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Free to Deployed Areas

Fighting edges closer to US advisers in Iraq

By MISSY RYAN
AND ERIN CUNNINGHAM
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — In Iraq's western Anbar province, more than 300 U.S. troops are now posted at a base in the thick of a pitched battle between Iraqi forces, backed by tribal fighters, and well-armed Islamic State militants.

The militants, positioned at a nearby town, have repeatedly hit the base with artillery or rocket fire in recent weeks, and since the middle of December, the U.S.-led military coalition has launched 13 airstrikes around the facility.

U.S. troops have suffered no casualties as a result of the attacks. But the violence has un-

derlined the risks to American personnel as they fan out across Iraq as part of President Barack Obama's expanding mission against the Islamic State group, even as he has pledged U.S. operations will not "involve American combat troops fighting on foreign soil."

In a sign of the risk, military

officials said American soldiers have been ferried out to the Ayn al-Asad base under the cover of night by helicopter — partly to maintain a low profile for the renewed U.S. operation in Iraq, but also to protect soldiers amid fierce fighting west of the capital, Baghdad.

Under Obama's plan to aid the

Iraqi government, the number of U.S. troops in Iraq is expected to grow to around 3,000 from a little less than 2,000 now. They are deployed not only in Baghdad and the northern city of Irbil, but in recent weeks have been sent to Anbar and training sites flanking the capital.

SEE IRAQ ON PAGE 2



RELUCTANT TO RETURN

Options limited for millions of Afghans displaced by war

Page 10

BY THE NUMBERS

2.5 MILLION

Afghan refugees around the world

782,162

Internally displaced persons

5.8 MILLION

Afghan refugees who have returned since 2002

\$200

Average grant provided to returning refugees by the U.N.

SOURCE: United Nations and the Norwegian Refugee Council

An Afghan girl plays in the dirt at a camp in Kabul, Afghanistan, for refugees who have returned from Pakistan.

JOHN SMITH/Stars and Stripes



2014

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A year of adventure, exploration in gaming

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2014 was wonderful, strange on big screen

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MILITARY

Green Berets won't be punished for Afghan friendly fire incident

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College football playoffs: Ducks to duke it out with Buckeyes » Back page

QUOTE OF THE DAY

"I can feel the coldness they are feeling now."

— Jiang Hui, whose mother was on flight Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, which disappeared March 8, on feeling sympathy for the relatives of those lost aboard AirAsia Flight 8501 which crashed Sunday

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COMING SOON



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WAR ON TERRORISM

Iraq: Analyst says militants may seek to pin forces in base

FROM FRONT PAGE

Overall, they make up a tiny share of the force of more than 160,000 that had been deployed in Iraq at the height of the 2003-2011 war. But U.S. military officials acknowledge Iraq remains a "dangerous neighborhood in places," as a spokesman for U.S. Central Command put it.

"We are aware of those risks, and we are taking appropriate measures to mitigate them," said Col. Patrick Ryder.

While U.S. commanders have suggested the on-the-ground U.S. activities might expand, troops are now limited to advising local commanders and retraining some of Iraq's army. They are confined to military headquarters or training bases at four sites.

Those sites include al-Asad in Anbar, the largely Sunni province that has been particularly volatile and provided a foothold for the Islamic State's rise. Militants now control much of the province, including the city of Fallujah and the town of Hit.

If Anbar falls, it would expose Baghdad to even greater risk, allowing militants to more easily traffic reinforcements and weaponry in from neighboring Syria.

U.S. and allied warplanes have sought to counter that threat from the air, launching recent strikes against militant positions around al-Asad and other parts of Anbar.

Suleiman al-Kubbaisi, a spokesman for Anbar's provincial council, said Iraqi forces were now battling to reclaim areas around Baghdad, a town about 10 miles from al-Asad. In the meantime, he said, those areas were being used as launching pads for militants to fire artillery and rockets at the base where Americans are stationed.

Sheikh Naeem al-Gaoud, a tribal elder of the Albu Nimr tribe in Anbar, said Islamic State militants were dangerously close to the base and to Iraqis who lived nearby. He called for additional airstrikes and American operations to defend Anbar.

"There is definitely more activity in this area than there was

before," he said. "If (militants) had the chance, they would attack Ayn al-Asad."

But Jessica Lewis McFate, an analyst with the Institute for the Study of War in Washington, said militants appeared to be focusing their efforts on ensuring Iraqi forces cannot use the base to block their attempts to capture other, more strategic parts of Anbar.

Al-Asad lies between areas under Islamic State control, into which the group will eventually have to press if it will be able to conquer the province. Militants are still fighting for Ramadi, another important city. Iraqi forces so far have been able to defend other strategic areas, such as the Haditha dam.

"The militants' goal is "not necessarily to try to overrun the base, but to try to pin forces in that gift," Lewis McFate said.

A U.S. defense official said artillery or rocket attacks on al-Asad had been "very sporadic and ineffective." U.S. and Iraqi officials said many landed out-

side the base.

Such attacks are far from unusual in Iraq. They were a daily occurrence for much of the 2003-2011 war, as militants rained projectiles on the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad's Green Zone and military bases across the country.

Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said this fall he expected the Islamic State also would launch such indirect attacks on Baghdad.

In order to minimize such risks, security is being enhanced at the other training locations where U.S. and allied troops will be stationed, the official said. Iraqi forces will provide security at the training sites, which also include facilities north and south of the capital.

Much of Iraq's military collapsed in June when soldiers abandoned their posts to escape the Islamic State advance. Some Iraqi troops fled another Anbar base earlier this fall during an Islamic State assault.



HADI MIZBAN/AP

Marking new year in Iraq

Iraqi Christians pray during New Year's Mass at the Chaldean Mar Gorges Church in Baghdad. In Iraq's war-scarred capital, authorities ordered the overnight curfew in force for more than a decade to be lifted for one night to allow the city's revelers to stay out late on the streets. Traffic was unusually heavy starting shortly after sunset and authorities closed commercial streets to vehicles in the city's center as a precaution against possible suicide bombings by Islamic State group militants.

Coalition jets pound militant stronghold

BEIRUT — U.S.-led coalition warplanes carried out more than a dozen airstrikes overnight in and around the Islamic State group's de facto capital in northeastern Syria, three activist groups said Friday.

The air raids on the outskirts of Raqqa were the heaviest coalition strikes on the city along the Euphrates River since Islamic State group militants captured a Jordanian pilot after his F-16 jet went down near the city on Dec. 24.

The anti-Islamic State activist group called Raqqa is Silently Being Slaughtered reported on Friday at least 13 coalition strikes. It said the Furoussiyeh area and the Division 17 military base were among the targets hit.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights and the Local Coordination Committees activist collective also confirmed the air raids.

There was no immediate word on casualties.

From The Associated Press



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MILITARY

No punishment in Afghan friendly fire deaths

By JON HARPER
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The commander of U.S. Army Special Operations Command won't punish two Special Forces soldiers involved in friendly-fire deaths in Afghanistan earlier this year, according to officials.

Five American soldiers and their Afghan counterpart were killed June 9 when an Air Force B-1 Lancer dropped guided bombs on their position after they were misidentified as Taliban fighters.

American special operators, conventional troops and Afghan army soldiers had been battling insurgents in the Arghandab district of Zabul province throughout the day.

Following a U.S. Central Command investigation, Air Force Maj. Gen. Jeffrey Harrigian, the investigating officer, blamed the deaths on a series of communication problems between the forces on the ground and the aircrew.

"Had the team understood their system's capabilities, executed standard tactics, techniques and

procedures and communicated effectively, this tragic incident was avoidable," Harrigian wrote in the executive summary of his report.

A redacted version of the report was released in September.

The report was forwarded to USASOC and the Air Force to decide whether disciplinary action should be taken against the people involved, including Army Special Forces Capt. Derrick Anderson and Master Sgt. Travis Zellmann.

"After carefully reviewing all of the information, the Commanding General of U.S. Army Special

Operations Command, Lt. Gen. Charles T. Cleveland, decided not to relieve the team leader and team sergeant of the Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha that was involved in the June 9th, 2014 friendly fire incident in Afghanistan," Lt. Col. Mark Lastoria, a USASOC spokesman, said in a statement.

Cleveland made his decision on Dec. 24, and the two were cleared of any wrongdoing, according to USASOC.

The Washington Times first reported the decision on Sunday.

Lastoria said "steps will be taken to significantly reduce the chances of this type of incident from happening again," but did not specify what measures will be put in place.

The troops killed by friendly fire were Staff Sgt. Scott R. Studenmund, 24; Staff Sgt. Jason A. McDonald, 28; Spc. Justin R. Helton, 25; Cpl. Justin R. Clouse, 22; Pvt. Aaron S. Toppen, 19; and Afghan army Sgt. Gulbuddin Ghulam Sakhi.

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CARLYN BYRNE/Courtesy of the U.S. Army

Fort Hood victims file new medal petition

By NOMAN MERCHANT
The Associated Press

DALLAS — Survivors and relatives of those who died in the 2009 Fort Hood shooting filed a formal petition Wednesday to receive Purple Hearts and other benefits they have argued are long overdue.

More than five years after an Army psychiatrist opened fire on dozens of unarmed soldiers and killed 13 people, many survivors struggle to find jobs or support themselves. Congress approved new regulations in December aimed at forcing the U.S. Department of Defense to reconsider Fort Hood victims for the Purple Heart.

Wednesday's petition aims to start that process. Lawyers for a large group of victims and family members entered the petition in an ongoing federal lawsuit they filed against the Defense Department seeking damages due to the attack.

Military officials have denied the award to Fort Hood victims, calling after the November 2009 attack an act of workplace violence, not terrorism. Advocates for the victims have pointed to gunman Nidal Hasan's attempts to contact a cleric that authorities have linked to al-Qaida, as well as statements Hasan made before and after the attack calling himself a "soldier of Allah" fighting America.

Hasan was convicted in August 2013 and sentenced to death.

The petition names the victims of the attack and describes each survivor's injuries and financial struggles.

Staff Sgt. Shawn Manning, shot six times by Hasan, still suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder and severe pain, according to the petition. Sgt. Rex Stalnakier, who helped pull soldiers to safety and was deployed to Afghanistan soon afterward, is "70 percent disabled and unemployable," the petition says.

Heading back to US

Servicemembers deployed in support of the U.S. effort to fight Ebola go through customs at Roberts International Airport outside of Monrovia, Liberia, prior to boarding their flight to the United States on Thursday. All troops will go through 21 days of controlled monitoring at either Joint Base Lewis-McChord, Wash., Joint Base Eustis-Langley, Va., Fort Hood, Texas, or Fort Bliss, Texas. The redeployment of the 450 servicemembers will not affect Joint Forces Command-United Assistance's capability to monitor systems built during the mission or the ability to respond to other missions outside of Liberia.

Pot use among soldiers down in Colo., Wash.

By TOM ROEDER
The Colorado Springs, Colo.
Gazette

Fewer soldiers are testing positive for marijuana in two states where recreational use of the drug is legal, an Army study of the issue obtained by The Gazette in Colorado Springs, Colo., has found.

The change in Washington and Colorado, where legal pot is available near large Army bases, is small. But it's the reverse of what military leaders said would happen in Colorado Springs with marijuana legalization.

"With one minor exception, the data is trending downwards, though it remains relatively flat

and the changes are statistically insignificant," Army spokesman Lt. Col. Justin Platt wrote in an email from the Pentagon.

In Colorado, the rate of positive drug tests for marijuana dropped to 47 percent in the fiscal year that ended Oct. 1. That is down from 79 percent in the same time period two years earlier, before recreational marijuana sales were legal. The number of positive marijuana tests at Fort Carson, Colo., dropped to 422 from 725 over that span.

Army brass said the drop is more of a sign of how the Army is handling legalization than soldiers being suddenly less likely to

smoke marijuana.

"That's a sign of good leadership," said Army Gen. Chuck Jacoby, the top-ranking soldier in the Pikes Peak region who stepped down as commander of U.S. Northern Command on Dec. 15.

The same downward trend was evident at Joint Base Lewis McChord in Tacoma, Wash. — the largest Army base in a state that also legalized recreational marijuana. There, the rate of positive drug tests for marijuana dropped over two years to 46 percent from 54 percent — a reduction of 131 positive tests.

