

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Thousands flee deadly wildfires in Oregon

Associated Press

PHOENIX, Ore. — Deadly wildfires in heavily populated northwest Oregon were growing, with hundreds of thousands of people told to flee encroaching flames while residents to the south tearfully assessed their losses.

The number of people evacuated statewide because of fires rose to an estimated 500,000 — more than 10% of the state's 4.2 million people, the Oregon Office of Emergency Management reported late Thursday.

One fire approached Molalla, triggering a mandatory evacuation order for the community of about 9,000 located 30 miles south of Portland. A police car rolled through the streets with a loudspeaker blaring "evacuate now."

Inmates were being moved from a women's prison less than a mile from Interstate 5 in Portland's southern suburbs "out of an abundance of caution," the Oregon Department of Corrections said.

With two large fires threatening to merge, some firefighters in Clackamas

County, which includes Molalla, were told to disengage temporarily because of the danger. Officials tried to reassure residents who abandoned their homes and law enforcement officials said police patrols would be stepped up to prevent looting.

The local fire department said on Twitter: "To be clear, your firefighters are still working hard on the wildfires in Clackamas County. They are taking a 'tactical pause' to allow firefighters to reposition, get accountability & evaluate extreme fire conditions."

"We haven't abandoned you," the fire officials said.

Residents of the small Oregon town of Phoenix near the California state line walked through a scene of devastation after one of the state's many wildfires wiped out much of their community. A mobile home park, houses and businesses were burned, leaving twisted remains on charred ground.

Many of the residents were immigrants, with few resources to draw on.

Artemio Guterrez stood helplessly next to his pickup, surveying the rubble of his

mobile home. His children sat quietly in the truck bed and waited for him to salvage what he could. He found a ceramic pot with a smiley face on it, some charred miniature houses from a Christmas-themed village and a cross that formed when two pieces of glass melted together.

Guterrez, a single father of four, had been at work at a vineyard nearby when he saw thick smoke spreading through Rogue River Valley. He raced home just in time to snatch his kids from the trailer park where they live alongside dozens of other Mexican families. They got out only with the clothes they were wearing.

"I'm going to start all over again. It's not easy but it's not impossible either. You have to be a little tough in situations like this," said Guterrez, who had just returned from his mother's funeral in Mexico.

Entire mobile home parks with many units occupied by Mexican immigrants who worked in nearby vineyards or doing construction were reduced to ash in Phoenix and nearby Talent.

Oregon officials haven't released an exact death count for the wildfires.

California wildfire becomes state's deadliest of year

Associated Press

GRIDLEY, Calif. — The terrible toll of California's wildfires became more evident as a mother confirmed her 16-year-old son was among those killed when an inferno tore through several hamlets in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada this week.

Jessica Williams, who earlier pleaded for her missing son Josiah to call her, told CBS13 Sacramento that DNA confirmed the teen's death.

"He was alone, terrified and ran for his life ... my son was a good, smart, caring young boy that died alone and it kills me thinking about what he was going through," the TV station reported Friday. It was not immediately clear if the teen was counted among the 10 wild-

fire deaths or 16 missing persons reported so far by local authorities.

The North Complex fire near the small city of Oroville that exploded in wind-driven flames earlier in the week was advancing more slowly Friday after the winds eased and smoke from the blaze shaded the area and lowered the temperature, allowing firefighters to make progress, authorities said.

However, the smoke made for poor visibility and fire helicopters couldn't fly Thursday.

Throughout the state, red flag warnings of extreme fire danger because of hot, dry weather or gusty winds were lifted.

Only a day or two earlier, the North Complex fire tore through Sierra Nevada foothills so quickly that fire crews were

nearly engulfed, locals fled for their lives to a pond, and the town of Berry Creek, population 525, and other communities were gutted.

On Thursday, Butte County sheriff's Capt. Derek Bell said seven bodies were discovered, boosting the death toll to 10 in two days. At least four people with critical burns were hospitalized.

Deputies and detectives were searching for human remains as they made their way into devastated areas with a team of anthropologists from Chico State University, Bell said.

Burned-out and overturned cars, downed power lines and the ruins of buildings littered Berry Creek and nearby areas, the Sacramento Bee reported. One hatchback found on a dirt

road had three dead dogs in it, while a pickup truck had the remnants of a guitar case and melted CDs in the bed.

More than 2,000 homes and other buildings burned in the fire, which began several weeks ago as a lightning-sparked collection of blazes 125 miles northeast of San Francisco. The final toll is expected to be much higher. Damage assessment teams planned to begin a methodical search of the burned areas on Friday.

The speed and ferocity of the fire astonished observers, even those who remembered a blaze only two years earlier that killed some 85 people and devastated the town of Paradise, a few miles away from the current blaze.

Medal of Honor recipient recalls mission

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Gunfire ripped through the air and suicide-vest explosions rattled the ground as then-Sgt. 1st Class Thomas Patrick Payne peered inside the burning building where dozens of prisoners held by Islamic State remained locked in cells.

He knew he needed to move quickly or the hostages would burn to death, the longtime Army special operator said. He entered the building, exposing himself to machine gun fire, and with a set of bolt cutters, freed the prisoners from the jail in the northern Iraqi city of Hawija.

