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Trump says US seriously considering Polish base

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

President Donald Trump said Tuesday that he is considering permanently basing U.S. troops in Poland, a country that has offered up to \$2 billion in financial support in hopes of luring American forces to the country.

"Poland is willing to make a very major contribution to the United States to come in and have a presence in Poland, and certainly it's something we'll discuss," Trump said during a news conference with Polish President Andrzej Duda at the White House.

For years, Poland has lobbied for larger numbers of U.S. troops in its country, where there are now several thousand American soldiers carrying out missions on a rotational basis. In addition to about 700 U.S. cavalrymen positioned near Poland's border with the Russian military enclave of Kaliningrad, the country also is a main outpost for an Army armored brigade on rotation from the United States.

However, the U.S. forces shuffle in and out of Poland and there is no permanent American base in the country. Warsaw, long uneasy about a more aggressive Russia, has argued an Army brigade and associated support units stationed permanently in the country would serve as a more serious deterrent to Russian aggression.

To that end, Poland has offered as much as \$2 billion to set up a permanent U.S. base in the country.

Within the U.S. military and among security analysts, there is a long-running debate over the merits of building up forces in Poland.

N. Korea vows to dismantle nuke complex if US also takes steps

By KIM GAMEL
Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — Kim Jong Un agreed Wednesday to dismantle North Korea's main nuclear complex if the United States reciprocates, as he and South Korea's president vowed to turn the war-torn peninsula into a "land of peace."

The offer was part of a wide-ranging declaration that capped a pomp-filled inter-Korean summit aimed at breathing new life into U.S.-led diplomatic efforts to persuade Kim to give up nuclear weapons.

Experts said the ball was in President Donald Trump's court and it remained to be seen if South Korean President Moon Jae-in delivered enough to bring Washington back to the table.

Trump praised the summit, saying there had been "tremendous progress with respect to North Korea." He also said he received a letter from Kim that was delivered three days ago.

Moon and Kim signed the so-called Pyongyang Declaration after holding their second and final round of talks Wednesday at a state guesthouse.

The two leaders began the summit on Tuesday after Moon and an entourage of more than 150 South Korean business titans and officials arrived in the North Korean capital after a nearly hourlong flight from Seoul. Standing next to Kim at a press conference, Moon outlined specific measures he said the North was prepared to take, including the permanent closure of the main nuclear complex at Yongbyon and the destruction of a missile test site in the presence of international experts.

"Today Chairman Kim has

shown his commitment to denuclearization and we shared our willingness to create a peninsula that is peaceful and nuclear-free," Moon said.

Kim, whose family has ruled the communist state since it was founded in 1948, also said he would visit Seoul "in the near future."

That would make him the first North Korean leader to travel to the South Korean capital while in power.

"The road to our future will not always be smooth and we may face unexpected challenges and trials," Kim said. "But we want to bring an end to the division of the peninsula as soon as possible. We are on the journey to peace and prosperity."

"The two sides shared the view that the Korean Peninsula must be turned into a land of peace free from nuclear weapons and nuclear threats, and that substantial progress toward this end must be made in a prompt manner," the five-point declaration said.

The longtime rivals also moved forward with improving bilateral relations, signing a sweeping military agreement aimed at easing tensions along the heavily fortified border that has divided the peninsula since the 1950-53 war ended in an armistice instead of a peace treaty.

In addition, they agreed to compete together in the 2020 Summer Olympics and to submit a joint bid for the 2032 Summer Games.

The excitement over the North's participation in this year's Winter Olympics that were held in the South helped launch the diplomatic process that reversed months of tensions threatening to provoke a nuclear war.

While observers largely welcomed the summit outcome as a positive step, experts were skeptical that the North is willing to completely give up its nuclear weapons program.

Many said the deal fell short of U.S. demands that the North provide a detailed inventory of nuclear facilities and allow international inspectors to verify steps throughout the process.

Trump said in an earlier tweet that Kim had agreed to allow nuclear inspections, "subject to final negotiations."

But the summit agreement mentioned only that "experts from relevant countries" would observe the permanent dismantlement of the Dongchangri missile test site.

"In the meantime there will be no Rocket or Nuclear testing," Trump wrote, adding that the North would continue returning remains of American war dead.

It's unclear what details may have been discussed during the talks. Moon plans to brief Trump on Monday on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly, presidential spokesman Yoon Young-chan said.

Experts said the measures, while far from the complete removal of the nuclear program that Washington seeks, were likely enough to keep the diplomatic process alive.

"This has really put the ball in the Trump administration's court," Alexandra Bell, of the Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, said in an interview. "It's very clear that President Moon and Chairman Kim are committed to moving forward no matter what."

The Korean leaders pledged to "remove all dangers that could cause war on the peninsula," Moon said.

Mattis dismissive of reports Trump unhappy with him

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Jim Mattis on Tuesday dismissed recent news reports that tensions between him and President Donald Trump point to his exit soon.

Asked by a reporter whether such reports should be taken seriously, he replied, “No. I wouldn’t take it seriously at all. It’s like most of those kind of things in this town” that he said are fanned by baseless rumor.