While civilians took up the

newly legal vice in Washington and Colorado, the Defense Department has redoubled efforts to get pot out of the ranks. Signs at the gates of military bases in the Pikes Peak region emphasize that marijuana possession remains a federal crime, and soldiers caught smoking face harsh punishment under the Uniform Code of Military Justice.

Military leaders including Fort Carson boss Maj. Gen. Paul LaCamera leaned on local officials to keep recreational marijuana sales away from bases. Recreational sales were banned in Colorado Springs, Fountain and other communities.

NATION

Legal pot states face challenges

By GENE JOHNSON
The Associated Press

SEATTLE — A year into the nation's experiment with legal, taxed marijuana sales, Washington and Colorado find themselves wrestling not with the federal interference many feared, but with competition from medical marijuana or even outright black market sales.

In Washington, the black market has exploded since voters legalized marijuana in 2012, with scores of legally dubious medical dispensaries opening and some pot delivery services brazenly advertising that they sell outside the legal system.

Licensed shops say taxes are so onerous that they can't compete.

Colorado, which launched legal pot sales last New Year's Day, is facing a lawsuit from Nebraska and Oklahoma alleging that they're being overrun with pot from the state.

The number of patients on Colorado's medical marijuana registry went up, not down, since 2012, meaning more marijuana users than can avoid paying the higher taxes that recreational pot carries.

Officials in both states say they must do more to drive customers into the recreational stores. They're looking at reining in their medical systems and fixing the big tax differential between medical and recreational weed without harming patients.

In some cases, they are considering cracking down on the proliferating black market.

"How can you have two parallel systems, one that's regulated, paying taxes, playing by the rules, and the other that's not doing any of those things?" said Rick Garza, of the Washington Liquor Control Board, which oversees recreational pot.

The latest states to legalize marijuana — Oregon and Alaska — have different concerns, but officials there are nevertheless paying attention to Colorado and Washington as they work on rules for their own industry.

Alaska doesn't have commercial medical dispensaries, so licensed stores there won't face direct competition. And in Oregon, taxes on recreational pot are set at just \$35

an ounce, which officials hope will minimize competition from the medical side.

In Seattle, however, six licensed recreational stores face competition from medical pot shops that are believed to number in the hundreds.

"Am I afraid about medical marijuana dispensaries taking my business? They're not all my business. They are the industry," said James Lathrop, the owner of Seattle's first licensed pot shop, Cannabis City.

He said the dominance of medical marijuana and the black market is obvious in his clientele: It's mostly tourists and professionals who use pot occasionally and don't mind spending a little extra at a legal store.

Regular pot users have stuck with their old dealers or continue masquerading as patients, he said.

Reining in medical marijuana will be a top priority when the legislative session begins in Olympia next month.

The question, lawmakers say, is how to direct people into the regulated system — maximizing state revenues — without hurting legitimately sick people who use marijuana.



LAINE THOMPSON/AP
Cannabis City assistant manager Pam Fenstermacher fills in a reader board of marijuana available at the shop in Seattle.

Legal weed brings state tax boost

By KRISTEN WYATT
The Associated Press

DENVER — To see the tax implications of legalizing marijuana in Colorado, there's no better place to start than an empty park of land on a busy thoroughfare near downtown Denver.

It is the future home of a 60,000-square-foot public recreational center that's been in the works for years.

Construction costs started going up, leaving city officials wondering whether they'd have to scale back the project. Instead, they hit on a solution — tap \$3.2 million from pot taxes to keep the pool at 10 lanes, big enough to host swim meets.

The Denver rec center underscores how marijuana taxation has played throughout Colorado and Washington. The drug is bringing in tax money, but in the mix of multibillion budgets, it is a small boost, not a tsunami of cash.

Much of the drug's tax production has been used to pay for all of the new regulation the drug requires — from a new state agency in Colorado to oversee the industry to additional fire and building inspectors for local governments to make sure the new pot-growing facilities don't pose a safety risk.



LAINE THOMPSON/AP
Cannabiss City clerk John Golby, left, helps customers looking over a display case of marijuana products.

And estimates for pot's tax potential varied widely.

Some government economists predicted a huge boost to public coffers. Others predicted a volatile revenue stream that could spike wildly based on how consumers and the black market would respond.

In Colorado, where retail recreational sales began on Jan. 1, 2014, the drug has a total effective tax rate of about 30 percent, depending on local add-on taxes.

Through October, the most recent figures available, Colorado collected about \$45.4 million from sales and excise taxes on recreational pot sales.

That puts the state on pace to bring in less than the \$70 million a year Colorado voters approved when they agreed to a statewide 10 percent sales tax and 15 percent excise tax on recreational pot.

Voters set aside the first \$40 million in excise taxes for school

construction; so far, that fund has produced about \$10 million.

But adding fees and licenses and the taxes from medical marijuana sales, Colorado had collected more than \$60 million through October. Local governments can add additional taxes, too.

That's what led to additional revenue streams like Denver's \$3.2 million for a bigger pool at its rec center.

In Washington, where recreational pot sales began in July, recreational weed is taxed on a three-tier system as the plant moves from growers to processors to retailers. The total effective tax rate is about 44 percent.

State tax officials are just getting a look at the first few months of pot taxes, and the money is coming in slowly because there aren't many stores there yet.

State economists have predicted pot sales will bring in \$25 million by next July.

Lessons to share on pot sales

By KRISTEN WYATT
The Associated Press

DENVER — Don't worry about a federal lawsuit. But do worry about tax rates. Those are among the many lessons Colorado and Washington have to share from the front lines of America's marijuana experiment.

Don't be timid

Public officials in the pioneering marijuana states were flustered when voters made pot legal.

At first, waiting for a possible federal lawsuit, then trying to figure out how to monitor and tax a product that had never been fully regulated anywhere in the world, the states spent many months coming up with rules for how the drug should be grown, sold and consumed. The delays were understandable. But they led to one of the biggest disappointments of the marijuana markets — lower-than-hoped tax collections.

Don't get too excited

Both Colorado and Washington have seen tax collections fall below some rosy projections. The effective tax rates are about 44 percent in Washington and 29 percent in Colorado, with plenty of asterisks and local variances.

The states assumed that pot users would pay a steep premium to stop using drug dealers and have clean, safe stores in which to buy

their weed. But the tax rates have led to a continuing black market, undercutting the top argument for legalizing in the first place.

Months of delays for permitting and licensing meant that potential pot taxes went uncollected. And limited marijuana supply in both states has further driven up the price of legal weed.

Think outside the bong

Pot users these days aren't using the drug the same way hippies in the 1960s did. But Colorado and Washington weren't entirely prepared to deal with popular new forms of edible and concentrated weed. It took more than 18 months for Washington to begin sales of edible pot.

Colorado had regulations for edible pot already in place from the medical market — but it stumbled, too, when the edibles proved a lot more popular than officials expected and many first-timers weren't sure how much to eat.

Colorado has had to go back after the fact to tighten rules on edible pot packaging and dosing.

Think about the kids

It's an obvious consequence of legalization — wider availability for adults means easier access for kids. School districts in both Colorado and Washington have reported more kids showing up at school with weed. There have been more kids treated at emergency room for marijuana ingestions, too.

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NATION

Who would benefit if Clinton opts not to run?

By KEN THOMAS
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — It's hard to imagine Hillary Rodham Clinton not running for president again — and easy to imagine the result of such a decision: political chaos.

"It would be shocking," said Tad Devine, a Democratic strategist who is advising Sen. Bernie Sanders, a Vermont Democrat who is considering a presidential campaign himself.

Early polling shows Clinton in a dominant position. Outside groups have been promoting her candidacy for more than a year. The fundraising juggernaut, EMILY's List, is well into a foundation for the campaign to elect the nation's first female president. All that has left the potential field frozen in place and has locked down financial donors, endorsements and connections around the country.

But what if Clinton decided against another campaign? Those considered longshots would become instant contenders and others planning to skip the race would give it a new look.

Some whose political fortunes and plans for 2016 could change if Clinton decides to pass on the race:

Joe Biden

In any other year, the sitting vice president would have an inside track to the nomination. But Clinton's dominant standing within the party has marginalized Biden in early 2016 discussion. In a Clinton-free campaign, the veteran of runs for president in 1988 and 2008 would be an early front-runner.

Elizabeth Warren

The Massachusetts senator is a

favorite of liberal activists, some of whom are trying to "draft" her into running for president — even though she has repeatedly said she is not. Warren's populist economic approach and calls to rein in Wall Street resonate with many Democrats disappointed by the midterm elections and the gap between the wealthy and the poor. If Clinton decides not to run, Warren is sure to face pressure to fill the void.

Martin O'Malley

The outgoing Maryland governor has been a workhorse surrogate for Democrats, trying to build a network of financial donors — only to be effectively frozen by Clinton. Even without Clinton in the field, the Republicans' defeat of his hand-picked successor in Maryland — and sagging poll ratings at the end of his term — would complicate his

campaign.

Jim Webb

The former Virginia senator would bring a bipartisan record to the campaign: He served as President Ronald Reagan's Navy secretary. He is an accomplished author and decorated veteran, still carrying shrapnel from his service in the Vietnam War. He is independent and at times unpredictable, and his foreign policy outlook and outsider status could shake up the primary with or without Clinton.

Bernie Sanders

Few Democrats expect the independent senator from Vermont to make much of an impact if he runs against Clinton, but that has not stopped Sanders from courting college students and liberals in Iowa and New Hampshire. He

has maintained a large email distribution list, giving him a way of reaching activists, but is still more likely to shape the debate than to compete for delegates no matter what Clinton does.

Andrew Cuomo

When New York Gov. Mario Cuomo declined to seek the White House in 1991 after a lengthy de-liberation, the vacuum helped a relatively unknown Arkansas governor named Bill Clinton. If Hillary Rodham Clinton decides not to run, it could give his son, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, an opening to jump into a race he does not plan to contest. The second-term governor has built a record of accomplishments on marriage equality, gun control and, last month, banned hydraulic fracturing in New York — a move cheered by environmentalists.

Schools vie for Obama library site

The Associated Press

HONOLULU — President Barack Obama has preached economic opportunity and equal access to education as cornerstones of the legacy he wants to leave behind. But in the contest to host his presidential library, two public universities that serve needy communities fear the playing field has been tilted against them by a pair of elite, private schools with seemingly endless money.

As Obama weighs a decision he'll announce within months, the University of Hawaii and the University of Illinois at Chicago are struggling to offer the up-front resources needed to offset the massive cost of building the library and presidential museum, expected to run close to half a billion dollars. The other two schools in the running, Columbia University and the University of Chicago, are both top-10 schools with a combined endowment of more than \$15 billion.

The Obamas are expected to raise much — but not all — of the money themselves, so a university's ability to contribute will be a major factor. The Barack Obama Foundation, which is screening proposals and will recommend a winner to Obama, has asked each school in the running for explicit details about what financial and other resources they can bring to bear.

"Look, when it comes to raw fundraising prowess, we're not in a position to compete with New York and Chicago," said Sen. Brian Schatz, D-Hawaii. "We bring different assets to the table. But if the question is who can raise more money, Honolulu's going to come in third."



Jim McKNIGHT/AP

Then-New York Gov. Mario Cuomo speaks during a news conference at the Capitol in Albany, N.Y., with the Rev. Jesse Jackson in 1988.

Ex-NY Governor Mario Cuomo dies

The Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. — Mario Cuomo had a loud and liberal voice that inspired a generation of politicians to turn to public service, and a story of humble beginnings that he wove into calls for social justice during his three terms as New York governor and years as a national figure and hesitant presidential candidate.

Cuomo died Thursday of natural causes due to heart failure, just hours after his son Andrew began his second term as New York's chief executive. He was 82.

The son of Italian immigrants, Mario Cuomo played minor league baseball before embarking on a legal and political career. His oratory and his dedication to progressive policies made him a political star, but despite calls to seek the White House, he never made a run for president.

Hours before his father's death, the younger Cuomo delivered an inaugural address in which he honored the Democratic stalwart. "He is in the heart and mind of every person who is here," An-

drew Cuomo said. "He is here and he is here, and his inspiration and his legacy and his experience is what has brought this state to this point. So let's give him a round of applause."