For his actions in the Oct. 22, 2015 raid, which ended with the first American service member killed by ISIS since the U.S. return to Iraq in late 2014, Payne, now a sergeant major, was scheduled to receive the Medal of Honor on Friday from President Donald Trump. The award is an upgrade of the Distinguished Service Cross that Payne was initially awarded in 2017. He will become the second living service member to receive the nation's highest honor for combat valor for actions in Iraq.

In an interview Wednesday, Payne, 36, struggled to describe his feelings about receiving the Medal of Honor, which he said should be credited to the troops

with whom he served on the battlefield that day and the dozens of mentors who shaped him into one of the Army's most elite special operators.

"It's a different feeling," said the veteran of 17 combat deployments. "It's hard to describe. You hear stories of other Medal of Honor recipients. And for me, I don't consider myself a recipient, I consider myself a guardian of this medal, and the legacies of my teammates will live on with this Medal of Honor."

That includes the legacy of Master Sgt. Joshua Wheeler, who was killed by enemy fire during the raid, and who posthumously received the Silver Star, the nation's third highest

honor for valor, for his own actions that day.

Payne was to receive the Medal of Honor on the 19th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the primary event that convinced him to join the military, as thousands of other Americans did.

He said Wednesday that he expected he would be thinking of the firefighters and others who rushed to respond that day in New York City and at the Pentagon and the other service members who have volunteered to fight since 2001.

"You think about them, you think about our country," he said. "I'll think about my teammates, you know."

DOD rescinds shutdown order for Stars and Stripes

By COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon will rescind its order for Stars and Stripes to cease publication by Sept. 30, according to an email sent to the news organization Thursday.

The Pentagon was also working Thursday to withdraw its request that Congress not fund Stars and Stripes in fiscal year 2021, according to the email from the acting director of the Pentagon's Defense Media Activity to Stars and Stripes ombudsman Ernie Gates.

The apparent decision comes nearly a week after President Donald Trump on Sept. 4 tweeted Stars and Stripes funding would not be cut "under my watch."

In Army Col. Paul Haverstick's email, he wrote Stars and Stripes would no longer be required to submit to the Defense Department a written shutdown plan that had been due Sept. 15. That plan would have detailed how the news organization would close by Jan. 31. Haverstick, the acting DMA

director who issued the original August order for Stripes to prepare to stop operations, wrote to Gates that he aimed to provide the new memorandum to Stars and Stripes leadership by the weekend.

"It's good to get written assurance from the director that the shutdown memo will be rescinded," Gates said Thursday of the reversal. "Beyond that assurance, it's significant that Col. Haverstick called off his direction that Stripes' publisher provide a detailed shutdown plan by next Tuesday."

Though Stars and Stripes retains its editorial independence and is congressionally mandated to be governed by First Amendment principles, it is part of the Pentagon's Defense Media Activity. The Pentagon funding, about \$15.5 million, makes up roughly half of Stars and Stripes' annual budget and is primarily used to print and distribute the newspaper to troops scattered across the globe, including in warzones such as Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria. The remain-

der of the newspaper's funding comes from advertising and subscriptions.

In February, Defense Secretary Mark Esper proposed in his fiscal year 2021 budget ending federal funding for Stars and Stripes, a move the news organization's leadership said would be fatal to the newspaper. Esper said at that time the savings would fund "higher-priority issues," such as purchasing modern weapons.

But last week with major news organizations publishing stories of Stars and Stripes' imminent closure, Trump took to Twitter to announce the news organization would remain in operation and "continue to be a wonderful source of information to our Great Military!"

Trump's announcement came as he fought off accusations he had disparaged American service members, including Marines who died in World War I.

He has adamantly denied those reports first raised Sept. 3 by The Atlantic.

Now, Stars and Stripes' fate

appears to rest with Congress, Gates said Thursday.

The House has already moved to fund Stripes at about \$15.5 million in fiscal year 2021, in a pair of critical Pentagon spending and policy bills passed by the lower chamber during the summer. But those bills — the fiscal year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act and the Department of Defense Appropriations Act — still must be reconciled with the Senate.

The Senate-passed version of the NDAA did not authorize funding for the news organization. The Senate Appropriations Committee has yet to consider its version of the annual appropriations bill and it has not scheduled hearings to draft that legislation.

Lawmakers said this week that it is unlikely the two chambers will finish negotiating the bills until at least November, meaning the Pentagon will likely begin the new fiscal year, which starts Oct. 1, under a continuing resolution, which is a stopgap spending measure.

Virus relief package blocked as prospect of another fades

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Senate Democrats scuttled a scaled-back GOP coronavirus rescue package on Thursday as the parties argued to a standstill over the size and scope of the aid, likely ending hopes for coronavirus relief before the November election.

The mostly party-line vote capped weeks of wrangling that gave way to election-season political combat and name-calling over a fifth relief bill that all sides say they want but are unable to deliver. The bipartisan spirit that powered earlier aid measures is all but gone.

Democrats said the measure shortchanged too many pressing needs. Republicans argued it was targeted to areas

of widespread agreement, but the 52-47 vote fell well short of what was needed to overcome a filibuster. All the present Democrats opposed it, while conservative Rand Paul, R-Ky., cast the only GOP “nay” vote. The Democratic vice presidential nominee, Kamala Harris, was campaigning in Miami and missed the vote.

“It’s a sort of a dead end street, and very unfortunate,” said Sen. Pat Roberts, R-Kan. “But it is what it is.”