“Somebody cooks up a headline. They then call to a normally chatty class of people, they find a couple of other things to put in, they add the rumor, somebody else on the other coast starts writing the same thing — next thing you know you’ve got a story,” he told a small group of reporters on the steps of the Pentagon as he awaited the arrival of his Philippine counterpart.

Several news organizations have reported that Trump has become weary of Mattis, a retired Marine general who was one of his first Cabinet selections. He is seen by many as a steadying influence on Trump

in the face of sometimes impulsive moves on national security issues.

It’s well known that Mattis has privately disagreed with Trump on numerous issues, including the president’s decision to end U.S. participation in the Iran nuclear deal and move the U.S. Embassy in Israel to Jerusalem. But Mattis is widely supported in Congress and the military and prevailed in an administration argument in 2017 over whether to keep U.S. troops in Afghanistan.

The New York Times reported Saturday that Trump has “soured” on Mattis, and that the president is considering whether he wants someone running the Pentagon who would be more vocally supportive. The newspaper also reported that Mattis is becoming weary of pushing back against various Trump proposals.

In his comments Tuesday, Mattis did not refer to any specific story. He said he is not considering quitting and indicated he is not worried about the stories.

Army screening of immigrant recruits is under scrutiny

The Washington Post

The lawsuits and public pressure made it clear: The Army had a problem.

In August, it reversed its decision to expel dozens of immigrant recruits who were seeking expedited citizenship by serving in the U.S. military. But days before, on Aug. 13, a military intelligence unit asked Army Reserve attorneys to scrutinize its completed security screening packets for admissions of potential crimes by immigrant recruits, according to an email obtained by The Washington Post. The email is written in a who, what, when, where, why format. The “why” says: “[Immigrant recruits] are currently suing the federal government claiming they were wrongfully discharged from the Army.”

Critics say the request appears to be retribution for the lawsuits that helped overturn dozens of dismissals and was intended to legitimize a process beset with legal and bureaucratic problems that have been blamed internally for draining vast resources.

“Instead of a good-faith attempt to give due process, it’s done in bad faith,” Margaret Stock, a retired Army officer and immigration attorney, told The Post on Tuesday. The Pentagon acknowledged the email but said the request was not designed to discharge immigrant recruits or

charge them with crimes.

The Military Accessions Vital to the National Interest program, or MAVNI, promises expedited citizenship for badly needed language and medical skills. More than 10,400 immigrants entered the force through the program since 2009, when it was implemented by Stock. It was shuttered last year.

The August email followed a tumultuous summer in which the Army responded to lawsuits by halting the discharge of recruits while the Pentagon figured out an orderly and fair screening process. An unknown number of recruits and reservists have been kicked out after their enlistment because of problems in their counterintelligence screening process, which typically occurs after recruits clear background checks through FBI and police databases, Stock said.

The Army has turned immigrants away for holding foreign investments, sending money to parents or communicating with relatives who work in foreign governments, said Stock, who has reviewed declassified reports. Others were discharged because another agency failed to provide documents for screeners in time for an interview, she added.

Now, following questions and a lawsuit over the process, it appears screeners are looking for more serious issues.

Bikers donate money to flood victims near base in Japan

By JAMES BOLINGER
Stars and Stripes

MARINE CORPS AIR STATION IWAKUNI, Japan — American and Japanese bikers recently delivered \$2,500 to Iwakuni City Mayor Yoshihiko Fukuda to support the victims of deadly flooding and landslides over the summer.

Nearly 150 riders — some traveling from as far as Tokyo and Fukuoka — participated in a fundraiser rally Aug. 18 at an

Iwakuni night club, said Chief Petty Officer Gregory Messner, of Fleet Readiness Center Western Pacific Detachment Iwakuni.

Inferno Crew, a motorcycle club from Yamaguchi prefecture, brought more than 100 riders to the event. Other groups that participated included the Bugz Motorcycle Club of Hiroshima and the Kurasu Moto Cycle Club, which includes a mix of Americans and Japanese who live and work at MCAS Iwakuni.

“People see bikers and often think of us as hooligans,” said Messner, who rides with Kurasu. “This is a chance for us to give back to the community and show people that we are not all crazy.”

Iwakuni local government officials reported two deaths and one minor injury from July’s flooding, which caused mudslides and road closures in the area.

Six homes in the city were destroyed and hundreds were damaged by water.

Trump visits areas damaged from Florence

Associated Press

HAVELOCK, N.C. — President Donald Trump sought to offer comfort Wednesday to families who suffered losses in Hurricane Florence, declaring “America grieves for you” as he arrived in North Carolina to survey damage left by the powerful storm.

Trump pledged to be with storm victims “100 percent” as they recover from Florence, which dumped torrential rains and caused heavy flooding that has required a massive recovery effort by state, federal and local officials.

The president traveled south Wednesday as the region continues to grapple with the aftermath of a storm that North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper said was “epic.” The death toll has climbed to at least 37 in North Carolina, South Carolina and Virginia since

Florence made landfall Friday.

At Trump’s first stop, Cooper briefed the president at a Marine Corps air station that sits among areas hardest hit by Florence. The governor asked for help “cutting red tape” to get his state the federal assistance it will need to recover. He noted that farmers suffered significant losses and scores of people lost their homes. Some 10,000 people remain in shelters.