President Barack Obama telephoned Cuomo on Thursday and offered his condolences. In a statement, the president called Mario Cuomo "a determined champion of progressive values, and an unflinching voice for tolerance, inclusiveness, fairness, dignity, and opportunity."

Cuomo served as New York governor from 1983 through 1994 and became nationally celebrated for his ability to blend the story of his humble upbringing with ringing calls for social justice.

Cuomo and his wife, Matilda, had three daughters and two sons. Andrew was New York's attorney general before becoming governor. His other son, Chris, is a CNN newscaster. Daughter Maria married designer Kenneth Cole. The other two daughters are Dr. Margaret I. Cuomo and Madeline Cuomo O'Donohue.

GOP legislators thwart bids to expand Medicaid

By CHARLES BABINGTON
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Governors across the political spectrum are hitting a roadblock in their bids to expand Medicaid with federal funds: Republican legislators who adamantly oppose "Obamacare."

While some of these governors, themselves, have criticized the president's health care law in general, they've come to see one component — Medicaid expansion — as too generous to reject. But they're battling conservative lawmakers who say it's better to turn down billions of federal dollars than to expand Medicaid under the 2010 law.

Partisan politics have driven states' Medicaid decisions ever since the Supreme Court ruled in 2012 that expansion was optional, not mandatory, under the new law. Within months, every Democratic governor agreed to expand Medicaid (although Republican legislatures blocked a few of those efforts).

Only nine states with Republican governors accepted the offer.

Medicaid, the health insurance program for low-income and disabled people, covers about 65 million Americans, more than one in five. The federal government will pay the full expansion cost for the

first three years, and gradually will reduce the subsidy to 90 percent. That's more than the traditional Medicaid federal match to states.

The law expanded Medicaid eligibility to adults with annual incomes up to 138 percent of the federal poverty level. That will qualify an individual making less than \$16,105, and a family of four earning less than \$32,913.

So far, 27 states have agreed to expand Medicaid. But several more, including some with Republican governors, now want in. These governors note that their residents pay the federal taxes that fund expansions, so declining to participate amounts to subsidizing other states without receiving benefits.

Several Republican governors and one independent are meeting Republican legislative resistance to their expansion proposals. Some have tried to use conservative provisions by adding "free enterprise" provisions, which require federal approval.

Perhaps the most aggressive GOP governor is Bill Haslam of Tennessee, who won re-election in November. Meeting with newspapers and others, Haslam now says Medicaid expansion is "morally and fiscally the right thing to do."

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NATION

2 officers hurt in shootout in W.Va.

By JONATHAN MATTISE
The Associated Press

CHARLESTON, W.Va. — Two West Virginia police officers were wounded in a New Year's Day shootout after a traffic stop involving a stolen SUV and a truck with two bodies inside, authorities said.

The two Lewisburg officers pulled over an SUV at about 4 p.m. Thursday on a highway outside of the city, Lt. Michael Baylous, chief of the West Virginia State Police, said in a news release. The SUV had a North Carolina license plate that showed it had been stolen, according to police.

During the traffic stop, the second car — a truck — pulled over nearby.

As the officers conducted the stop, the driver of the truck shot at them with a handgun, wounding both officers, Baylous said. One officer returned fire, wounding the suspect in the leg.

Baylous said the driver of the SUV fled the scene ahead of him, but later turned himself in without incident. The driver of the truck also fled and was eventually taken into custody by the Greenbrier County Sheriff's Department, he said.

Authorities identified the suspects as Eric Campbell, 21, and Edward Campbell, 54, of Texas. Police said they reported that they're father and son. Police say that Edward Campbell was the driver of the truck and the wounded shooter.

During their search of the vehicles, authorities found two recently deceased bodies under a mattress in the bed of the truck, according to police.

State police did not immediately identify the victims, but North Carolina's Orange County Sheriff Brindell B. Wilkins Jr. told Raleigh TV station WRAL that the bodies were those of Jerome Faulkner, 73, and his wife, Dora Faulkner, 62.

The sheriff told the station that the two suspects burst into the Faulkners' home near Oak Hill on Thursday morning, set the house on fire and took the couple and their SUV.

Wilkins said it was not immediately clear why the two were targeted or whether they were killed in the initial attack or sometime later.

The Associated Press could not immediately reach Wilkins early Friday.

The two Lewisburg officers and the shooting suspect were being treated for injuries that were life-threatening. Donna Hinkle, administrator of the Greenbrier County 911 center, told the AP on Thursday.

The two suspects will be charged with malicious assault and attempted murder of a police officer in Greenbrier County, according to the news release.



LENNY IGONZALEZ/AP

California Highway Patrol officers Armando Garcia, right, and Ray Patton explain to immigrants the process of getting a driver's license during an information session at the Mexican Consulate in San Diego.

Calif. accepts immigrant applications for licenses

By AMY TAXIN
The Associated Press

SANTA ANA, Calif. — California on Friday started taking drivers' license applications from the nation's largest population of immigrants in the country illegally.

The state Department of Motor Vehicles expects 1.4 million people will seek a license in the first three years of a program aimed at boosting road safety and making immigrants' lives easier.

California officials say they can't predict how many people will line up immediately to apply, but the number of people making appointments for a license more than doubled when immigrants were allowed to sign up. Appointments are required to apply for a license except at four newly created DMV offices.

California is one of 10 states that now provide licenses to im-

migrants in the country illegally. The licenses issued to immigrants without legal status will include a distinctive marking and are not considered a valid form of federal identification.

Immigrants in the country illegally have not been allowed to apply for a driver's license in California since the state began requiring proof of legal presence during the 1990s.

Immigrant advocates have cheered the licenses as a way to integrate immigrants who must drive to work and shuttle children to school. But critics have questioned state officials' ability to verify the identity of foreign applicants, citing security concerns.

Law enforcement officials say the program will improve road safety because licensed drivers must be tested and insured. A DMV study of 23 years of crash

data found that unlicensed drivers were more likely to cause a fatal collision than licensed drivers.

State insurance officials hope the change will increase the number of drivers holding auto insurance, though some immigrants say they have always held insurance even though they could not get a license.

Maritza Aguirre, 30, is one of them. She used to take a two-hour bus trip to work cleaning houses in driving-dependent Southern California. Now, she drives but lacks a license and fears her car might be impounded if she is ever stopped by police.

"For me, honestly, it is a blessing," said Aguirre, who had an appointment this week to apply for a license. "The relief of knowing they won't take your car is a big advantage."

Sheriff's office: Fla. man decapitates his mother

The Associated Press

OLDSMAR, Fla. — A Florida man is charged with first-degree murder after his mother was found decapitated outside their home on New Year's Eve.

According to the Pinellas County Sheriff's Office, Mario Gomez called 911 on Wednesday evening and told dispatchers that his brother, Christian, had killed their mother and cut off her head. Deputies found Maria Suarez-Cassagne's body outside the Oldsmar home near some garbage cans.

Sheriff Bob Gualtieri said Thursday that Gomez had planned his mother's murder for two days.

Gomez, 23, was upset with his mother because she wanted him to move boxes around the house, and he was jealous of the attention Suarez-Cassagne paid to his brother, Gualtieri said.

Gomez attacked his mother in the garage with an ax, severing her head, Gualtieri said. Gomez then allegedly dragged his mother's remains from the garage to the garbage cans.

Gualtieri told reporters that the

crime was one of the worst his department had ever seen.

Gomez then fled the scene, but he was arrested a few blocks away after another 911 call reported a suspicious person riding a bicycle in the area.

Gomez confessed to killing his mother, Gualtieri said.

Investigators recovered the ax, Mario Gomez, 27, was not injured.

According to the sheriff's office, Gomez had been diagnosed with schizophrenia and previously was held under the Baker Act. Gomez also had other arrests in Pinellas County for loitering and prowling, resisting an officer without violence and disorderly conduct.

Cleveland seeks outside probe of boy's fatal shooting

The Associated Press

CLEVELAND — The city is hoping to hand over the investigation of a 12-year-old boy's fatal shooting by police to an outside agency, as well as future investigations of all deadly use-of-force cases.

Michael McGrath, the city's safety director and its former police chief, has been in talks with Cuyahoga County officials for the sheriff's office to handle the inquiry, city spokesman Dan Ball told the Northeast Ohio Media Group for a story Thursday.

"We would like a different, outside agency to handle all deadly use-of-force cases," Ball said.

For now, Cleveland police investigators are collecting evidence and conducting interviews related to the Nov. 22 shooting of Tahir Rice. The boy was carrying an airsoft gun that shoots nonlethal plastic pellets when a rookie officer shot him at a Cleveland playground.

Surveillance video released by police shows Tahir being shot less than two seconds after the patrol car stopped near him. Officer Timothy Loehmann told the boy to put his hands up, but he didn't, according to police.

Cleveland Police Patrolmen's Association President Jeff Follmer recently told The Associated Press that officers had no way of knowing the boy was carrying an airsoft gun that only looked like a real firearm.

Man lying in road struck, killed by police

The Associated Press

GHATHAM, Mass. — A police officer responding to an emergency call early New Year's Day ran over and apparently killed a college lacrosse player lying in a road, authorities said.

Police said they don't know why Garrett Gagne was in the road or what his condition was before he was struck at 4 a.m. in Chatham. The officer, who has not been identified, immediately stopped and called for help when he realized he had hit Gagne, police said Thursday. State and local police are investigating.

Gagne, 22, was a senior government major and lacrosse player for St. Lawrence University. Police said he was from Longmeadow in western Massachusetts and was in Chatham, on Cape Cod, to celebrate New Year's Eve with friends.

The Canton, New York, university set up a memorial website to Gagne on Thursday. In a statement, St. Lawrence President William Fox said the school will hold a tribute for him when classes resume.

NATION

Sad song for piano stores as number who play dwindles

By DAVID PITT

The Associated Press

BETTENDORF, Iowa — When Jim Foster opened his piano store 30 years ago, he had 10 competitors selling just pianos.

When he closed Foster Family Music in late December, not one was still selling pianos in the Quad-Cities area of Iowa and Illinois.

"We did try hard to find a buyer," Foster said. There were no takers.

Stores dedicated to selling pianos like Foster's are closing across the country as fewer people take up the instrument and those who do often opt for a less expensive electronic keyboard or a used piano. Some blame computers, and others note the high cost of new pianos, but what's clear is that a long-term decline in sales has accelerated.

The best year for new piano sales in the U.S. was 1909, when more than 364,500 were sold. But after gently falling over the years, piano sales plunged more recently to between 30,000 and 40,000 annually.

Larry Fine, a Boston-based piano technician, consultant and author, said it's an indication of a changing society.

"Computer technology has just changed everything about what kids are interested in," said Fine, who also publishes a website offering consumer information on new and used pianos. "People are interested in things that don't take much effort, so the idea of sitting and playing an hour a day to learn piano is not what kids want to do."

Youth sports demands also compete with music studies.

"Children these days are being recruited for so many other activities, whether it's soccer, gymnastics or swimming," said Robin Walenta, CEO of West Music, a music retailer with a chain of

stores in Iowa and Illinois.

To succeed now, Walenta said retailers must engage families in music education. Her company offers an early childhood music program that starts with 3-month-old babies. A keyboard exploration program is available for youngsters until they're ready to begin individual lessons at age 7 or 8.

Foster Family Music survived because it took a similar approach, offering digital pianos and acoustic pianos with built-in electronics for student lessons and hosting thousands of students in large performance events, Foster said, sitting at a Wi-Fi and fiber optic-equipped Yamaha Disklavier grand piano.

'Computer technology has just changed everything about what kids are interested in.'

Larry Fine
piano technician

ensure the instrument continues to be a mainstay for children learning music.

"On a digital piano, they can practice with a harpsichord sound or a trumpet sound. It makes it more fun," she said. "Kids these days need that kind of interaction to be interested."

When Dennis Saphir recently closed his piano store in the Chicago suburb of Wilmette, it was the end of a business his family started six generations ago in Vienna. He took it over from his father, who brought the business to the U.S. during World War II.

Saphir said new piano sales are challenged by fewer parents requiring youngsters to take lessons as part of their upbringing



and a glut of instruments already in homes.