The \$650 billion measure is significantly smaller than legislation promoted by Republican leaders this summer. But that version was too big for most conservatives, so the GOP bill was instead stripped back to focus on school aid, jobless benefits and help for small

businesses. That maximized Republican support even as it alienated Democrats, who say such a piecemeal approach would leave out far too many vulnerable people.

The result was a predictable impasse and partisan tit-for-tat as the congressional session limps to its pre-election close.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., predicted that Thursday’s GOP defeat would prompt Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., back to the negotiating table, as an earlier filibuster in March helped make the \$2 trillion rescue bill more generous.

“But (Thursday’s) bill is not going to happen because it is so emaciated, so filled with poison pills, so partisanly designed,” Schumer said.

Microsoft: Hackers in Russia hit campaigns

Associated Press

BOSTON — The same Russian military intelligence outfit that hacked the Democrats in 2016 has renewed vigorous U.S. election-related targeting, trying to breach computers at more than 200 organizations including political campaigns and their consultants, Microsoft said Thursday.

The intrusion attempts reflect a stepped up effort to infiltrate the U.S. political establishment, the company said. “What we’ve seen is consistent with previous attack patterns that not only target candidates and campaign staffers but also those who they consult on key issues,” Tom Burt, a Microsoft vice president, said in a blog post. U.K. and European political groups were also probed, he added.

Most of the hacking attempts by Russian, Chinese and Iranian agents were halted by Microsoft security software and the targets notified, he said. The company would not comment on who may have been successfully hacked or the impact.

Although U.S. intelligence officials said last month that the Russians favor President Donald Trump and the Chinese prefer his Democratic challenger, former Vice President Joe Biden, Microsoft noted Thursday that Chinese state-backed hackers have targeted “high profile individuals associated with the election,” including people associated with the Biden campaign.

Microsoft did not assess which foreign adversary poses the greater threat to the integrity of the November presidential election. The consensus among cybersecurity experts is that Russian interference is the gravest. Senior Trump administration officials have disputed that, although without offering any evidence.

Ex-cops seek own trials in Floyd’s death

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Attorneys for four former Minneapolis officers charged in the death of George Floyd say that each client should get his own trial, as the officers try to diminish their roles in the Black man’s death by pointing fingers at one another.

Prosecutors say all four officers should be tried together because the nature of the charges and evidence is similar and “it is impossible to evaluate any individual Defendant’s conduct in a vacuum.”

The former officers are scheduled to appear in court Friday for a hearing on several issues, including the prosecution’s request to hold a joint trial. Other issues that will be argued include defense requests to move the trial away from Minneapolis and to sequester the jury and keep jurors anonymous.

Floyd, who was in handcuffs, died May 25 after Derek Chauvin pressed his knee against his neck as Floyd said he couldn’t breathe and became motionless. Chauvin is charged with second-degree murder, third-degree murder and manslaughter. Thomas Lane, J. Kueng and Tou Thao are charged with aiding and abetting both second-degree murder and manslaughter.

Defense requests to dismiss charges won’t be addressed at Friday’s hearing. A trial is scheduled for March.

Friday’s hearing will also mark the first time Chauvin is expected to appear in a courtroom. He is in state custody and has attended previous hearings via videoconference.

Prosecutors say the case should proceed with one trial because the evidence — including witness statements, body-camera video and police department policy on use of force — is similar for each officer. Prosecutors say the officers also acted in close concert.

But defense attorneys are pushing for separate trials, saying they are likely to offer “antagonistic” defenses, and evidence against one officer could negatively impact another’s right to a fair trial.

Attempts at finger-pointing are already prevalent throughout court filings in the case. Attorneys for Lane and Kueng have argued that their clients were rookies, who were following Chauvin’s lead. Thao’s attorney, Bob Paule, has said that his client’s role was “absolutely distinct” from the others, because he was on crowd control and was securing the scene — while the other three restrained Floyd.

Chauvin’s attorney, Eric Nelson, also wrote that his client’s case is different. Nelson said prosecutors must prove Chauvin intended to assault Floyd, but they must also show that the other officers knew of Chauvin’s intent before it happened. As a result, he said, Chauvin will have to defend himself differently.

US to end virus screenings of some travelers

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The United States plans to end enhanced health screening of travelers from certain countries next week, and those visitors will no longer be funneled through 15 large U.S. airports.

Those requirements were imposed in January to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said the government will remove those edicts beginning Monday.

The CDC said the current screening, which includes temperature checks and questioning travelers about COVID-19 symptoms, “has limited effectiveness” because some infected people have no symptoms or only minor ones. Travelers go through customs only after the health screening.

The health agency said that of the 675,000 travelers who went through the process, fewer than 15 were found to have COVID-19 because of the extra screening.

The health agency said that instead it will focus on other measures, including a stronger response to reports of illness at airports, collecting passenger-contact electronically to avoid long lines, and “potential testing to reduce the risk of travel-related transmission” of the virus.

The extra health screening applies to people who have been in China, Iran, most countries in continental Europe, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Brazil. Most people coming from those countries who aren’t U.S. citizens have been barred entry to the country.

Arkansas

LITTLE ROCK — A Black couple who got into a fight with white customers at a Little Rock steakhouse who weren’t wearing masks and stood too close filed a lawsuit Thursday accusing the restaurant of discrimination and not enforcing coronavirus safety rules.

