored the final 29 points to remain undefeated.

Zach Wilson threw four touchdown passes and finished 25-for-35 for 400 yards as No. 14 BYU rallied for a 43-26 win over Houston on Friday night.

“The statement we made is that we are a big-time team,” Wilson said. “Average teams are inconsistent and can’t finish games off. There wasn’t a moment of that tonight. Every single play, every single drive was we are going to execute the next drive.”

Dax Milne caught nine passes for 184 yards and three touchdowns to help BYU improve to 5-0 for the first time since 2008. BYU outgained Houston, 478-438.

“That dude’s a playmaker,” Wilson said of Milne. “I love that guy. He’s one of my best friends. I’m so happy for him. I believed in that guy since day one. I’ve always known he was going to be a big-time player for

us.”

Down 12, Wilson found Milne for a 2-yard touchdown pass with 53 seconds remaining in the third. Wilson gave BYU the lead back with an 8-yard touchdown pass to Masen Wake with 10:35 left to make it 29-26 following a two-point conversion pass from Wilson to Tyler Allgeier.

“They had the lead on us,” BYU coach Kalani Sitake said. “I’m proud of our players and the way they were able to respond to adversity. We got caught in some things. It’s weird because we got the momentum early, and it starts slipping away. Then, we had to regroup at halftime and get in the locker room and talk things over.”

Wilson threw an 18-yard touchdown pass to Milne with three minutes remaining before Allgeier iced it with a 14-yard touchdown run with 1:40 left.

Clayton Tune finished 21-for-31 for 310 yards and two touchdowns to lead Houston (1-1).

No. 17 SMU 37, Tulane 34 (OT): At New Orleans, Brandon Crossley ended the first

overtime possession with an interception and Chris Naggar made a 34-yard field goal to lift the Mustangs over the Green Wave.

Crossley intercepted Tulane freshman Michael Pratt’s pass to put SMU (5-0, 3-0 American Athletic) in position to win with the field goal.

“It’s good to get a hard-fought win,” SMU coach Sonny Dykes said. “We had our hands full and we were really fortunate to win. It’s very difficult to be able to win a mid-week game on the road, especially with all the problems that we created for ourselves. We just didn’t seem to be in sync on either side of the ball. We did a bunch of things that if you normally do, you lose ball games. But, we were able to win.”

SMU is 5-0 for the second straight season, a feat it last accomplished in 1983.

“Being able to accomplish what we have these last two years says we are getting better as a program,” Dykes said. “When you take over a program you want to always try and get better. It’s a credit to the players for buying in and

doing what we are asking them to do.”

The Green Wave (2-3, 0-3) rallied to force overtime on Merek Glover’s 27-yard field goal with 1:30 left.

“We went blow for blow with them,” Tulane coach Willie Fritz said. “Unfortunately, they get the last one in. I saw a lot of good things from our guys. Really was impressed with the way we battled and fought back.”

After Tulane took a 31-27 lead early in the fourth quarter on Pratt’s 7-yard touchdown, the Mustangs pulled ahead 34-31 lead on Shane Buechele’s 10-yard pass to Danny Gray.

Buechele completed 23 of 37 passes for 384 yards and two touchdowns. He entered the game second nationally in passing yards.

Rashee Rice had seven receptions for 139 yards and a touchdown, and Gray added five catches for 133 yards and a touchdown and had a 32-yard scoring run. Ulysses Bentley ran for 94 yards and a touchdown on 25 carries.

Sports briefs

Italians take top 2 spots in women’s giant slalom

Associated Press

SOELDEN, Austria — Marta Bassino led Federica Brignone for an Italian 1-2 finish in the season-opening women’s World Cup giant slalom Saturday.

Bassino held on to her first-run lead to beat her teammate and defending overall World Cup champion by 0.14 seconds.

Petra Vlhova posted the fastest second-run time and the Slovakian racer finished third, 1.13 behind Bassino.

No MLB positives for 47 days

NEW YORK — Major League Baseball’s postseason bubble appears to be working as a defense against the new coronavirus.

MLB players extended their streak of

consecutive days with no new COVID-19 tests to 47 through Thursday.

Joshua, Pulev reschedule fight

LONDON — Anthony Joshua will defend his world heavyweight titles for the first time this year when it was confirmed he will face Kubrat Pulev on Dec. 12 in London.

Joshua’s WBA, IBF, and WBO titles will be on the line in his first home fight in more than two years.

Kansas’ de Sousa opts out

LAWRENCE, Kan. — Kansas forward Silvio de Sousa is opting out of the upcoming college basketball season, potentially ending what has been one of the most contro-

versial tenures of any player to have joined coach Bill Self’s blueblood program.

Self said in a statement that de Sousa was opting out to “focus on matters in his personal life.”

Maple Leafs sign Thornton

TORONTO — The Toronto Maple Leafs signed 41-year-old forward Joe Thornton to a one-year, \$700,000 contract Friday.

Thornton, a six-time all star and the winner of the Hart Memorial Trophy in 2006 as the NHL’s MVP, is the second Ontario-born veteran to sign a league-minimum deal with the Maple Leafs in free agency, joining Jason Spezza.