"We actually found ourselves competing with our own pianos that came back on the market and, frankly, nothing was wrong with those pianos," he said. "We had serviced them and made sure customers took care of those pianos. There were lots of really excellent pianos on the market for a fraction of what the new piano would cost."

The average cost of a new grand piano last year was just over \$16,000.

Well-maintained pianos can make music for 50 to 70 years, said Peter Stumpf, a piano technician for the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and Carnegie Mellon University, also in Pittsburgh.

Stumpf acknowledged new piano retailers are challenged by technicians like him who restore well-made used pianos and sell them at a fraction of the cost.

The piano's design, durability and new flexibility brought by technology helps keep the instrument created by Italian Bartolomeo Cristofori more than 300 years ago relevant today, said Joe Lamond, president and CEO of the National Association of Music Merchants, a music products industry trade association.

"Having all the notes laid out in front of you spatially is really an important way to learn music," he said. "It's why it's one of the most important instruments for people to begin on. That's not going to change."



PHOTOS BY CHARLIE NEIBERGAAL/AP

Top: Jim Foster talks about his career at his Foster Family Music Center piano store in Bettendorf, Iowa. **Above:** A sign alerts passing traffic of the store's closing.

Historians say Battle of New Orleans crucial for US

By CAIN BURDEAU

The Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — New historical research is shedding light on how pivotal the victory by Maj. Gen. Andrew Jackson and his ragtag army of frontiersmen, Creoles, slaves and American Indians was at the Battle of New Orleans 200 years ago.

Often, the Battle of New Orleans — the main battle took place Jan. 8, 1815 — is viewed as having been a great military victory, but inconsequential because a peace treaty between Britain and the United States was signed before the battle was fought.

"What I was taught in school, like most of us, was that the Battle of New Orleans was irrelevant," said C.J. Longenecker, a former National Park Service ranger who worked for years at the Chalmette Battlefield, a national park dedicated to the battle.

In reality, historians now say, the peace treaty was only as good as the paper it was written on.

A big discovery has come from British war records: a set of secret orders given in October 1814 to Maj. Gen. Edward Pakenham, the commander of the British invasion of the Gulf Coast.

The orders directed Pakenham to fight on regardless of any

peace deal and capture New Orleans, said Ronald Drez, the military historian who uncovered the orders. He dug up the records last spring during research in London for his new book, "The War of 1812, Conflict and Deception: The British Attempt to Seize New Orleans and Nullify the Louisiana Purchase."

This should put to rest any doubt about British designs in America, Drez argues.

Drez found the orders among military records in The National Archives at Kew in London.

It's old information that hasn't been looked at, said Christina Vella, a Tulane University historian and

Community College, about the orders.

In Chapman's new book, "The Battle of New Orleans: But for a Piece of Wood," he reaches similar conclusions to Drez. Both historians said Americans don't appreciate how close the British came to seizing New Orleans and radically changing the course of American history.

The British viewed the sale of the Louisiana territory by Napoleon Bonaparte to Thomas Jefferson as illegal. Great Britain "had never been reconciled with the loss of its colonies" in North America, said Christina Vella, a Tulane University historian and

biographer. "They planned to colonize Louisiana."

The stand by Jackson and his makeshift army, then, takes on new meaning.

Nearly 300 British soldiers were dead and almost six times as many were wounded, captured or missing after a multipronged attack by the British on the makeshift fortifications the Americans had erected on the two banks of the Mississippi River south of New Orleans. The defeat caused the British armada to retreat to Mobile and definitively ended the War of 1812, and the two countries never went to war again.

WORLD

Dozens of AirAsia victims recovered

The Associated Press

PANGKALAN BUN, Indonesia — After nearly a week of searching for the victims of AirAsia Flight 8501, rescue teams battling monsoon rains had their most successful day yet on Friday, more than tripling the number of bodies pulled from the Java Sea, some still strapped to their seats.

Of the 30 corpses recovered so far, 21 were found on Friday, many of them by a U.S. Navy ship, according to officials.

The Airbus A320 carrying 162 passengers and crew went down Sunday, halfway into a flight from Surabaya, Indonesia's second-largest city to Singapore. Minutes before losing contact, the pilot told air-traffic control he was approaching threatening clouds, but was denied permission to climb to a higher altitude because of heavy air traffic.

The accident was AirAsia's first since it began operations in 2001.

In addition to looking for victims, Search and Rescue Agency chief Henry Bambang Soelistyo said ships from Indonesia, Ma-



Members of the National Search and Rescue Agency carry coffins containing bodies of the victims aboard AirAsia Flight 8501 to transfer to Surabaya at the airport Friday in Pangkalan Bun, Indonesia. Several bodies were found still belted to their seats.

aysia, Singapore and the U.S. are scouring the ocean floor as they try to pinpoint wreckage and the all-important black boxes.

Bad weather, which has hindered the search for the past several days, remained a worry. Strong sea currents have also kept debris moving.

Col. Yayan Sofiyani, commander of the warship Bang Tomo, told MetroTV his vessel managed to pull seven bodies from the choppy waters on Friday, five still fastened in their seats. More than a third of the bodies have been recovered by the USS Sampson.

Generally, aviation experts say the more passengers, luggage and parts of the aircraft that remain intact indicate the plane hit the water in one piece. That would signal problems like a mechanical error or a stall.

Families of MH370 feel empathy, envy

The Associated Press

BEIJING — Images of bodies and wreckage floating in Indonesian waters gave relatives of those lost aboard AirAsia Flight 8501 anguish and grief, but they also provided the answers that other families have sought in vain for nearly 10 months.

Those with loved ones aboard Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 can only imagine what has happened to them, and can only hope to one day know for sure.

"We have been living in anxiety, fear and hate, and our lives have been utterly messed up, but we as ordinary people are unable to do anything," said Dai Shuqin, whose sister was on the missing plane with her husband, daughter, son-in-law and grandchild.

What happened to MH370, which took off on March 8 from Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, en route to Beijing, remains a mystery. The jetliner disappeared after veering off course and flying for hours with its communications systems disabled. It is thought to have crashed about 1,100 miles off Australia's west coast, but no trace of the aircraft or the 239 people aboard — most of whom were Chinese — has been found despite an exhaustive and continuing search.

On hearing the news that the AirAsia plane had lost contact on Sunday morning, MH370 relatives said they immediately sympathized with the families who were in the same position they were on March 8. "I can feel the coldness they are feeling now," said Jiang Hui, whose mother was on MH370.

Two days later, with debris spotted in the sea, it was already a different story. Some families of the Flight 370 victims felt a sort of envy.

Families of those on the AirAsia flight "are luckier than us, because they know what happened soon afterward," said Song Chunjie, whose sister was on the plane on her way back from a photography holiday. "Knowing the bad news is painful, but it's even more painful for us to live with uncertainty and have to wait to know what actually happened."

"They can find (Osama) bin Laden, he's just a single person," added the 50-year-old businessman. "How can they not find such a big airplane? ... We must get the answers that can stop such a tragedy happening again in the future."

Since Flight 370 disappeared, relatives of the



Song Chunjie, whose sister was aboard Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 that went missing on March 8, wipes tears Wednesday as he speaks about her.

missing have helped each other bear the turmoil of not knowing. They have forged new friendships, demanded answers and endured some hassles from Chinese authorities, who are wary of any cause that may trigger social instability, even those that seem apolitical.

Relatives say they have been under regular police surveillance, and that 16 of them were detained, with some beaten, in mid-July while at a support center.

Groups of relatives have small get-togethers to comfort each other. On Sunday, Dai and some others met at Jiang's house in Beijing to make dumplings, an activity overseen by news of the AirAsia plane.

Dr. George Hu, a clinical psychologist in Beijing, said the relatives of the MH370 passengers are experiencing a psychological phenomenon that parents of children who are kidnapped also go through.

"Worse than grief is the not knowing, the in-between, do I grieve or do I hope. That's hard," he said.

The passengers' relatives wonder when — or if — their agonizing waiting game will end.

"If there's no conclusion, you think there's still hope," said Steve Wang, who said he has carried on working as normal so other people don't worry about him. "Maybe the mystery will never be solved," he added. "Maybe it will take a very, very long time: 3 years, 5 years, 10 years or 20 years. Anything's possible."



A U.S. Navy helicopter crewmember watches as personnel from the USS Sampson help unload the body of a victim.

For second time in a week, Italians save abandoned migrant ship

The Associated Press

ROME — An Icelandic Coast Guard ship was towing a cargo vessel to Italy on Friday with about 450 migrants who were abandoned by smugglers, leaving the vessel in rough seas without a crew, authorities said Friday.

Italian Coast Guard Cmdr. Filippo Marini said that after several hours of struggling, Italian rescue teams shortly before dawn managed to secure the wave-tossed Ezadeen for towing

toward the southern Calabrian region. The Icelandic ship Tyr, part of a new European patrol force to detect and aid migrants at sea, was doing the towing.

Children and pregnant women were among the migrants, most of who were believed to be Syrian, Marini said. The Sierra-Leone-flagged cargo ship apparently set sail from Turkey, he said.

By midday, the migrants were still hours away from land. Authorities still didn't know which

port would receive the ship. Bad weather made the route unsure, with two parts of the Calabrian coastline in the "instep" of the Italian boot-shaped peninsula being cited as possibilities.

Italian Air Force official Nicola Nicolosi told Sky TG24 TV that engineers and electricians were lowered by air force helicopter to the ship to get the Ezadeen steering smoothly so it could safely enter a port. A blackout on board complicated efforts; the cause of

the blackout was not immediately clear.

Earlier on Friday, Marini said that a migrant had called for help saying: "we're without crew, we're heading toward the Italian coast and we have no one to steer."

The Ezadeen is the second cargo ship full of migrants to be abandoned at sea this week. Days earlier, the Italian Coast Guard lowered officials onto the Moldovan-flagged cargo vessel

Blue Sky M so they could take control of the ship, which was close to crashing into the Italian coast with hundreds of migrants aboard.

More than 170,000 migrants were intercepted or needed rescue by Italian navy, coast guard and air force patrols last year. This apparently new technique by smugglers of abandoning a ship after setting it on a crash course complicates rescue efforts, Marini told Italian state radio.

WORLD

Russians optimistic for 2015 despite woes

By JIM HEINTZ
The Associated Press

MOSCOW — At the vast skating rink in Moscow's Gorky Park, Russians say they're looking forward to a 2015 that will be as smooth as the ice, despite the country's economic and political difficulties. The ruble has sunk, tensions with the West are up, but the troubles seem to have produced a surge in national pride.

Russians are a nation of optimists," said Ivan Kasyanov, a skater in his 20s. "The worse things get, the better we develop."

Kasyanov brushed off concerns about the stunning decline of the ruble — which lost about half of its value against Western currencies in 2014 — and the Western sanctions imposed over Russia's annexation of Crimea and support for separatists in eastern Ukraine. He doubts these factors would deal a serious blow to an economy that in recent years has soared on oil and gas income.

"We will put more (effort) on our industrial development," he said, echoing the spin promulgated on state-controlled TV.

A recent Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll showed that Russians who rely on state TV for their news think significantly more highly of President Vladimir Putin than those who tap other news sources. Still, the poll showed that in both sectors, the support for Putin is resoundingly strong — 84 percent and 73 percent, respectively.

Gorky Park, itself, is a place to encourage optimism. After becoming rundown following the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union, the park in recent years has undergone an impressive restoration, helped along by the money and influence of Roman Abramovich, one of Russia's richest and most politically compliant men. The skating rink is its stunning centerpiece, a happy labyrinth of ice-coated lanes festooned with colored lights that stretches about 4½ acres.

But the view is different in other quarters of the Russian capital, even in the ostentatious corridors of the GUM department store,

where only the well-heeled can afford to shop.

"Here, everything changes so often. So I would like stability," shopper Olga Mozalyova said.

Concern is also strong where stock traders anxiously monitor their screens. The ruble's fall, the plunge in world oil prices and the sanctions' denial of access to Western credit have all dealt a blow to the Russian economy.

"Maybe if Russia doesn't give cause for the strengthening of sanctions, we can get a positive result in that case," said Sergei Romanchuk at Metallinvestbank. The chances of that are not promising.