The federal lawsuit stems from a June 27 fight at the Saltgrass Steakhouse that was

caught on cellphone video and widely shared on social media. Shayla Hooks and Tyrone Jackson accuse the restaurant of negligence, racial discrimination and defamation over its handling of the confrontation.

The lawsuit says the couple was sitting in the restaurant’s bar area when a group of white people from a Louisiana tour bus entered and asked if they could sit close to them, despite social distancing restrictions. Arkansas allows bars and restaurants to open but with capacity limits and distancing rules.

The lawsuit says the restaurant’s staff didn’t intervene as the customers harassed and intentionally stood near the couple when Jackson said he didn’t want them sitting nearby because of COVID-19. The lawsuit says some of the white customers intentionally coughed on Hooks and that one punched her in the face during the ensuing fight, giving her a black eye.

Landry’s Inc., the steakhouse chain’s parent company, called the lawsuit frivolous and cited videos that it said show Jackson hitting people at the beginning and the end of the brawl.

California

SACRAMENTO — California’s typical turnaround time for coronavirus tests has dropped to less than two days, state health officials said Thursday, a mark that allows for effective isolation and quarantine of those who are infected to limit the spread.

Test results now are available from laboratories within 1.3 days on average, down from the five- to seven business days that officials commonly reported last month.

Two-thirds of test results are now returned within one day and 88% within two days, Pan said. The one-day average improved 13% since last week, and is down from a statewide average turnaround of nearly four days at the beginning of August.

Florida

FORT LAUDERDALE — Florida bars will be allowed to reopen at 50% capacity starting Monday, state officials announced Thursday.

At the direction of Gov. Ron DeSantis, Florida Department of Business and Professional Regulation Secretary Halsey Beshears issued an emergency order rescinding a previous order that halted the sale of alcohol at bars, an agency news release said.

Nevada

RENO — Bars, taprooms, wineries and breweries will remain closed in Las Vegas but can reopen as early as next week in the Reno-Sparks area under strict guidelines intended to prevent the spread of COVID-19, a state task force decided Thursday.

Drinking establishments in rural Pahrump were given the go-ahead to open after midnight at 50% capacity if employees and patrons wear face coverings.

The COVID-19 Mitigation and Management Task Force took Nye County off its monitoring list and officials noted the positivity rate for the virus in the rural county west of Las Vegas fell from 11.4% last week to 6.4% this week.

Re-openings in Washoe County can begin at 12:01 a.m. next Thursday, subject to task force approval of enforcement measures for mask-wearing and 50% capacity.

New Mexico

ALBUQUERQUE — Its possible restrictions on youth sports and training could be eased if New Mexico continues to make progress in limiting the spread of COVID-19, Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham indicated during an online briefing Thursday.

With the public health order due to expire soon, the governor said her administration will be taking another look at the current restrictions early next week. The review will take

into account the latest data on cases and transmission rates as well as the effectiveness of the state’s COVID-19 safe practices and what has been learned during the first wave of school openings.

Gov. Lujan Grisham and health officials said the seven-day average case count has reached one of its lowest levels in months, the rate of transmission is meeting targets and hospitalizations remain low.

Virginia

RICHMOND — The Hampton Roads region of Virginia is joining the rest of the state in Phase 3 of coronavirus restrictions after Gov. Ralph Northam said improved data allow for more severe restrictions to be relaxed.

The rest of the state has been in Phase 3 since late June. Initially, Hampton Roads was in Phase 3 as well, but Northam re-imposed additional restrictions in late July on the region after a spike in coronavirus cases and concerns that tourist areas around Virginia Beach were doing a poor job of maintaining social distancing and wearing masks.

The move back into Phase 3 ends restrictions that had been in place barring gatherings of more than 50 people and ending alcohol sales in restaurants at 10 p.m., among other things.

West Virginia

CHARLESTON — Marshall University in West Virginia will impose pay cuts affecting 650 employees due to the coronavirus pandemic reducing enrollment, the school’s president announced on Thursday.

The school faces a fall enrollment decrease of 4.6%, which is better than initial expectations, according to a news release. But the school has fewer out-of-state and international students, resulting in a revenue hit of \$3.6 million.

Marshall University had previously cut pay for 140 employees making \$100,000 or more annually.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Voter bares arms, and more, after shirt nixed

NH EXETER — A voter who was told she couldn't wear an anti-Trump shirt at a polling place because it violated electioneering rules simply whipped it off and did her civic duty topless.

The woman walked into a polling place in Exeter, N.H., on Tuesday's primary election wearing a "McCain Hero, Trump Zero" T-shirt. Town moderator Paul Scafidi told her she couldn't wear a shirt featuring a political candidate while she voted, Seacoastonline.com reported in a story that did not identify the woman.

No person "shall distribute, wear, or post at a polling place any campaign material," according to state law. People who are convicted can be fined as much as \$1,000.

The woman pointed out that another woman nearby was wearing a T-shirt in support of the American flag, Scafidi said. He answered that an American flag was not electioneering and that the "Trump Zero" shirt would have to be covered. So the woman asked if he wanted her to take her shirt off. She wasn't wearing anything underneath.

"I said I'd rather she not," Scafidi said. "But she took it off so fast, no one had time to react. So the whole place just went, 'whoa,' and she walked away, and I let her vote."