“We will be there 100 percent,” said Trump, wearing a wind breaker and khaki pants, seated inside a hangar with federal and state officials. “All of the folks from the federal government that are around the table are confirming it.”

Trump praised first responders and offered comfort to residents who suffered losses in the storm, saying: “To the families who have lost loved ones, America grieves

with you, and our hearts break for you. God bless you. We will never forget your loss; we will never leave your side. We’re with you all the way.

“And to all those impacted by this terrible storm, our entire American family is with you and ready to help. And you will recover,” he said.

The grim aftermath of Florence, some of which Trump was to see Wednesday during stops in North Carolina and South Carolina, presented a challenge for a president who has struggled at times to show empathy in moments of national tragedy.

In a video posted on social media the day before his trip to the region, Trump praised first responders, offered prayers for victims and declared the storm “one of the wettest we’ve ever seen from the standpoint of water.”

Kavanaugh accuser seeks FBI investigation

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Christine Blasey Ford wants the FBI to investigate her allegation that she was sexually assaulted by Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh before she testifies at a Senate Judiciary Committee hearing next week, her lawyers said in a letter to the panel.

The lawyers wrote that Ford, who is now a college professor in California, wants to cooperate with the committee. But in the days since she publicly accused Kavanaugh of assaulting her at a party 35 years ago, the lawyers said, she has been the target of “vicious harassment and even death threats.” Her family has relocated, they said.

An FBI investigation “should be the first step in addressing the allegations,” the lawyers wrote in the Tuesday letter, which was obtained by The Associated Press.

The development came after President Donald Trump showered sympathy on his embattled nominee and as Senate Republicans and Democrats fought determinedly over who should testify at a high-stakes hearing on the allegation just six weeks before major congressional elections.

Trump has already rejected the idea of bringing in the FBI to reopen its background check of Kavanaugh.

Should he order such a review, it would likely delay a confirmation vote until after the election.

In the Senate, the issue of whether, when and if Ford might testify has ignited a furor, especially among Democratic women. Democrats in general are complaining that the process is being rushed, but some women are seeing a deeper — and possibly insidious — narrative, especially if Republicans go ahead with Monday’s hearing without Ford.

Republicans say Ford will have one chance to testify, and one chance only.

“Monday is her opportunity,” Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said Tuesday. McConnell expressed confidence that Kavanaugh would be confirmed, saying, “I’m not concerned about tanking the nomination.”

FEMA leader’s fate in doubt amid Florence cleanup

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — While Hurricane Florence barreled through the Carolinas, a different type of storm was brewing within the federal disaster relief agency tasked with responding to the fallout.

The fate of Brock Long, the head of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, was cast in doubt with revelations that he was being investigated by Homeland Security’s internal watchdog and a congressional committee for the possible misuse of government vehicles.

The watchdog, the inspector general’s office, has turned the review over to federal prosecutors to determine whether any

criminal charges are warranted, according to a person familiar with the probe. The person was not authorized to speak publicly about the investigation and requested anonymity.

Long, a well-respected emergency manager, says he is not focused on the probes.

“I am fully focused on those impacted by Hurricane Florence,” he said in a statement Monday evening after being asked for comment on the investigation.

But some emergency management experts say the investigations are a distraction for the beleaguered agency as it deals with the worst storm of the year.

Beverly Cigler, co-chair of a Hurricane Katrina task force set up by the American

Society for Public Administration, said Long has been working hard but that “any organization has to have active engaged leadership at the very top.”

“You don’t want your FEMA administrator to be under investigation that’s going to distract you somewhat no matter how focused you are,” said Cigler, a Penn State distinguished professor emerita.

Rafael Lemaitre, who was a senior FEMA official in the Obama administration, said the timing was troubling.

“For these allegations to emerge in the hours before landfall of a major hurricane is a huge distraction to the work the FEMA administrator is doing,” he said.

Long has not been asked to resign.

McDonald's workers protest harassment

Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — McDonald's workers staged protests in several cities Tuesday in what organizers billed as the first multistate strike seeking to combat sexual harassment in the workplace.

In Chicago, one of the targeted cities, several dozen protesters rallied in front of McDonald's headquarters while a plane flew overhead with a banner reading, "McDonald's: Stop Sexual Harassment." In New Orleans, current and former employees chanted, "Hey, McDonald's, you can't hide — we can see your nasty side." Other protests were held in San Francisco; Los Angeles; St. Louis; Kansas City, Mo.; and Durham, N.C. The targeted restaurants kept serving food, with organizers saying the goal was not to shut them down.

Protesters demanded McDonald's require anti-harassment training for managers and employees. They also want a national committee formed to address sexual harassment, made up of workers, managers and leaders of women's groups.

McDonald's declined to comment on the protests, saying it stood by a statement issued last week defending its anti-harassment policies. The company also disclosed last week that it will turn to outside experts, including consultants from Seyfarth Shaw at Work, an employment law training firm, to help "evolve" those policies.

Protest organizers called on McDonald's to drop Seyfarth Shaw, depicting it as an "anti-worker law firm." They noted it has defended The Weinstein Co. in a lawsuit over sexual harassment allegations against former Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein.