In his televised New Year's Eve message to the nation, Putin hailed the annexation of Crimea as a historic achievement and the rightful return of the peninsula's people to the bosom of Russia. Although the fighting between pro-Russian separatists and government forces in eastern Ukraine has eased since September, there has been little progress on ensuring a stable cease-fire, much less withdrawing heavy weapons or resolving the complicated and inflammatory question of the region's political status.

In the offices of Russia's opposition groups, who endure constant pressure from authorities and struggle to find public support, the view of 2015 is ominous.

"The end is near, the country is at the brink of going down," said Mikhail Kasyanov, who was Putin's first prime minister but is now a firm opponent. "That's why I'm saying that people will take to the streets demanding a change of the situation ... 2015 is a very important year. I would say it may be a historic year."

The opposition, usually all but invisible to ordinary Russians, made a brief show of protest two days before New Year's. A couple of thousand demonstrators defied police and gathered near the Kremlin to protest the conviction of opposition stalwart Alexei Navalny and his brother on fraud charges. But the demonstration was far smaller than the anti-Putin protests that broke out two winters ago.



NO HAN GUAN/AP

Zhao Weiwei shows a photo of his girlfriend, Pan Haiqin, who was killed in a deadly stampede Wednesday in Shanghai.

China stampede victims' kin grieve, seek answers

By DIDI TANG
The Associated Press

SHANGHAI — Like hundreds of thousands of other revelers, Pan Haiqin, 24, decided to ring in the new year on Shanghai's famed riverfront as the skyscrapers flashed and sparkled. But as the crowd grew and then turned into an out-of-control crush of bodies, the real estate professional never made it up steps to a viewing platform to see the dazzling lights.

Nearly 20 hours later, her parents and friends identified her trampled body in a city morgue, one of 36 people killed in one of the deadliest accidents in this showcase Chinese city. Some 49 others were injured.

With authorities identifying 32 dead victims by name, hundreds of family members mourned the lost, who were mostly young women. On social media and TV airwaves, many Chinese were asking how such a tragedy could have happened in the heart of the country's high-profile financial hub.

"I blame myself for it. I did not protect her," said Pan's boyfriend, Zhao Weiwei, his eyes welling up with tears. "She was a cheerful woman who worked so hard in this city."

Shanghai is known for a better-

oiled municipal government than most other Chinese cities, with its leaders supposedly savvier in managing traffic and crowds. But the latest incident has exposed gaping vulnerabilities in the city's preparedness and emergency response system.

Authorities were still investigating the cause of the stampede late Wednesday night, but street vendors, residents, taxi drivers and other witnesses say the city failed to prepare for the massive turnout Wednesday night. Officials may not have expected such large numbers on riverfront area called the Bund after they canceled the much-hyped midnight light show and hosted a toned-down version at another location.

Zhao said the crowd descending from the platform crashed into him and his girlfriend and others at the bottom of the steps as they were trying to inch up.

"We were holding hands then, but no way could we resist the force coming down," he said. "We were separated, and people fell down backward with their faces up, piling on each other. When we were able to pull them out, many were already unconscious."

Grieving family members and friends say they were kept in the dark on rescue efforts and post-mortem arrangements. They said

they had yet to meet or talk with senior city officials. On Friday, many were forced inside a district government compound, with reporters kept out.

"We are basically placed under house arrest," Cai Jinjun, whose cousin, Qi Xiaoyan, was killed in the stampede, said before an Associated Press reporter was asked by Shanghai police to leave the compound.

During light shows in previous years, city and military police tightly controlled foot and car traffic on the riverfront. But on Wednesday night, the hundreds of thousands who showed up were allowed mostly to move freely.

"On major holidays, the viewing platform is always restricted — which is known to us all, but this time it was completely open," said a riverfront resident who declined to give his name for fear of reprisal.

Zhou Jiaming, 21, said he was separated from his girlfriend, Li Na, in the crush, although he tried hugging her close.

"When the people rushed in, she leaned against a wall, and I couldn't move," Zhou recalled. "My feet couldn't touch the ground, and I couldn't see her after that. When I found her later, she was on the ground and unconscious."

the legality of the new law.

The punishment of a three-year jail term or a fine of \$56,000 for journalists whose reports are deemed to have undermined police investigations is among the eight suspended clauses.

From The Associated Press



DENIS TYRIN/AP

People light sparklers Thursday as they celebrate the New Year at Red Square in Moscow.

Kenya court suspends parts of new terror law

NAIROBI, Kenya — A Kenyan court has suspended eight sections of a new law that the government says is meant to fight terror but critics say will be used to crush dissent by curtailing civil

liberties.

High Court Judge George Oduga said Friday that freedoms and inalienable rights cannot be limited under the pretext of fighting terrorism. He said he is suspending sections of the law until the chief justice sets up a three-man bench to determine

MIDEAST



PHOTOS BY JOSH SMITH/Stars and Stripes

Camps for internally displaced persons, such as this one in Kabul, are being cleared to make way for new high-rise buildings. The refugees who have occupied the camps for more than a decade have mixed feelings about moving. Some hope for better shelter, while mourning the jobs they will lose by leaving.

Afghan refugees face troubles at home

Number of displaced residents attempting to return at a 12-year low amid fighting, economic woes

By JOSH SMITH
Stars and Stripes

KABUL, Afghanistan — Eight years after returning from Pakistan, Fedá Mohammed wishes he'd never come back.

For the better part of a decade, 45-year-old Mohammed, his wife, and eight children have been among several dozen returned refugees occupying makeshift tents and shacks on a small vacant lot on a street corner in Kabul. He has a job as a city sanitation worker, but the \$80 per month salary barely covers the family's food.

As Afghanistan slips deeper into another winter, hundreds of thousands of returned refugees and others will be trying to survive another cold season while facing a future as uncertain as ever. Record numbers of Afghans

left the country during the 1980s and 1990s after the Soviet invasion triggered decades of war. Many came back after the U.S.-led invasion toppled the Taliban regime in 2001. More than 5.8 million refugees — roughly a fifth of Afghanistan's entire population — returned.

But after more than a decade of international intervention, U.S.-led forces have failed to end the stubborn insurgency destabilizing the country. Fewer Afghan refugees are trying to return than during any time since 2002, even as increased violence sends new waves of people fleeing their homes.

It's one of the largest and most protracted refugee crises in the world, and like many of Afghanistan's problems, it's far from solved. Like millions of other Afghans,



Above: Fedá Mohammed says eight years after returning from exile in Pakistan, he's having second thoughts about staying in Afghanistan. "This is my country, but it was better in Pakistan."

Left: Nargis Amiri, center, cries as she recalls harassment by Iranian officials who deported her and her family back to Afghanistan.

Mohammed fled to Pakistan decades ago during the Soviet invasion. He returned full of hope after the allied invasion. But now he regrets ever returning.

"This is my country, but it was better in Pakistan," he said, standing amid a handful of tussled children bundled in layers of bright clothes against the biting cold. "Here there are no jobs and no security."

Many refugees and internally displaced persons are gathered in camps. Others are taken in by relatives, just more nameless faces in a sea of humanity struggling to make a life in a country still torn by war and shackled by economic malaise.

More than 2.5 million Afghan refugees still remain in other countries, mostly neighboring Pakistan and Iran. But as NATO's

international military coalition continues its drawdown, economic concerns and rising violence have slowed the voluntary return flow to just 16,000 in 2014, less than half of what it was the year before.

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MIDEAST

FROM PAGE 10

A question of opportunity

At a United Nations-run facility for the displaced in Herat near the western border with Iran, Nargis Amiri, 29, is distraught. She, her husband, and daughter fled Afghanistan five years ago seeking better economic opportunity in Iran.

After struggling for years to find a footing there, she says the Iranian government made their lives a nightmare. "The soldiers hit us and made us sit in the hot sun for hours and hours," she said, tears filling her eyes. "We had no food and when we tried to buy some, the soldiers stole our money."

Countries like Iran can offer better economic opportunity and therefore a higher standard of living, but refugees can face fickle and sudden harassment or changes in official policies that make it impossible to stay.

Now Amiri and her family feel trapped between a life with no options in Afghanistan, and what they see as a better economic life now out of reach across the border.

Both aid officials and returning refugees cite economic challenges as a key reason why many remaining refugees are loath to return to Afghanistan. Almost 36 percent of Afghans live below the poverty line, three times the 12 percent poverty rate in Pakistan, according to World Bank statistics. And about 25 percent of Afghans are unemployed.

After 2001, Afghanistan's economy quickly improved due to the flood of international aid. But the CIA's own public assessment acknowledged that living standards remain among the lowest in the world and that growth "slowed markedly" in 2013. "Much of the population continues to suffer from shortages of housing, clean water, electricity, medical care, and jobs," the agency noted in its fact book. "Criminality, insecurity, weak governance, lack of infrastructure, and the Afghan Government's difficulty in extending rule of law to all parts of the country pose challenges to future economic growth."

Returning refugees have access to a range of international aid programs such as grants of about \$200 to help with transportation and other reintegration costs, shelters to stay at temporarily, briefings on legal aid and education, and vaccinations for children.

The Afghan government has been allocating land to returning refugees and other displaced people, but it has a limited ability to provide other services like education and health care.

"Many of the refugees lose everything when they try to come home," said Hamidullah Khatibi, an official who oversees refugees in Herat. "They have no money and need doesn't have the resources to help them all, and now we're competing with places like Syria and Palestine for international aid."

Many Afghans who do return are being drawn to cities by the prospect of better economic opportunities, even though the reality is there are rarely more



Afghan refugees cross the border back into Afghanistan after being deported from Iran in July 2014. Aid officials say economic hardship is driving many Afghans to seek better opportunities in other countries.



options, said Danielle Moylan, a Kabul-based Protection and Advocacy manager with the Norwegian Refugee Council.

"There is often a perception that refugees want to return to their places of origin, but it is becoming widely accepted that the majority don't want to go home," she said. "They often left because of conflict or other hardship but now don't want to return because of the economy."

Still running

It's not just millions of refugees in Pakistan and Iran who are affected by Afghanistan's troubles. As many as 800,000 Afghans are still considered internally

displaced, and aid agencies say 140,000 more people have joined them in 2014 due to the escalating insurgency.

In southern Helmand province, Haji Mohammed Hydar is one of many residents who fled fighting in Sangin district this summer. He and 12 members of his family moved to the provincial capital.

"We had to leave," he said. "We are not safe anywhere. And there are many more behind us who want to leave but don't have the money to."

And it's not just the violence in Afghanistan that has residents in the region fleeing. In a reversal, a Pakistani military offensive in tribal regions across the border in Pakistan has sent as many as a

quarter million Pakistanis across the border into Afghanistan in a wave that strained Afghanistan's already limited capacity.

The increased violence has not only sent more people packing, it has made tracking and helping them harder, Moylan said. "Conflict-induced IDPs can only be counted where the UN and humanitarian NGOs can still have access, and for this reason we think that the figures are conservative, and could become even more so if we are unable to work in areas due to safety concerns."

Despite the challenges, thousands of Afghans are braving the odds to try to find a better life. For months, Nazam Mohammed, 40, his wife, Sorya, 37, and their



Above: During a temporary stopover at a United Nations camp in Herat, Nazam Mohammed, shown in July, points out injuries he sustained as a soldier fighting for Afghanistan's communist government in the 1990s.

Left: Residents of southern Afghanistan's Sangin district fled fighting that has rocked the area for most of 2014.

three children skipped meals to save up money so they could return from Iran where they had lived for 16 years.

A former soldier under the communist regime, Nazam fled from the Taliban. For years he worked and lived in Iran, but it never felt like home.

"We don't know where we are going," he said, sitting in an empty room at the U.N.'s camp in Herat, surrounded by the suitcases and plastic bags holding all the family's belongings. "But we hope it will be better."

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OPINION

Moving on from certificates of necessity

By GEORGE F. WILL

Mighty oaks from little acorns grow, so last year's most encouraging development in governance might have occurred in February in a U.S. District Court in Frankfort, Ky. There, a judge did something no federal judge has done since 1932. By striking down a "certificate of necessity" regulation, he struck a blow for liberty and against crony capitalism.