Motorcyclist killed in crash with tractor

NE ASHTON — A woman died this week after her motorcycle collided with a tractor in central Nebraska, the Nebraska State Patrol reported.

Ava Bratten, 61, of Ashton,

was one of two motorcyclists who attempted around 7:45 p.m. Monday to pass a tractor that was pulling a baler on a rural Sherman County road, investigators said. The tractor made a sudden left turn as the motorcyclists were trying to pass, leading them to hit the tractor and baler, officials said.

Bratten was pronounced dead at the scene. The other motorcyclist, Matthew Bratten, 54, of Ashton, was flown to a hospital in Kearney. The 16-year-old tractor driver was not injured, officials said.

Bioluminescent algae lights up parts of bay

VA NORFOLK — A bioluminescent algae has been lighting up the lower Chesapeake Bay along the shores of Norfolk and Virginia Beach.

The Virginian-Pilot reported Wednesday that the single-celled organisms form a chain and reproduce in warm water. The algae is present during the day, but becomes most noticeable a couple of hours after sunset.

When waves break, white caps appear bright blue. The turbulence creates a chemical reaction in the algae cells that interacts with the water molecules.

The name of the algae is *Alexandrium monilatum*. And it can be harmful to fish and oysters.

Troopers find trailers carrying relief meals

TN FALL BRANCH — Tennessee law enforcement officials located two commercial trailers loaded with nearly \$450,000 worth of freeze-dried emergency meals designated to help with

hurricane relief efforts in Louisiana.

Tennessee Highway Patrol troopers found one of the trailers off of Interstate 81 in Jefferson County on Aug. 30, the agency said in a statement. The driver, Antonio Eaddy from North Carolina, was also located.

That trailer was carrying nearly 30,800 pre-packaged meals valued at more than \$200,000. The vehicle identification number plate had been removed but a secondary VIN confirmed the trailer was listed as stolen, troopers said.

A second stolen commercial box trailer was located off Interstate 40 in Cumberland County but the driver was not found, officials said.

Town to consider sea turtle protection

SC HILTON HEAD ISLAND — Officials in a South Carolina island town are proposing an ordinance that would ban beachside homes from disturbing sea turtles by casting light from their properties onto the beach.

The Hilton Head Island Town Council is set to consider the proposal next month, The Post and Courier reported Wednesday. It aims to protect sea turtle hatchlings by allowing them to find a more direct path to the ocean without interference from light pollution.

The ordinance would prohibit beachfront properties from shining light onto the sand through windows, doors and outdoor fixtures, requiring them to install tinted windows, solar screens or light-blocking measures instead, news outlets said.

Property owners could also turn off such lights from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. during the May to

October nesting season, or in some cases, use different colored bulbs that are less likely to attract the reptiles.

Judge reprimanded for sending man to jail

KY FRANKFORT — A Kentucky judge has been reprimanded for sending a man to jail without a hearing.

The state Judicial Conduct Commission issued the public reprimand against Circuit Judge Robert B. Conley, The Lexington Herald-Leader reported.

The commission said in an order Wednesday that in Greenup County on Jan. 2, Conley told a man he should shut up after listening to him explain why he had not made child-support payments.

Conley did not conduct a hearing on holding the man in contempt of court or make written findings, the commission said.

The man spent three days in jail.

\$1M lotto win means dream home for man

MO O'FALLON — A suburban St. Louis man will get that dream home he's always wanted after winning \$1 million in a Missouri Lottery game.

The Lottery said Thursday that Kenneth Wilmes of O'Fallon, Missouri, won the prize playing the "\$300 Million Cash Explosion" scratchers game. He bought the ticket at Midwest Petroleum in O'Fallon.

Wilmes said his dream home is a house on a couple of acres. "We found that house last week," he said.

From wire reports

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Mahomes, Chiefs top Texans in opener

Associated Press

KANSAS CITY, Mo — Just about the only thing that looked familiar about the NFL's long-awaited return Thursday night was the sight of Patrick Mahomes effortlessly leading the Kansas City Chiefs up and down the field.

The Super Bowl MVP threw for 211 yards and three touchdowns, Clyde Edwards-Helaire ran through the rain for 138 yards and another score, and the Chiefs began defense of their first championship in 50 years by beating the Houston Texans 34-20 on Thursday night before a socially distanced crowd of about 17,000 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Travis Kelce, Sammy Watkins and Tyreek Hill each caught TD passes for the Chiefs. They have won 10 straight dating to last season. That run includes a come-from-behind 51-31 victory over the Texans in the divisional round of the playoffs.

"I'm proud of our players but I'm also proud of our fans. They came out there. They were loud," said Chiefs coach Andy Reid, who claimed he didn't notice some booing from fans during a pregame moment of unity involving both teams.

"Obviously, our players, both sides of the

ball and special teams, I thought they were solid," Reid continued. "For the first game there were some good things that were done, some great individual performances."

The Texans' Deshaun Watson threw a touchdown pass and ran for another score, but he also was under relentless pressure and was intercepted once. David Johnson provided the biggest bright spot for Houston, running for 77 yards and a score.

"There's a lot to fix," Texans coach Bill O'Brien said. "It's only one game. We have to improve pretty quickly. But it's only one game. We have to get back to work pretty soon and fix these things."

The world has changed dramatically in the seven months since the Chiefs hoisted the Lombardi Trophy in Miami.