At the New Orleans protest, employees arrived at a restaurant with red tape over their mouths emblazoned with the #MeToo phrase. They pulled off the tape to chant their slogans.

Putin seeks to defuse downing of Russian recon plane in Syria

Associated Press

MOSCOW — Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday called the shooting down of a Russian reconnaissance aircraft by Syrian forces responding to an Israeli airstrike "a chain of tragic accidental circumstances." All 15 people aboard the aircraft died.

The downing of the Il-20 highlighted the dangers posed by the conflicting interests of various powers in the crowded skies over Syria and threatened the close security ties between Russia and Israel.

In an effort to maintain that relationship, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu quickly called Putin to express sorrow over the death of the plane's crew, blamed the plane's loss squarely on Syria and offered to send Israel's air force chief to Moscow to share information about the incident.

The Russian military said the plane was hit 22 miles offshore late Monday night as it was returning to the Russian air base in Syria.

The incident triggered testy exchanges of blame between Israel and Russia.

The Israeli military said its fighter jets were targeting a Syrian military facility involved in providing weapons for Iran's proxy Hezbollah militia, noting that it warned Russia of the coming raid in line with de-confliction agreements. It said the Syrian army launched the missiles that hit the plane when the Israeli jets were already inside Israeli airspace.

But the Russian Defense Ministry said the Israeli warning came less than a minute before the strike, leaving the Russian aircraft in the line of fire. It pointedly accused the Israeli military of deliberately using the Russian plane as a cover to

dodge the Syrian defenses and threatened to retaliate.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu called his Israeli counterpart, Avigdor Lieberman, to declare that "the Israeli side bears full responsibility" for the plane's downing and to warn that Russia "reserves the right to retaliate."

Putin took a more cautious tone, describing the incident as "a chain of tragic accidental circumstances." At the same time, he said Russia will respond by "taking additional steps to protect our servicemen and assets in Syria."

Netanyahu, who has maintained warm personal ties with Putin and traveled to Russia for Syria-focused talks, noted the need for Russia and Israel to continue coordinating their action in Syria. At the same time, he emphasized Israel would not tolerate the Iranian military presence in Syria.

Sen. Corker: Russia cheating on treaties

BY CLAUDIA GRISALES

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — A Senate committee chairman, several committee lawmakers and a top Defense Department official on Tuesday said Russia is skirting several critical treaties with the United States to limit its stockpile of missiles and other weapons.

Sen. Bob Corker, R-Tenn., chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said it is unlikely that Russia will adhere to its treaty commitments as it wreaks havoc around the world.

"We have significant problems with Russian compliance" with several treaties, Corker said during a committee hearing. "It should come as no surprise to any of us that Russia has been cheating on its treaties. (Russian President) Vladimir Putin's government has annexed Crimea, ... interfered

with elections — including our own — used chemical weapons to poison individuals on British soil and even purportedly hacked U.S. utilities. Given that record, he's not likely to let treaty commitments get in his way either."

The Tuesday hearing, which hosted officials from the State and Defense departments, marked the fourth such panel discussion Corker's committee has held on Russia since July. Earlier this month, the committee examined NATO's value to the United States, with a consensus that the military alliance remains critical to fending off Russian aggression.

On Tuesday, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee examined four key treaties with the Russians: the new Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or START; the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces, or INF, Treaty; the Open Skies Treaty;

and the Chemical Weapons Convention. All the treaties are aimed at the reduction of weapons, and Russia is not in compliance with most of the treaties, Corker said.

For example, the "Russian federation remains in violation of its obligations under the INF treaty," David Trachtenberg, deputy undersecretary of defense for policy, told lawmakers. "We have been more than patient and have provided Russia with ample opportunities to come back into compliance but to no avail."

The administration of President Donald Trump has determined Russia has violated the treaty, which was first announced in July 2014 under former President Barack Obama, Trachtenberg said. Trump White House officials have reviewed the intelligence and came to the same conclusion as their predecessors, he said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Authorities search for rogue rodent on island

AK JUNEAU — Wildlife officials were working to capture a rogue rodent sighted on a rat-free island off the coast of southwest Alaska.

Alaska's Energy Desk reported the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and local authorities set up a game camera and traps on St. Paul Island after a rat was spotted late last month.

The Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea have maintained a rat prevention program, helping to keep the islands rat-free for more than two decades.

Suit: Betty Crocker spoons made man ill

ME WATERVILLE — A Maine man is suing Betty Crocker and its parent company, claiming the company's red measuring spoons made him sick.

WGME-TV reported Greg Violette claims the Betty Crocker emblem on the two tablespoons came off as he used them to measure a mixture he eats daily. The Waterville resident says he became "very sick" and that a doctor determined it was from the spoons.

Violette is seeking \$250,000 in damages from Betty Crocker and its parent company, General Mills. General Mills denies the spoons were "defective" or "hazardous" and has asked that the case be dismissed.

Authorities pull globe from bear cub's head

WI BALSAM LAKE — A bear cub in Wisconsin had a Winnie the Pooh moment, but it wasn't a honey pot that got stuck on its head; it was a hard plastic globe.