Although Raleigh Bruner's Wildcat Moving company in Lexington is named in celebration of the local religion — University of Kentucky basketball — this did not immunize him from the opposition of companies with which he wished to compete. In 2012, he formed a company, hoping to operate statewide. Kentucky, however, like some other states, requires movers to obtain a certificate of necessity. Kentucky's statute says such certificates shall be issued if the applicant is "fit, willing and able properly to perform" moving services — and if he can demonstrate that existing moving services are "inadequate," and that the proposed service "is or will be required by the present or future public convenience and necessity."

Applicants must notify their prospective competitors, who can and often do file protests. This frequently requires applicants to hire lawyers for the hearings. There they bear the burden of proving current inadequacies and future necessities. And they usually lose. From 2007 to 2012, 39 Kentucky applicants for the certificates drew 114 protests — none from the general public, all from moving companies. Only three of the 39 persevered through the hearing gauntlet; all three were denied certificates.

Bruner sued, arguing three things: that the certificate process violates the Constitution's equal protection clause because it is a "competitors' veto" that favors existing companies over prospective rivals; that the state's requirements ("inadequate," "convenience," "necessity") are unconstitutional; and that the process violates the 14th Amendment's protections of Americans' "privileges or immunities," including the right to earn a living.

In 1932, the Supreme Court overturned an Oklahoma law requiring any new ice company to prove a "public need" for it, arguing that the law tended to "foster monopoly in the hands of existing establishments." "The principle is imbedded in our constitutional system that there are certain essentials of liberty with which the state is not entitled to dispense," including "the opportunity to apply one's labor and skill in an ordinary occupation."

Soon, however, judicial progressivism became deferential to the political class' conceit that it could centrally plan the present and foresee the future. Timothy Sandefur of the Pacific Legal Foundation notes that this involves what Friedrich Hayek called socialism's knowledge problem: For government to supplant markets in the efficient allocation of wealth and opportunity, governments must have infinite information to make them clairvoyant.

Writing in *George Mason University's* Civil Rights Law Journal, Sandefur notes that after World War I, states and cities used certificate of necessity requirements to cripple taxis, thereby protecting private investments in trolley lines. *Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. In many cities today, Uber and other ride-sharing businesses are challenging the mutually remunerative alliances between elected officials and taxi cartels. The result is a

riot of rent-seeking as entrenched interests construe judicial passivity as permission to stifle competition.

Since 1938, courts have — without justification from the Constitution's text or structure — distinguished between rights deemed "fundamental" and others pertaining to economic life. Courts have permitted any limitations on the latter that could be said to have a "rational basis," even if courts had to imagine a rationale that legislatures had neglected to enactuate.

This led, unsurprisingly, to cynicism, as when, in 2004, the 10th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals upheld an Oklahoma law forcing online snack retailers to have funeral director's licenses, which involve expensive, time-consuming requirements. The court did not even feign interest in finding a reasonable basis. Instead, it breezily asserted that although this law obviously was protectionism for funeral directors, "dishing out special economic benefits" — and, the court neglected to mention, inflicting injuries on aspiring entrepreneurs and on consumers — "is the favored pastime" of, and a prerogative of, state and local governments.

Judicial tolerance of the certificate fiasco is a result of judges embracing the "rational basis" excuse for retreating from judging. Such judges are either confessing that they cannot fathom basic political processes, or they are saying that they cannot trust themselves to recognize brazen, unapologetic rent-seeking when they see it. It is, however, possible to hope that what happened in Kentucky is a harbinger of judges returning to judging, thereby doing something rare in government — rethinking a wrong turn.

George F. Will is a member of Washington Post Writers Group.

Conservatives should want states to be free to fail

The failed experience of one state helps influence what other states will or won't do.

The death of Vermont's effort to install single-payer health care is revealing — and not only for what it says about the feasibility of such government-run systems in the United States. It also shows conservatives a way forward if the Supreme Court voids the broad swath of the Affordable Care Act in 2015.

In King v. Burwell, the court will consider a challenge to the legality of Obamacare subsidies distributed in states using the federally run health-insurance exchange. The law states the subsidies may be distributed only through exchanges "established by the states." But the Obama administration has argued for a broader reading permitting the distribution of subsidies to individuals living in states using the federal exchange.

If the justices determine the law means what it says, it's likely that the architecture of Obamacare in states without their own exchanges will be fundamentally compromised. That is because the absence of public subsidies makes health insurance unaffordable for millions, therefore invalidating the employer mandate in those states and, by extension, creating many exceptions to the individual mandate as well.

This could potentially set up a situation where the states that didn't establish their own exchanges face pressure to establish programs to help furnish affordable health insurance to those who will no longer receive subsidies through Obamacare. While the federal government will need to play some role in helping to fund these reforms, governors and state leaders will

have the opportunity (and will be expected) to show leadership in a post-King world.

For conservatives, this would be an important juncture. On one hand, the prospect of federalist reforms, where states take the lead in expanding private coverage while holding down rising medical costs, is an exciting one. On the other hand, with such federalist policies comes the possibility that some states will try to do what Vermont did and pursue single-payer or big-government approaches to health care.

The temptation for conservatives will be to argue that the federal government should restrict the kinds of changes states can pursue, to prevent others from taking the Vermont route. In the past, some conservatives have in effect made this point: States should be given the freedom and flexibility to pursue solutions that serve their citizens best, this argument goes, so long as federal funds aren't used to support policies that stray from free-market principles.

Such restrictions would be wrong-headed. Federalism means states will try "novel social and economic experiments without risk to the rest of the country," as Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis wrote. And states should be free to create the health care system their elected officials select, even if conservatives (or anyone else, for

that matter) find the changes offensive. The nature of federalism is that the best ideas will be replicated, while the worst ones won't.

Vermont's experience is therefore instructive. The state shuttered its effort to set up a single-payer system because, in the words of Democratic Gov. Peter Shumlin, "the potential economic disruption and risks would be too great to small businesses, working families and the state's economy."

The acknowledgment by Vermont officials that it was economically and fiscally infeasible to set up a government-run health care system will give pause to other states that are interested in doing something similar. The failed experience of one state helps influence what other states will or won't do.

The failure of Vermont's single-payer effort is no guarantee that other states won't adopt similarly wrong-headed programs. But if the Supreme Court rules against the Obama administration in the King case, conservatives should nonetheless let many flowers bloom when it comes to state-based reform.

That may be a tough pill for them to swallow, if some states enact policies anathema to free-market values. But conservatives should have enough faith in their principles to believe that these efforts will ultimately fail — and lead to a consensus that less, not more, government is the best way to change our health care system for the better.

LaNhee Chen is a Bloomberg View columnist. A former fellow at the Hoover Institution who also teaches public policy at Stanford University, he was the policy director of Mitt Romney's 2012 presidential campaign.

OPINION

‘Unbroken’ tells half of Japan’s war story

By JAMES GIBNEY
Bloomberg News

In the just-released film “Unbroken,” as in real life, U.S. Army Air Corps Lt. Louis Zamperini was beaten, starved and forced to work as a slave laborer by his Japanese captors.

Things could have been worse. Like some other war prisoners held by the Japanese, Zamperini could have been used in biological warfare experiments. Or vivisected. Or beheaded, with parts of his body then eaten by his captors. As the historian Daqing Yang notes, 9 out of 10 U.S. POWs who died in captivity in World War II did so at the hands of the Japanese.

In Japan, where “Unbroken” does not yet — and may never — have a release date, right-wing nationalists have protested the film as racist and inaccurate. “It’s pure fabrication,” asserted a representative of one such pressure group, the Society for the Dissemination of Historical Fact. Online petitions have described director Angelina Jolie as a “demon” and called for her to be banned from Japan.

Unfortunately, the attacks on Jolie’s film, which is really much less about Japanese brutality than the resilience of the human spirit, are part of a revisionist recrudescence under the administration of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. Several of his Cabinet members and appointees have pushed to whitewash or deny the Japanese military’s forced wartime recruitment of women as prostitutes, the 1937 Nanjing Massacre of Chinese civilians by Japanese troops and other wartime atrocities, targeting journalists and scholars who dare to disagree.

Such behavior has roiled Japan’s relations with China and South Korea and undermined its alliance with the United States. And it has cast an ugly shadow over the impending 70th anniversary of World War II’s end. Yet that occasion also offers an opportunity for both Japan and the U.S. to relearn lessons about the uses and abuses of history, beginning with the folly of trying to cover it up.

In the two weeks following the end of hostilities on Aug. 28, 1945, and the arrival of the first U.S. troops on Aug. 28, Japan’s military engaged in a wholesale destruction of its files. Some Japanese historians estimate, for instance, that as much as 70 percent of the army’s wartime records were lost. Although the Americans, British, Chinese, Dutch, Filipinos and Russians each held separate war-crimes trials of Japanese defendants, their documentation has never been gathered in one place, making it harder to access. Meanwhile, Japanese rightists have sought to discredit the remembered accounts of Korean “comfort women” as anecdotal or concocted memory. They have also exploited inaccuracies in sensationalist best-sellers such as Iris



SHINZO KAMAYASHI/AP

Shinzo Abe speaks during a press conference at his official residence in Tokyo after taking office for a third term as Japan’s prime minister. Records detail the expedient clemency policies toward some suspected war criminals from World War II — among them Nobusuke Kishi, a postwar prime minister who was Abe’s grandfather.

Chang’s “The Rape of Nanking” to try to discredit larger truths.

Yet not only have many Japanese contributed unflinching histories of Japan’s wartime behavior — many available in English — but voluminous, and damning, official records exist that have yet to be fully exploited. In 2006, the U.S. government’s National Archives and Records Administration published “Researching Japanese War Crimes,” a guide to U.S. intelligence reports, captured Japanese documents and contemporary news accounts contained in various U.S. public archives.

It’s not the kind of stuff you want to read on an all-stomach: In the National Archives, for instance, you can find the transcript of the trial of Japanese officers who ordered the execution, and then the cooking, of four U.S. Navy airmen downed in raids on Chichi-Jima — a fate that Lt. George H.W. Bush, who was also shot down on the raid, barely avoided.

To their credit, many Japanese scholars have drawn on such materials in their own work: U.S. documents on Japan’s biological warfare experiments on Chinese prisoners, for instance, helped to blunt the 1980s attempt by Japan’s Ministry of Education to censor references to such crimes in history textbooks.

Any forthright exploration of Japan’s wartime cruelties, of course, must be matched by an acknowledgment of the battlefield savagery of U.S. troops in the Pacific, where some members of the Greatest Generation pried gold teeth out of the mouths of still-living Japanese soldiers, strafed airmen in their parachutes, shot surrendering soldiers and sent Japanese skulls home to their sweethearts as table ornaments. Compared with the European theater, it was not exactly the Good War: “Subhuman, inhuman, lesser human, superhuman — all that was lacking in the perception of the Japanese enemy was a human like oneself,” observed the historian John Dover.

Moreover, U.S. archives lay bare another troubling aspect of U.S. wartime history: the willingness to collaborate with Japanese war criminals in the name of larger strategic interests. As Michael Petersen documents, Gen. Charles Willoughby, a die-hard anticommunist who was Douglas MacArthur’s intelligence chief, oversaw a (remarkably fearless) postwar spy network that included Masanobu Tsuji, the Imperial Army officer who helped organize the Bataan Death March that killed so many of the U.S. soldiers that MacArthur abandoned in the Philippines.

Still missing are documents showing what happened to data from the human experiments by Unit 731, the notorious Japanese chemical and biological warfare outfit led by Gen. Shiro Ishii, who was never prosecuted by the Allies. The records also shine a light on the expedient clemency policies toward suspected war criminals such as Nobusuke Kishi, a postwar prime minister who also happens to be Abe’s grandfather.

That raises a final historical irony worth pondering over the coming anniversary year: the U.S. responsibility for shielding the progenitors of Japan’s latter-day revisionists from accountability and prosecution. Even as late as the 1990s, the U.S. State Department was arguing against releasing information on early Cold War payments by the CIA to right-wing politicians from Japan’s ruling Liberal Democratic Party. Such behavior helps explain why “Unbroken” describes not just Louis Zamperini’s spirit, but the resilience of Japan’s rightists.

James Gibney writes editorials on international affairs for Bloomberg View.