Within six weeks, the term COVID-19 had become a part of everyday life, the disease killing more than 900,000 people around the globe. The death of George Floyd at the knee of a white Minneapolis police officer in May touched off the Black Lives Matter movement, which in turn has led to a summer of social unrest that has gripped the country.

Against that backdrop came an NFL opener unlike any other: masks worn by everyone from fans to the coaching staffs;

a series of videos raising awareness of social justice initiatives and encouraging the public to vote; and ultimately both teams locking arms in a display of unity prior to the coin toss.

To the relief of many, kickoff finally brought 4 hours of normalcy.

The Texans, who blew a 24-point lead against Kansas City in the playoffs, struck first when they marched 80 yards for a touchdown. The elusive Johnson finished it off by scampering 19 yards to the end zone for a 7-0 lead.

But just like that cold January day, the red-hot Chiefs overcame their slow start.

"We just trust whatever Coach Reid is dialing up," said Kelce, who finished with six catches for 50 yards and a touchdown. "They do an unbelievable job preparing us and scheming up defenses and we just trust what they're doing."

Watson threw a touchdown pass and ran for a TD in the fourth quarter to make the final score a bit more respectable.

"It was a little different but the fans did what they did for their home team and that was pretty much it," Watson said. "We just got to continue to do our job, find the rhythm, get guys on the same page and that's pretty much it."

No. 3 Williams knocked off by Azarenka

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Serena Williams already was struggling to keep up in a fast-paced U.S. Open semifinal when she stopped behind the baseline after a third-set point and leaned over. She held that pose for a bit, then clutched at her lower left leg and asked for a trainer.

While Williams took a medical timeout for a tape job for what she later said was an Achilles issue — her latest bid for a 24th Grand Slam singles title seemingly slipping away — her opponent, Victoria Azarenka, sat in a sideline seat, eyes closed, calm and composed as can be.

After a delay of about five minutes at Arthur Ashe Stadium, action resumed, and while Williams raised the force of her shots and volume of her shouts, it was Azarenka who finished off a 1-6, 6-3, 6-3 victory Thurs-

day to return to a major championship final for the first time in seven years.

"Maybe," Williams said, "I took a little too much off the gas pedal at some point."

The loss left her just short of the record-tying No. 24 yet again.

She was beaten in the finals of four of the preceding seven Slams, including at Flushing Meadows in 2018 and 2019.

"I mean, it's obviously disappointing. At the same time, you know, I did what I could today," said Williams, who has six U.S. Open singles trophies. "I feel like other times I've been close and I could have done better. Today I felt like I gave a lot."

With her 39th birthday a little more than two weeks away, the question will become: How many more chances will Williams get? She did confirm afterward she'll head to Paris; the French Open starts Sept. 27.

As for the Achilles, Williams

said she stretched it while chasing a ball during one of the lengthy baseline exchanges with Azarenka, but wouldn't blame it for the defeat.

"I don't think that had anything to do with it," said Williams, who repeatedly hopped on her feet at the baseline when play returned. "Ultimately, it didn't affect my play at all."

In Saturday's final, Azarenka will face Naomi Osaka in a meeting between two-time major champions who have both been ranked No. 1 in the past and have been by far the two best players since tennis resumed last month after a pandemic-forced hiatus.

Azarenka won the Australian Open in 2012 and 2013 and lost to Williams in the U.S. Open finals those two years.

She's finally back in a title match at a major.

"How is it different? I mean, mentally, I'm in such a different place. I think seven years

ago, after I won the Australian Open and stuff, and playing kind of consistently with good results, it was kind of I wouldn't say expected but kind of expected for me to be in the final. I don't think that was the case this year," said Azarenka, a 31-year-old from Belarus who is ranked 27th.

"But it feels more fun this year, more fulfilling, more pleasant for me," she said. "It feels nice. Nicer."

After going a full calendar year without a single tour-level victory, Azarenka has won 11 matches in a row. Osaka's streak is at 10 after her 7-6 (1), 3-6, 6-3 win over Jennifer Brady in a hard-hitting semifinal filled with fast serves and strong forehands.

"Going to be super fun," said Azarenka, who sat in to watch some of Osaka vs. Brady. "She plays incredible."

Rockets can't stop Lakers All-Star duo

Associated Press

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. — Anthony Davis was the biggest player on the floor, and the Houston Rockets had no answers.

Davis had 29 points and 12 rebounds, LeBron James finished one assist shy of a triple-double and the Los Angeles Lakers topped the Rockets 110-100 on Thursday night to take a 3-1 lead in their Western Conference semifinal series.

James had 16 points, 15 rebounds and nine assists for the Lakers, who outrebounded the Rockets 52-26. Alex Caruso scored 16 points and Rajon Rondo had 11 points, 10 rebounds and eight assists for the Lakers, who held on after frittering away most of a big second-half lead.

"Turnovers," Davis said. "We had too many turnovers."

That was one of the few complaints the Lakers could make after Game 4.

Russell Westbrook had 25 points and James Harden had 21 — on 2-for-11 shooting — for the Rockets, who got 19 from Eric Gordon and 14 from Austin Rivers.

The scoring margins were massive: Houston got outscored 62-24 in points in the paint, 17-3 on second-chance points and 19-2 on fast-break points.

"We know we're in a big hole now, but the next game is the game we've got to win," Rockets coach Mike D'Antoni said. "We'll go out and if we lay it on the line like the way we did in the fourth quarter, we'll be fine."