Authorities rescued the cub

Sunday after a passer-by spotted it near Balsam Lake with the mother bear nearby.

The Polk County Sheriff's Office used a squad car to keep the mother away while authorities and two bear hunters worked on the globe as the cub was contained in a net.

Sheriff's Sgt. Brent Waak said the thick globe resisted pliers, tin snips and pruning shears. It finally slipped off after bolt cutters were used.

7 hurt when startled camel bucks at circus

PA PITTSBURGH — A startled camel started bucking during a circus when a child apparently threw a shovel at its feet, injuring six children and an adult and causing frightened circusgoers to flee the arena.

Two children and an adult were riding the camel at the Shrine Circus at PPG Paints Arena when it became startled. Authorities said one child suffered a broken arm; the other injuries were considered minor.

Ruthie Kester, a Latrobe resident who was at the circus, told KDKA-TV in Pittsburgh that a child threw a shovel used to clean up after the animals at the camel's feet.

The camel was brought under control within seconds, and the circus resumed.

Man charged in arrow assault on police

MN ST. CLOUD — A Minnesota man was charged with assaulting a police officer by firing arrows at three officers, striking one of them and prompting the other two to shoot the suspect.

Stearns County prosecutors on Monday charged Ramey James Olson, 31, of Alexandria, with three felony assault

counts, theft of a motor vehicle and burglary. Bail was set at \$2 million.

Authorities allege Olson stole a pickup in Osakis on Sept. 13 and drove to Sauk Centre, where he allegedly smashed through a garage door and entered a home.

Olson allegedly took the homeowner's compound bow and shot an arrow through the left forearm of Deputy Paul Orvis.

Cat knocks out power to 7,500 in city

LA NEW ORLEANS — A cat got into a utility company substation and came into contact with electrical equipment, knocking out electricity to more than 7,500 New Orleans customers.

Entergy New Orleans said on its website and in social media posts that it happened Monday morning.

Power had been fully restored by midday.

The utility said it is unusual for a cat to get into a substation or make it around protective devices. The company added that, when it happens, the animal doesn't survive.

Post office renamed for Army Green Beret

RI BRISTOL — Hundreds gathered for an official ceremony renaming a U.S. Post Office in Rhode Island after an Army Green Beret who was killed in Afghanistan.

Gov. Gina Raimondo and the entire congressional delegation attended the ceremony held Sunday to name the post office in Bristol for 1st Sgt. P. Andrew McKenna.

The 35-year-old Bristol native died during an attack in Kabul in 2015. He was posthumously awarded the Silver Star and the Purple Heart for his service.

Park reopens road though it's not fixed

MS VICKSBURG — A road overlooking the Mississippi River reopened in Vicksburg after being closed for more than a year even though landslide damage hasn't been repaired.

National Park Service officials said a recent reassessment by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers concluded Louisiana Circle could reopen to small vehicles and pedestrian traffic.

Part of Vicksburg National Military Park, the road accesses a Confederate battery that sat atop a bluff over the Mississippi. It was closed in April 2017 after rains caused part of the bluff to collapse.

School replaces title of homecoming queen

MI CHELSEA — A Michigan high school decided to stop crowning homecoming queens amid bullying issues.

A Chelsea High School Student Council letter said the school decided to stop the "outdated" tradition because of its competitive and stereotypical nature.

The change follows the high school's 2016-17 #WhyYouMatter campaign, which highlighted contributions by students and staff. Student Council members believed the homecoming queen tradition clashed with the project's message.

The school will instead hand out a new excellence award, which will be open to students regardless of gender.

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Some NHL teams going without captains

Associated Press

Ryan Johansen remembers how the Columbus Blue Jackets didn't have a captain until one day it clicked and everyone knew it should be Nick Foligno.

"There was just no doubt," Johansen said. "It's just one of those things you don't want to force. You don't want to rush. You don't want to regret. Once someone is a very clear option to being named captain, then it's usually done."

For more than a century, NHL teams have named one player the captain, equipment managers stitched a "C" on his jersey and, if all went well, he was the one who'd accept the Stanley Cup and lift it first. It's still a hockey tradition with special meaning at all levels of the game, but almost one-third of the 31-team league could go into opening night without a captain, a sign of the times that it's no longer a necessity and certainly not a distinction that management and coaching staffs want to jump into without a lot of thought.

It's a hot topic right now in

Toronto, where the Maple Leafs haven't had a captain since trading Dion Phaneuf in early 2016 and are in no hurry to designate one. Longtime Islanders captain John Tavares and 2016 top pick Auston Matthews are the leading candidates, and each say they are fine with general manager Kyle Dubas waiting to make a decision.

"It's very important to have a captain, but I also think the way Kyle's handling it is the right way to do it because it doesn't really make sense to just throw somebody the captaincy," Matthews said. "It should have to be the right person. I think it's honestly been blown up a lot this summer with our team with, 'Somebody's going to get it, who's going to get it?' But I think in the end they're going to make their decision and it's going to be the right one."

Sometimes the decision is not to have a captain at all. The New York Rangers reached the Stanley Cup Final without a captain in 2014 after trading Ryan Callahan at the deadline, and the Golden Knights did the

same last year after not having a captain in their inaugural season.