Data reinforce the fallacy of a ‘post-racial’ society

By JONATHAN CAPEHART
The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — All I want for the new year is the banishment of “post-racial” anything from all social and political discourse. From its first utterance in 2008 to herald the rise of Barack Obama, the concept was misguided and delusional. That giddy moment when Obama won the bitterly fought South Carolina primary and the audience chanted “Race doesn’t matter” is but a distant memory. News, polls and studies that emerged in the last half of 2014 made it painfully plain that race still matters.

The fatal police interactions with unarmed African-American men, particularly with Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo., and Eric Garner in New York City, sparked a national debate about law enforcement and race. The results indicate that officers in those two cases spurred a national conversation on race and the equal application of justice. But let’s move past these two flash points, which play into what my Washington Post colleague Eugene Robinson correctly calls our “spasmodic pattern of dealing with race.”

Evidence that race matters is all around

us, quite literally. In December, the folks at Vox reminded us of a Southern Poverty Law Center list of the number of active Ku Klux Klan chapters in the United States. NewsOne turned that information into an interactive map. The racist and anti-Semitic hate group that fancies white sheets, cross burnings and has a history of other assorted acts of violence is active in 41 out of 50 states.

No pun intended, but race colors how we view some issues. A new Post-ABC News poll shows how stark the divide is when it comes to law enforcement.

Only 1 in 10 African-Americans says blacks and other minorities receive equal treatment with whites in the criminal justice system. Only about 2 in 10 say they are confident that the police treat whites and blacks equally, whether or not they have committed a crime. In contrast, roughly half of all white Americans say the races are treated equally in the justice system, and 6 in 10 have confidence that police treat both equally.

The division is not just along racial lines. The survey also highlights the partisan nature of it. If you are a white Republican you are more likely to say the races are treated equally by police. If you are a white Democrat you are more likely to believe there is

a difference in treatment.

And a column last month by Esther Cepeda on a study on the impact of language on how African-Americans are perceived was as eye-opening as it was stunning. The name of the report says it all: “A rose by any other name? The consequences of subtyping ‘African-Americans’ from ‘Blacks.’” Researchers Erika Hall, Katherine Phillips and Sarah Townsend conducted four experiments to see if whites made a distinction between “Blacks” and “African-Americans.” Please take the time to read their study. It’s fascinating. But everything you need to know is in their abstract.

We argue that the racial label Black evokes a mental representation of a person with lower socioeconomic status than the racial label African-American, and that Whites will react more negatively toward Blacks (vs. African-Americans). In Study 1, we show that the stereotype content for Blacks (vs. African-Americans) is lower in status, positivity, competence, and warmth. In Study 2, Whites view a target as lower status when he is identified as Black vs. African-American. In Study 3, we demonstrate that the use of the label Black vs. African-American in a US Newspaper crime report article is associated with a

negative emotional tone in that respective article. Finally, in Study 4, we show that Whites view a criminal suspect more negatively when he is identified as Black vs. African-American. The results establish how racial labels can have material consequences for a group.

This study alone should dispel any notion that ours will ever be a “post-racial” society. Before that could happen, we Americans first would have to deal with our “current-racial” society. But as I’ve written many times, we would have to talk to each other one on one, face to face, in an intensely personal and uncomfortable exchange.

The multiracial hue to the demonstrations has given me hope that those conversations are happening a little bit more now. Small steps on the road to racial healing. Still, those talks have yet to become national in scope because they require a key element that is missing: trust. Until we can have a conversation grounded in trust, we will never take that giant leap as a nation that will “post-racial” ideal where race doesn’t matter.

Jonathan Capehart is a member of The Washington Post’s editorial board and writes about politics and social issues for the PostPartisan blog.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Police seek suspect in horse-tail trimmings

ID TYHEE — Horse owners in southeast Idaho near Tyhee have reported five tail trimmings that occurred over the weekend.

The Bannock County Sheriff's Office told that the clippings happened on at least three different properties.

Bannock County Sheriff Lorin Nielsen said the motive isn't clear because there isn't a lot of value involved.

Horse owner Leslie England was upset to discover chunks of hair missing from the tail of her race horse Cash.

Tomatoes and potatoes grafted into 1 plant

OR PORTLAND — An Oregon seed company is offering gardeners potatoes and tomatoes in one plant.

The Territorial Seed Company in Cottage Grove calls it "Ketchup 'n' Fries."

The Oregonian reported the plant was developed in the United Kingdom.

The seed company said since potatoes and tomatoes are fairly closely related, they graft well together. It's not genetic engineering.

Gardeners can harvest a double crop of red cherry tomatoes and white potatoes from the plant also called a TomTato.

No one injured in Christmas tree fire

CA SAN JOSE — A Northern California man who was outside clearing downed trees to prevent further problems from the gusty winds that knocked out power, went inside his home to find a fire.

KNTV reported the good Samaritan was chopping fallen trees in his San Jose neighborhood after heavy wind storms on Tuesday night when his own Christmas tree was set ablaze, displacing him and his roommates.

San Jose Fire Capt. Mitch Matlow said the man was working outside about 8:30 p.m. when he returned inside and found that one of his animals had knocked over several candles, sparking the fire.

No one was seriously injured.

Court rules manure a pollutant under policy

WI MILWAUKEE — The state Supreme Court says manure qualifies as a pollutant as defined in an insurance policy.

The case began in 2011 when state environmental officials notified West Bend dairy farmer Robert Falk that manure spread on his fields had contaminated his neighbors' wells.

The neighbors demanded compensation. Falk turned to his insurance company, Wilson Mutual, but his policy excluded coverage for damage caused by pollutants. A state appeals court last found the exclusion was valid.

But the high court reversed the decision Tuesday. The court ruled 5-1 that manure is clearly



ANDY NELSON, THE REGISTER-GUARD (EUGENE, ORE.)/AP

Leaping lizards!

Brennan Vinje laughs while a lizard is perched atop his head during a Tuesday-based demonstration at the Springfield Public Library in Springfield, Ore., on Tuesday.

a pollutant when it seeps into a well. However, the court found that a property damage clause in the Falks' policy requires Wilson Mutual to pay as much as \$500 for each well.

Some jumpers say they'll skip Bridge Day

WV FAYETTEVILLE — Some BASE jumpers plan to skip West Virginia's Bridge Day festival next year because of a new security requirement.

The jumpers will have to undergo fingerprint scans, along with rappellers and vendors.

Alan Lewis, of Tennessee, is organizing a visit by jumpers to the Perrine Bridge in Twin Falls, Idaho, instead of Bridge Day. He told The Charleston Gazette that law enforcement in Twin Falls is more welcoming to BASE jumpers.

BASE stands for building, antenna, span and Earth, the fixed objects from which jumpers leap with parachutes. Bridge Day is the only time that BASE jumping

is allowed from the New River Gorge Bridge.

Bridge Day Commission chair Sharon Cruikshank has said the scans are less intrusive than background checks, and the fingerprints won't be saved.

Animal refuge hopes to add bed and breakfast

CO GREELEY — The Wild Animal Sanctuary in Weld County hopes to add a bed and breakfast, an RV park and other amenities for visitors.

The Greeley Tribune reported Sunday the sanctuary has formally requested county approval of the project, which would also include a welcome center and convention center.

The county planning commission hasn't yet scheduled a review of the application.

The 1-square-mile refuge in Keenesburg, about 40 miles northeast of Denver, is home to 350 animals, including lions, tigers, bears, wolves and others.

Many were rescued from abusive situations.

Executive Director Pat Craig said many visitors come in RVs and buses, and they often ask about a place to stay.

Bird-watchers blamed for trampling dunes

NJ BERKELEY TOWN-SHIP — An interest in wildlife is threatening the dunes at a New Jersey state park.

Officials at Island Beach State Park told NJ.com that bird-watchers trying to get good pictures of snowy owls are to blame for trampling dunes along the beach.

Park manager Ray Bukowski posted a plea on Facebook in December for people to stay off the dunes, where a single footstep can hasten erosion.

Snowy owls are a novelty along the New Jersey shore. They showed up in large numbers for the first time last winter when there was a shortage of food in some of their usual wintering spots. They have returned this winter.

THE CENSUS

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The percentage by which high school equivalency certification rates decreased in Wisconsin this year. The Department of Public Instruction reported that 912 people graduated from the state's General Education Development program in 2014, compared to 11,378 people in 2013. Many other states also saw a significant decline in the number of people seeking high school equivalency degrees, according to Ged Testing Service, which contracts with states to provide the course. The company implemented a new, more expensive test this year, costing \$135 for a new stack of tests, up from as little as \$75 in some parts of the state.



County to give armored vehicle back to military

AZ PHOENIX — An Arizona sheriff's office plans to return an armored vehicle to the federal government because it doesn't suit the agency's needs.

The Arizona Republic reported that the Mohave County Sheriff's Office will return its Mine Resistant Armored Patrol vehicle because it is larger than what the agency requested and is not being used.

Officials said Mohave County requested an armored vehicle in 2012 through a federal program that allows for transfers of military equipment to state and local police agencies.

Sheriff Jim McCabe wanted the vehicle to use for life-saving operations such as removing victims from natural disasters or evacuating people from other dangerous situations.

Billboard advertisement leads to KKK radio

AR HARRISON — A new billboard in Harrison advertisements Web-based "white-prideradio.com" and is leased by the Knights Party of Zinc, formerly the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan.

Knights Party national director Thom Robb told The Harrison Daily Times that the group is leasing the space for a year. Robb was national director of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, which The Southern Poverty Law Center says Robb renamed the Knights Party.

The billboard shows a young girl holding a dog and reads "It's NOT Racist to (love) Your People," with an image of a heart in place of the word love.

From wire reports

HEALTH & FITNESS



ILLUSTRATION BY NOGA AMP-RAV/Stars and Stripes

Experts predict biggest fitness trends of 2015

By RAVELLE WORTHINGTON/Tribune News Service

Last year was the year of all things high intensity. And rightfully so, in our fast-paced culture of multitasking, HIIT workouts (high-intensity interval training) enable fitness fiends to squeeze in that sweat session before a morning meeting or your Sunday night date with “The Newsroom.” The big question: What will 2015 bring?

1. Body weight training. Not only is body weight training a more affordable means of exercise given the minimal equipment needed, but it also allows people to get back to the basics of fitness. “Getting back to basics can be a very effective way to combine cardio and strength training,” said Joey Gonzalez, master trainer and partner at Barry’s Bootcamp in New York City. “Every trend seems to come full-circle eventually, so I’m not surprised that one of the most reliable exercise methods is predicted to be huge for the next year.”

2. High-intensity interval training (HIIT). Like we said, quick workouts, maximum results. “This is not surprising to me, since we live in a world where time seems to be our most precious commodity,” said Jenn

Seracuse, director of Pilates at FLEX Studios in New York City. “HIIT training is a great way to maximize burn (both caloric and muscle) and minimize time.”

3. Educated and experienced fitness professionals. “I love seeing this so high on the list,” Seracuse said. “With the growth and increasing popularity of the fitness industry, it is so important that we don’t lose sight of what’s important. All trainers and instructors should be certified and well educated in their field. It’s not enough to just look the part. If you are going to coach/lead/train/teach others, you must have the education and experience to back it up.”

4. Strength training. Gonzalez said strength training produces afterburn, which leads to faster metabolism and increased weight loss. “At Barry’s, we en-

courage guests to not shy away from heavier weights. There has long been a stigma that heavy weights will make you bulky, especially for women,” he said. “However, the heavier the weight the more calories you’ll burn during a strength training session.”

5. Personal training. Survey results show a rising number of students are majoring in kinesiology, indicating that they are preparing themselves for careers in allied health fields such as personal training. According to Gonzalez, personal training might have taken a backseat to group classes in the past few years due to the personalized nature of the group workouts offered at boutique fitness studios. While the one-on-one attention is beneficial to the client, there’s something motivational and inspiring about the energy in a group class that Gon-

zalez thinks people will continue to appreciate in the new year.

6. Yoga. “With so many different kinds of yoga practices out there, it seems right on point that the yoga craze would resurface in the new year,” Gonzalez said. “Since the HIIT trend was so prevalent in previous years, people are hooked on high intensity and looking for a way to unwind and continue to move in some way on their rest days.”