The Lakers were up by 23 midway through the fourth, well on their way to a blowout win. That's when Houston's offense woke up.

Westbrook made a corner three with 3:01 left, Harden got a steal and a pair of free throws on the next possession, and the Rockets put together a 18-2 run to get within 103-96. The Lakers turned the ball over on four consecutive possessions during that stretch.

"I think we did a good job

getting more aggressive, and that led to a lot more opportunities offensively," Harden said.

Harden was then asked why the Rockets were flat through three quarters.

"Good question," Harden said, later adding, "there's nothing we can do about it now."

The Lakers, on their biggest possession of the night, went to Davis — who was guarded by Gordon, who stands about half-a-foot shorter than Davis. It led to an easy score for Davis with 1:47 left, and the Lakers had a bit of breathing room.

Caruso's three-pointer off a pass from James with 34.6 seconds left made it 108-100, sealing the win.

"Obviously, we've got to be better," James said. "We've got to close out games the right way."

This is how easy things were for the Lakers: In the third quarter, James grabbed a defensive rebound, turned and fired a 70-foot pass — soccer throw-in style — to Davis, the ball sailing over the five Rockets who were jogging back on defense. Davis caught the pass in stride and laid it in for a score, the ball never touching the ground.

And this is how difficult things were for the Rockets: They went 4-for-20 from the field over a 16-minute stretch spanning from late in the first quarter to early in the third, getting outscored 41-23 and seeing their deficit growing from three to 21.

The Lakers won Game 3 by holding Houston to 38 points in the second half — and clamped down again in the first half of Game 4. It was 57-41 Lakers at the break, meaning Houston had scored 79 points in its last 48 minutes of basketball.

For context: The Rockets had 79 points in a two-quarter span on five different occasions this season. The stretch in the fourth made it interesting, but the Lakers never lost the lead.

"Overall, it's a heck of a win for our group," Lakers coach Frank Vogel said.

Radulov's OT goal gives Stars win over Knights

Associated Press

EDMONTON, Alberta — The entire Dallas Stars bench was yelling out to Joe Pavelski about what to do with the puck after a broken play in front of them only seconds into overtime.

Pavelski delivered, with a cross-ice pass to a breaking Alexander Radulov, who scored 31 seconds into overtime on a wrister from the middle of the right circle for a 3-2 victory Thursday night that gave the Stars a 2-1 series lead over the Vegas Golden Knights in the Western Conference finals.

"I was flying, no skating, on the other side of the ice, and it was kind of nobody there. (Pavelski) made a good pass, got into the zone, closed my eyes and shot it," said Radulov, later making it clear that he was only joking. "Come on, I didn't close my eyes ... He's a good goalie and there's not a lot of room. I was lucky to beat him."

Radulov's third career overtime goal was his second this postseason, and the only shot in the extra period.

"It's one of those broken plays that happen in hockey and we moved the puck up quickly, and Pavs made the right read," interim head coach Rick Bowness said. "The whole bench is yelling at him, 'wide, wide!'"

Anton Khudobin had 38 saves, including 16 in the third after giving up two goals earlier in the period. Vegas goalie Robin Lehner stopped 20 shots overall while his record postseason shutout streak ended.

Dallas was outshot 18-4 in the third period, but had the final chance in regulation with a 3-on-1 break. Stars captain Jamie Benn's wrister briefly shook up Lehner, who was struck by the puck that went over the pad and hit him near his left knee as time expired.

"I thought in the third we responded again, had a bunch of chances to potentially win the game in the last five minutes," Vegas coach Pete DeBoer said. "It was one of those nights.

They were opportunistic and that's what they are. Pucks right on the wrong guy's stick in the wrong spots tonight for us."

Lehner was back in net for overtime, and said afterward that he was fine. As for the game-ending goal, he said, "It happened pretty quick. ... Tough to judge right now."

Vegas tied the game at 2 with 7:14 left in regulation on Alex Tuch's goal that was challenged by the Stars, who felt there was interference against Khudobin. The goalie was in front of the right post with Mark Stone against him when Tuch's shot went over his left shoulder and into the net.

"Nothing I can say about it, I think I was out of the crease. That was it," Khudobin said.

The unsuccessful challenge put the Golden Knights on a power play, during which Khudobin made a pair of sprawling saves, including one when a shot by Tuch ended up under his left leg.

Dallas led 1-0 after Jamie Oleksiak scored on a breakaway with 17 seconds remaining in the second period, starting the offensive charge when he blocked a shot by Stone. Oleksiak took a pass from fellow defenseman Miro Heiskanen and stayed ahead of Alex Martinez before using a forehand, backhand move for the goal.

The puck went off the left leg of Lehner and trickled into the net just inside the right post. That ended Lehner's shutout streak of more than 171 minutes that had set a postseason franchise record.

Lehner had shutout wins in his previous two games, including the Game 7 winner over Vancouver in the second round, and Game 2 against the Stars two days earlier when he stopped 24 shots. The Golden Knights record had been 144:04 two years ago by Marc-Andre Fluery, still their primary goal until Lehner was acquired in a deadline trade this season.

Contact tracing hard for college football

Associated Press

A planned scrimmage at Tennessee last weekend turned into a scaled-down practice when the Volunteers were without about 35 players due to COVID-19.