"For us last season all coming from different places, different teams, it was a good thing," Vegas goaltender Marc-Andre Fleury said. "Everybody chipped in. I think we had a good group of veterans who played a lot of games. I think all together we kind of took charge of helping try to lead the team. It worked out pretty good for us."

The Golden Knights lost in the final to the Capitals as Alex Ovechkin became the first Russian-born and just the third European-born and trained captain to win the Cup. No team has won it without a captain since the 1972 Boston Bruins.

"That tells you something," said Minnesota's Eric Staal, who was captain of the Carolina Hurricanes for six seasons. "Sometimes it can be overblown with saying you really have to have one or this player can't handle this or that. I don't think players change — or they

shouldn't — if they have a letter or don't. ... I also think it's a cool thing to be a captain or an assistant captain. It's been part of the game for a long time. But every team chooses to do things differently."

Teams certainly aren't afraid to make big decisions with their captains. Within the past two weeks, Montreal traded captain Max Pacioretty to Vegas and Ottawa traded captain Erik Karlsson to San Jose, Carolina abandoned its two-captain system and gave the "C" to Justin Williams and Florida promoted Aleksander Barkov to succeed Derek MacKenzie as captain.

The Islanders (post-Tavares), Rangers (after trading Ryan McDonagh last season), Golden Knights, Maple Leafs, Sabres, Canadiens, Senators and Canucks (after Henrik Sedin retired) all have vacancies, and the Red Wings are in a similar spot because captain Henrik Zetterberg's career is over because of injury. Consider them the AAA club because without a captain, three players are alternates each game.

Source: Sixers hiring Elton Brand as general manager

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — Elton Brand is in charge of the Philadelphia 76ers.

A person familiar with the situation says the Sixers have made Brand their new general manager, replacing Bryan Colangelo. Colangelo resigned in June as the 76ers' president of basketball operations after what an investigation concluded was "careless and in some instances reckless" sharing of sensitive team information on Twitter.

The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity Tuesday because the move had not been officially announced. Brand is expected to be introduced at a news conference on Thursday.

Brand had worked for the Sixers as vice president of op-

erations and also served as the general manager of the Delaware Blue Coats, the 76ers' G League affiliate.

Brand was the No. 1 pick of the 1999 draft by the Chicago Bulls and played two stints with the Sixers.

Sixers coach Brett Brown had served as Philadelphia's interim GM and said earlier Tuesday he wasn't interested in holding both jobs. Brown pledged the Sixers would name a general manager before the season started.

"This is not something that interests me. I do not believe in the role that I have as a head coach that it's tenable," Brown said. "We will have, to the best of my knowledge, a general manager appointed, announced by the start of the season. And it's not me. It was never going to be."

Hours later, the Sixers had their guy.

Brand played in 1,058 career games over 18 seasons with the Bulls, the Los Angeles Clippers, Dallas, Atlanta and the Sixers. He posted career averages of 16 points, nine rebounds, two assists and two blocks per game. A two-time All-Star and the 2000 rookie of the year, Brand was also the recipient of the 2005-06 Joe Dumars Trophy, presented each season to the player who exemplifies the ideals of sportsmanship on the court.

The person familiar with the decisions also said Ned Cohen will remain assistant general manager and Marc Eversley will stay as senior vice president of player personnel. They both interviewed for the GM job. Alex Rucker was promoted to executive vice president of

basketball operations.

The Sixers won 52 games last season and beat Miami in the first round of the playoffs before they were eliminated in the conference semifinals by Boston. Under Brown's watch, Joel Embiid and Ben Simmons have blossomed into two of the top young players in the league.

The Sixers were rocked when an independent review found that Colangelo's wife, Barbara Bottini, operated four Twitter accounts it investigated, and she admitted using private information to criticize the Sixers and rival colleagues.

Colangelo and his predecessor Sam Hinkie, who hired Brown, had the final say in player personnel decisions. Brown said he was looking "for a partner" in personnel moves with the new GM.

Hall of Famers threaten to boycott

Associated Press

A group of Pro Football Hall of Famers led by Eric Dickerson is demanding health insurance coverage and a share of NFL revenues or else those former players will boycott the induction ceremonies.

In a letter sent to NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell, NFLPA Executive Director DeMaurice Smith and Hall of Fame President David Baker — and obtained by The Associated Press — 21 Hall of Fame members cited themselves as “integral to the creation of the modern NFL, which in 2017 generated \$14 billion in revenue.”

Among the signees were Dickerson, who is listed as chairman of the newly created Hall of Fame Board the group has formed; Jim Brown; Joe Namath; Lawrence Taylor; and Sarah White, the widow of Reggie White.

There were questions, though, about how well-organized the group was. Two players whose names are on the letter said they were not part of the boycott effort. Another name on the list of 22 signees was Carl Ellard, but no one by that name has played professional football. Former Vikings defensive end Carl Eller, however, is a Hall of Famer.

“The time has come for us to be treated as part of a game

we’ve given so much to,” the letter states. “Until our demands are met, the Hall of Famers will not attend the annual induction ceremony in Canton. It’s well known that the NFL is celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2020, and while we are proud of our role in building this league, we don’t believe 100 years of player exploitation is something to celebrate.”

The strongly worded letter called out the league for paying Goodell \$40 million, saying “there are better uses for that money.” It also criticized Smith for his salary and the lack of a former player on the players’ association executive board. But there have been two former players on that executive board since 2009.

Jerry Rice, whose name is on the letter, said he isn’t on the Hall of Fame Board. And in a statement on Twitter, the former wide receiver said he plans to support the Hall of Fame and “looks forward to attending the 100th anniversary in 2020.”

Kurt Warner also released a statement on Twitter that said he wasn’t made aware of the letter and said his name was mistakenly put on it. He said he supports the efforts for better benefits for all retired players and doesn’t believe in boycotting the Hall of Fame.

Baker said the Hall seeks to help all players, not just those enshrined in Canton, Ohio.

“Many Hall of Famers have reached out to express their support of the Hall,” he said in a statement.

“While we enshrine Hall of Famers, our mission is to serve every player who helped build this great game. We guard the legacies and seek to serve all players and not just Hall of Famers who we serve every day.”

NFL players have received a pension since the Bert Bell Plan, named after a former league commissioner, was created in 1959. In the 1993 collective bargaining agreement, a 401K plan to which players also could contribute was established, and in 1998 an annuity program was created.

“There have been significant increases in the pension with every collective bargaining agreement in the history of this sport,” said Miki Yaras-Davis, the NFLPA’s senior director of benefits.

“The normal retirement age is 55 for former players, and those players can leave in their pension (funds) and at 65 they have almost a 300 percent increase. This is one of the few defined benefit plans left in the country. It’s a program which isn’t seen much anymore that defines the benefits at a certain age.”

During the 2011 labor dispute and lockout, one of the main issues was establishing a fund for pre-1993 players. In that CBA, a “Legacy Fund” was

established, with a \$620 million increase in benefits, with team owners contributing out of their share of revenues for the first time. The union and the league have increased pensions three times for former players since 2011.

But the letter calls the Legacy Fund “little more than cynical public relations ploys that fail to help those who desperately need it.”

“The total cost for every Hall of Famer to have health insurance is less than \$4 million — less than that of a 30-second Super Bowl ad, or about 3 cents for every \$100 the league generates in revenue,” Dickerson’s letter states.

“Paying Hall of Famers an annual salary works out to about 40 cents for every \$100 in annual revenue, a figure that will increase dramatically in the near future with legalized gambling.”

The disgruntled former players also took aim at the expansion of the Hall of Fame into a village that Baker has estimated will eventually cost \$1 billion.

Other Hall of Famers listed on the letter are Marcus Allen, Mel Blount, Derrick Brooks, Earl Campbell, Richard Dent, Marshall Faulk, Mike Haynes, Rickey Jackson, Ronnie Lott, Curtis Martin, John Randle, Deion Sanders, Bruce Smith and Jackie Smith.

Stanford gets Love back for No. 20 Oregon

Associated Press

STANFORD, Calif. — Stanford will get star running back Bryce Love back for this week’s Pac-12 North showdown against No. 20 Oregon but the seventh-ranked Cardinal will be without a key defensive player.

Coach David Shaw said Tuesday that outside linebacker Casey Toohill will miss the game against the Ducks (3-0, 0-0 Pac-12) with an undisclosed injury.

Shaw said Love was “100 percent” after resting some minor ailments last week when the Cardinal (3-0, 1-0) easily beat FCS-level UC Davis 30-10.

“Last week he was Coach Bryce, work-

ing with the other guys, telling them what he saw and walking around with a script,” Shaw said. “He still got his workouts in last week so he’s physically ready this week. This week he doesn’t need to coach anybody. He just needs to carry the ball.”

The Cardinal will be counting on Love in the tough environment of Autzen Stadium against a defense that has allowed opponents just 2.0 yards per carry and 77 yards per game on the ground.

Stanford hasn’t hit its stride yet after last year’s campaign that made Love the Heisman Trophy runner-up. He ran for 2,118 yards for the most of any Power 5 player, av-

eraged 8.1 yards per carry and set an FBS record with 13 runs of at least 50 yards.

Love ran for 147 yards and two TDs on 17 carries in last year’s 49-7 win over Oregon.

He hasn’t had as easy a go of it this year as defenses have loaded up the box to limit his production.

Love was held to 29 yards on 18 carries in a season-opening win over San Diego State. He fared much better in Week 2 with 136 yards on 22 carries against USC but has yet to break a long TD run this season.

This will be the first games this year the Cardinal will have a healthy Love and starting center Jesse Burkett.

Taylor's walk-off HR keeps LA in first

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Chris Taylor couldn't have picked a better time to launch his first career walk-off home run.

He hit a high-arching, two-strike solo shot to left field in the 10th inning, lifting the Dodgers to a 3-2 victory over the Colorado Rockies that extended Los Angeles' NL West lead to 1½ games on Tuesday night.

"In this tight division race that was big," said the soft-spoken outfielder who has struggled with his swing this season.

Taylor raised his right arm in the air even before he rounded first base, watching the ball sail into the cool evening air off Adam Ottavino (6-4).

"I had a pretty good feeling it was going long," he said.