Coach Jeremy Pruitt said seven or eight players were in isolation after being infected and another 28 or so had been quarantined after it was determined through contact tracing they had been exposed to the coronavirus.

"I'm really glad we're not playing today," Pruitt told reporters.

What remains of a college football season greatly pared

down by the pandemic is about to ramp up this weekend. All summer long, college sports leaders have said they expect disruptions for the teams that have plowed ahead — and that has already been the case with about a dozen games postponed so far.

Outbreaks can leave teams unable to play, not just because they sideline the infected but also because anyone deemed a close or high-risk contact is required to quarantine for 14 days. That's where contact tracing comes in.

Contact tracing is part science and part sleuthing. Team doctors and athletic trainers

are guided by local health departments and university protocols. Within conferences, medical staffs are trying to create as much consistency as possible in how to determine who plays and who sits.

Ultimately, it's a "clinical judgment," said Dr. Chris Klenck, team physician at Tennessee.

Differences in who makes those judgments and how could loom large over this season.

"It's important to us that we all have a level playing field and that we're all following the same protocols and procedures so that the perception that one team has an unfair advantage

is minimized and that we're all doing the same protocols and the same health and safety standards for all of our student-athletes," Klenck told AP before Pruitt revealed the Volunteers' predicament.

Start with the basics: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention says any person who spends at least 15 minutes within 6 feet of a person who is infected with COVID-19 is deemed a high-risk contact and requires a 14-day quarantine. High-risk contacts can also involve touching or being sneezed or coughed upon by an infected person.

MLB roundup

Royals rookie Singer carries no-hitter into 8th inning

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — Royals rookie Brady Singer allowed just one hit — a two-out single through an infield shift in the eighth inning — while pitching Kansas City to an 11-1 victory over the Cleveland Indians on Thursday night.

Making his ninth career start, the 24-year-old Singer (2-4) was four outs from becoming the 36th rookie to throw a no-hitter when Cleveland catcher Austin Hedges, who came in batting .148, bounced a single through a wide-open right side. The hit came on a full count and Singer's 116th pitch.

Maikel Franco and Adalberto Mondesi each hit a three-run homer for the Royals. Edward Olivares added a solo shot off Aaron Civale (3-5). Kansas City has won three straight since a seven-game losing streak.

Franco also had a two-run single, giving him five RBIs.

Braves 7, Nationals 6: Freddie Freeman homered twice, Dansby Swanson hit a go-ahead shot in the eighth inning and visiting Atlanta rallied from a 5-0 deficit to beat Washington.

Freeman tied the game at 6 in the seventh with a 443-foot, two-run drive to right-center off Will Harris. Swanson's solo shot off Tanner Rainey gave the Braves their first lead.

Angels 6, Rangers 2: Mike Trout hit his major league-leading 16th home run, a 449-foot drive into the left field second deck, and visiting Los Angeles avoided being swept in six games this season at new Globe Life Field.

Trout homered in the fifth inning against Kyle Gibson (1-5) for a 4-1 lead. Angels rookie Jared Walsh homered for the third time in five games, a go-ahead, three-run drive in the first.

Red Sox 4, Rays 3: At St. Petersburg, Fla., Rookie Bobby Dalbec homered for the fifth consecutive game and Rafael Devers also went deep and drove in three runs as AL-worst Boston beat AL-best Tampa Bay.

Devers hit a two-run drive in the third inning and gave Boston the lead for good with a seventh-inning single off Pete Fairbanks (4-2).

Tigers 2-6, Cardinals 12-3: Jeimer Candelario capped a

two-homer day with a two-run, bases-loaded single in the seventh inning to help visiting Detroit earn a doubleheader split.

In the first game, Yadier Molina, wearing uniform No. 21 in honor of Roberto Clemente, hit a two-run homer in the second inning as the Cardinals hit five homers.

Athletics 3, Astros 1: Sean Manaea carried a perfect game into the sixth inning on the way to winning his fourth straight start, Matt Olson hit a two-run homer and host Oakland beat stumbling Houston.

Manaea (4-2) struck out four and didn't walk a batter over seven innings.

Marlins 7, Phillies 6: Starling Marte hit a tying, three-run double off Brandon Workman in the eighth inning and Jorge Alfaró singled home the winning run in the ninth for host Miami in the opener of a seven-game series, the longest in a major league regular season in 53 years.

Alfaró grounded a single up the middle just past the glove of diving shortstop Didi Gregorius for his first big league walk-off hit, giving the Marlins their first walkoff win this season.

Padres 6, Giants 1: Jorge Ona homered for his first major league hit, Manny Machado also went deep and host San Diego beat San Francisco despite an injury to starter Chris Paddack.

Six relievers blanked the Giants over the final seven innings as San Diego won its fifth straight and stopped San Francisco's five-game winning streak. Paddack went two innings before exiting with a sprained right ankle. X-rays were negative.

Diamondbacks 5, Dodgers 2: Carson Kelly hit a two-run homer, Christian Walker added a two-run double and host Arizona earned a rare win over Los Angeles.

The Diamondbacks snapped a seven-game losing streak against the Dodgers and won for just the third time in 21 games overall.

Cubs 8, Reds 5: Willson Contreras had four hits to tie a career high, rookie Nico Hoerner added three RBIs and host Chicago overcame an early three-run deficit to top Sonny Gray and Cincinnati on a long, wet night at Wrigley Field.