Taylor was mobbed by his teammates at home plate as

they bopped up and down in celebration. A day after moving past the Rockies into first place, the five-time defending NL champions matched their largest lead of the season on Taylor's one-out drive.

"He really epitomizes what we're about as a team," manager Dave Roberts said. "Being prepared when called upon. It couldn't happen to a better teammate."

The Dodgers won the series opener 8-2 on homers by Joc Pederson and Max Muncy.

Dylan Floro (6-3) led a stellar bullpen effort, getting the win by striking out two in the 10th.

Dodgers starter Clayton Kershaw gave up two runs and three hits in seven innings. He walked five and struck out three while struggling with his command.

"I threw the ball OK," Ker-

shaw said. "Sometimes you're going to have to work through things. Obviously too much traffic out there."

Kenta Maeda relieved Kershaw and struck out the side on 10 pitches in the eighth. Kenley Jansen worked the ninth, allowing a leadoff hit to Gerardo Parra before retiring the next three batters.

"We've been sort of inconsistent all year long, so things are coming together at the right time," Roberts said.

The loss dropped Colorado 1½ games behind St. Louis for the second NL wild-card spot.

"We've got to score more runs. We've got to get more hits," Rockies manager Bud Black said. "This is something we talk about every afternoon when we get to the ballpark. We've got to press on."

Rockies starter Kyle Freeland allowed two runs and five

hits in 6²/₃ innings. He struck out four and walked four.

The Dodgers tied it 2-all in the fifth when Austin Barnes scored on a throwing error by third baseman Nolan Arenado.

Colorado took a 2-1 lead on Charlie Blackmon's 27th homer in the fifth. He extended his hitting streak to 11 games, currently the longest active one in the majors.

The Rockies tied it 1-all in the third on errors by third baseman Justin Turner and left fielder Taylor. DJ LeMahieu was safe at first when the ball went past Turner's glove, which allowed Garrett Hampson to take third and Blackmon to advance to second. The ball went into left field where Taylor couldn't field it cleanly, allowing Hampson to score.

The Dodgers led 1-0 on Matt Kemp's RBI single in the first.

MLB roundup

Yankees prevent Red Sox from clinching AL East title

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Neil Walker and some teammates pulled into Yankee Stadium at 9:30 a.m. Tuesday, only to turn right back around for home when New York announced a six-hour postponement.

The Yankees needed a jolt to get through the long, soggy day. Aaron Judge provided the first with his return to the lineup, and Walker helped finish the job.

Walker hit a three-run homer, Zach Britton started a game-ending double play on New York's third try in the ninth inning and the Yankees kept the Boston Red Sox from a bubbly celebration in the Bronx for at least another night with a 3-2 victory.

Batting from the left side, Walker golfed a no-doubter in the seventh inning off Ryan Brasier for the Yankees' third hit of the game and a 3-1 lead.

Walker dropped his bat, admired the shot for a moment and then pointed into the Yankees dugout as he jogged to first base.

"We didn't have many hits tonight," Walker said. "When you get a big hit like that, it can be uplifting. I was just happy to put a good swing on it."

Angels 9, Athletics 7: Kaleb Cowart hit a go-ahead grand slam in a six-run sixth inning before adding an RBI triple, and Los Angeles rallied past host Oakland.

Cubs 9, Diamondbacks 1: Javier Baez and Daniel Murphy each hit an early two-run homer as visiting Chicago routed fading Arizona.

Cardinals 8, Braves 1: Paul DeJong hit a two-run homer, Yadier Molina added a two-run single in a four-run eighth inning and visiting St. Louis won its third straight game.

Astros 7, Mariners 0: Mar-

win Gonzalez hit a two-run homer in a four-run third inning that helped host Houston eliminate Seattle from contention for the AL West title.

Rays 4, Rangers 0: Blake Snell became the major leagues' first 20-game winner in two years, pitching Tampa Bay past host Texas.

Reds 3, Brewers 1: Jose Peraza capitalized on Chase Anderson's home run troubles with a drive in the first inning and Cincinnati handed host Milwaukee its third loss in four games.

Phillies 5, Mets 2: Jorge Alfaro hit a go-ahead, three-run homer in the sixth inning and host Philadelphia boosted its faint playoff hopes.

Blue Jays 6, Orioles 4: Host Baltimore fell to Toronto, dropping its 108th game, a team record for losses in a season since moving from St. Louis in 1954.

Pirates 2, Royals 1 (11): Pinch-hitter Ryan Lavarn-

way drove in the winning run with a single in the 11th inning and Jameson Taillon struck out a career-high 11 for host Pittsburgh.

Nationals 4, Marlins 2: Stephen Strasburg matched his season high with 11 strikeouts and Bryce Harper tied a season high with five walks to lead visiting Washington.

Twins 5, Tigers 3: Chris Gimenez homered and Tyler Austin drove in three runs to lead visiting Minnesota.

Indians 5, White Sox 3: Corey Kluber struck out 11 in eight innings to record his career-high 19th win for host Cleveland.

Giants 5, Padres 4: Rookie Chris Shaw hit a two-run single in the eighth inning and San Francisco rallied to win on the road and guarantee rebuilding San Diego will finish last in the NL West.