7. Fitness programs for older adults. Survey results show that more health and fitness professionals are creating age-appropriate fitness programs to keep older adults active and healthy. “As we age, our mental and emotional desire to stay active and fit may not change, but you can bet that our bodies will,” Gonzalez said. “I would imagine that there is a huge market for age-appropri-

ate fitness programs, as the baby boomer generation is slipping into their retirement stage.”

8. Functional fitness. This trend looks to use strength training to improve balance and ease of daily living. “Exercise doesn’t have to be just about burning calories — it is about setting the body up to function as healthfully as possible in day-to-day life to avoid injury and pain,” Seracuse said.

9. Group personal training. A great way to curb the costs of a personalized experience, group personal training can serve as a fun and motivational activity to do with your friends. “Enlisting a personal trainer for a group of your pals helps you remain even more accountable than you would be if you were training one on one,” Gonzalez said.



TOP MOVIES

From 'Birdman' to 'Budapest,' it was a strange and wonderful year on screen

BY COLIN COVERT
Star Tribune

What a lot of excellent films made it to theaters in 2014.

As a public service for readers from a guy who saw a couple hundred of them (and that was just at Sundance), here's a list of 2014 releases with more pros than cons.



CHUCK ZLOTNICK, OPEN ROAD FILMS/AP

When Lou Bloom (Jake Gyllenhaal) muscles into the world of L.A. crime journalism, he blurs the line between observer and participant to become the star of his own story in "Nightcrawler."

Most jolting job sagas

"Whiplash" and "Nightcrawler" are two shrewd shockers about life in the business world. J.K. Simmons and Jake Gyllenhaal play noir characters, one in jazz, the other in journalism. They are monstrous occupational drill sergeants who have a way of pushing their followers until they literally bleed, while insisting they aren't trying hard enough. Each film features a weird sort of S&M relationship in the workplace. They appear to suggest that great careers in music and television are the products of great tyranny — a discomfiting notion.

Top perplexing film

"Birdman," a story about a has-been movie star's iffy Broadway return, by the unconventional Mexican director Alejandro González Iñárritu, is not quite like anything I've ever seen. I mean, hey, the full title is "Birdman or (The Unexpected Virtue of Ignorance)." I didn't understand the story 60 percent of the time. But I loved every bizarre moment. Movies are increasingly noisy, similar and dull, so seeing Iñárritu's craziness is like drinking a giant margarita after an endless diet of flat Pepsi. What funny and touching characters. What an ensemble: Michael Keaton, Edward Norton, Emma Stone, Naomi Watts and Zach Galifianakis.

A washed-up actor (Michael Keaton, left) who once played an iconic superhero must overcome his ego as he mounts a Broadway play in a bid to reclaim his past glory in "Birdman." Edward Norton, right, co-stars.



FOR SYDNEY BART PICTURES/AP



Best buffoonery from unlikely sources starring Chris Pratt

"The Lego Movie" is a masterpiece of modern animation. The theme song, "Everything is Awesome," describes each cartoon-esque, adult-friendly scene. Best movie ever made about Danish plastic bricks. Swell cast, with a (pseudo) happy plastic construction worker (played by Pratt) evolving into unplanned hero as President Business (Will Ferrell) endeavors to eradicate creative freedom with Super Glue.

But wait, there's more. Pratt's live-action role as a space crusader atop "Guardians of the Galaxy," based on an entirely forgettable Marvel comic, is again deliciously lightweight and agreeably absurd. While fighting alien enemies he bops to a choice 1980s soundtrack, full of hits chosen to leave us "Hooked on a Feeling." Co-star Vin Diesel offers his best vocal performance ever: "I am Groot." And who can't love a space battle scene based on that arcade game classic Galaga?

Chris Pratt starred in two hit movies in 2014: "The Lego Movie," for which he provided the voice of Emmet, top left, and "Guardians of the Galaxy," left.



IFC FILMS/AP

Filmed over 12 years with the same cast, "Boyhood," starring Ellar Coltrane, charts the rocky terrain of childhood.

Standout slow-cooked home meal

Richard Linklater's coming-of-age epic "Boyhood" looks at the common things in life in an exceptional way. It traces the youth of Mason, a nice suburban Texas kid, over the course of 12 years as his divorced parents (Ethán Hawke and Patricia Arquette) try their best to raise him. Linklater shot the movie in chunks from 2002 to 2013. We watch Mason (and his exceptional performer, Ellar Coltrane) evolve from a dreamy tadpole first-grader to a thoughtful, long-limbed college freshman. The usual mile markers of a growing-up tale — the first kiss, the big touchdown, the funeral — are conspicuously lacking. The events in "Boyhood" are modest and charming, universal love songs to passing instants and lifelong feelings.

TOP MOVIES



YEAR
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FROM PAGE 24



ANNE JOYCE, *THE WEINSTEIN COMPANY/AP*

A Polish nurse (Marion Cotillard) is forced into prostitution by a theater manager (Joaquin Phoenix) who moonlights as a pimp in "The Immigrant."

Poignant American dreams

Tommy Lee Jones perfectly directed and starred in "The Homesman," playing a frontier thief who, like Keaton in "Birdman," shows up in his underwear. It gives Hilary Swank her best role in years as his manager on a five-week trip carrying three women back east to a madhouse. At heart it's a fable of Grace and Redemption — the names of their two horses. "The Immigrant" featured stellar performances in the story of a Polish immigrant (Marion Cotillard), wrestling with American life under the employ of a boorish pimp (Joaquin Phoenix) in lushly shot 1920s New York City.



FOX SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES/AP

Thrilling true-life narratives

Both "Wild" (starring Reese Witherspoon and Laura Dern) and "Foxcatcher" (with Steve Carell, Channing Tatum and Mark Ruffalo) feature characters wrestling with the roots of modern life. "Foxcatcher," from director Bennett Miller, bleeds anger and anxiety in its strong, precisely told recount of an emotional triangle between a wealthy wrestling patron and two Olympic-winning brothers. "Wild," from Jean-Marc Vallée, is heartbreaking and inspiring. Set from southern desert to the High Sierras, it presents a troubled woman finding her future one step after another.

Reese Witherspoon portrays Cheryl Strayed in the real-life drama "Wild."



Great pseudoscientific science fiction

It's not "Interstellar," that's for sure. The smart, terrific future action feast "Edge of Tomorrow" (retitled "Live Die Repeat" for home video) allows us to see Tom Cruise get killed over and over again — how is that not worth the price of admission? In the process, he does his best acting in years. Plus, the movie is packed with humor and the ever-attractive Emily Blunt as a hard-as-nails military hero who inspires history's hap-piest ending.

Then there's "Snowpiercer," a clever, dark, mostly English-language thriller from Korean master Bong Joon-Ho. With Earth gone unthinkably cold, the only survivors live in a planet-circling supertrain. Chris Evans outdoes his Captain America work as he leads the impoverished occupants of the windowless tail section in their attempt to overtake the train's sacred creator at the front. It's a thrilling action extravaganza. And as the battle flows across successive compartments, it's an ingenious map of classism in a hierarchical culture.

"Edge of Tomorrow," starring Emily Blunt, left, and Tom Cruise, unfolds in a near future in which an alien race has hit the earth in an unrelenting assault, unbeatable by any military unit in the world.

DAVID JAMES, WARNER BROS. PICTURES/AP

Ideal comedy set in Europe between the wars

Before "The Grand Budapest Hotel," I did not know that Ralph Fiennes was more than a dramatic icon. He's pricelessly funny as M. Gustave, the world's greatest concierge at a nostalgic luxury inn in the Eastern European country Zubrowka, or at least in Wes Anderson's matchless imagination.

Our droll, elegant hero, wearing his signature cologne, L'Air de Panache, scuffles with rich thieves and jackbooted military thugs while coping with the romantic shortcomings of his youthful bellboy (Tony Revolori) and his elderly lover, Madame D. (Tilda Swinton, under hilarious layers of makeup). It's gorgeous — each shot colored in pink, red, orange, purple and lavender — and the comic patter is pure, relaxed craziness.

I think of Anderson as a character said of Gustave: "He managed the illusion with such grace." Unquestionably the best 99 minutes of the year.

Set between the First and Second World Wars, the comedy "The Grand Budapest Hotel" tells of the adventures of legendary concierge M. Gustave (Ralph Fiennes, right) and Zero Moustafa (Tony Revolori, second from left), the lobby boy who becomes his most trusted friend.

MARTIN SCALI, FOX SEARCHLIGHT FILMS/AP





THE YEAR IN BOOKS

2014

Adaptations, feud dominate news

By HILLEL ITALIE
The Associated Press

Like a serial for the digital age, the book world's most dramatic story of 2014 unfolded in installments, often in real time.

A dispute about e-book revenues between Amazon.com and Hachette Book Group led to Amazon's removing buy buttons, cutting discounts and reducing orders for weeks ranging from J.K. Rowling's latest detective thriller to J.D. Salinger's "Nine Stories." The battle lasted for months. Hachette author Stephen Colbert flipped the bird to Amazon, right on camera. Amazon suggested that frustrated customers might try buying books elsewhere.

You could call the resolution happy, and open-ended. The two sides agreed to a multiyear deal in mid-November, and Hachette books were back in full for the holiday season. Amazon and Hachette each declared itself satisfied.

But it's hard to say what has changed. Douglas Preston, a Hachette author who became a leading Amazon critic, expressed a common view among writers when he told The Associated Press recently that the standoff demonstrated that the online retailer is "ruthless and willing to sanction books and hurt authors." Amazon's image might have suffered, but it still controls some 40 percent of the market, by the estimate of major New York publishers, and still has a hold on those who say they fear it.

Here are other highlights from 2014:

Yesterday's news

Many of the big fiction books of 2014 were not published in 2014: An Oprah Winfrey pick, Sue Monk Kidd's "The Invention of Wings"; Donna Tartt's Pulitzer Prize-winning "The Goldfinch," a Hachette release so in demand that even Amazon left it alone; and a handful of novels helped by movie adaptations — Gillian Flynn's "Gone Girl," John Green's "The Fault in Our Stars" and Laura Hillenbrand's "Unbroken." Phil Klay's book of contemporary war stories, "Redeployment," won the National Book Award, but a people's prize for top literary hardcover of 2014 would likely go

to a novel about World War II, Anthony Doerr's "All the Light We Cannot See," which has sold more than 180,000 copies, according to Nielsen BookScan, which tracks around 80 percent of sales.

Rock stars

Readers have been treating young adult writers like rock stars, which is better than how they've been treating rock stars — at least those of a certain age. At 48,000 copies, "One Direction: Who We Are: Our Official Autobiography" was more popular than the combined Nielsen sales for books by Carlos Santana, Joe Perry and Jerry Lee Lewis.

Diversity

BookCon, a self-styled "pop culture" version of BookExpo America, launched in 2014 and immediately failed by inviting only white authors to speak. In response, a social media campaign was born, and a grassroots movement, We Need Diverse Books, soon followed.

Need Diverse Books' advisers is Jacqueline Woodson, who won the National Book Award for her young adult book "Brown Girl Dreaming." She also, quite unintentionally, helped raised a substantial amount of money for the organization. After she won her prize, awards emcee Daniel Handler of "Lemony Snicket" fame made an awkward joke about watermelon that even Handler later acknowledged was racist. He apologized and eventually donated \$110,000 to WNDB.

Woodson, a published author for nearly 25 years, sees the industry alternating between cycles of recognition and neglect. Now, she believes, recognition is underway, citing Jason Reynolds and Aisha Saeed as among the promising young adult writers. Meanwhile, Woodson wants to get around to an adult book she's been meaning to write. "My plan for January is to get quiet again, and write."

Getting personal (and political)

Lena Dunham only begins the story. It was a good year for personal essays, including those that are more than personal with acclaimed collections from Roxane Gay, Charles D'Ambrosio and Meghan Daum among others. Leslie Jamison, author of the best-selling "The Empathy Exams: Essays," wrote in a recent email that "readers are becoming increasingly drawn to forms of personal writing that also look outward at the world: that blend the revelations of memoir with the inquiries of journalism and criticism."

The facts

With nonfiction still essentially a print market, and with bookstore space far smaller than a decade ago, it's hard these days to be a historian — unless you're Bill O'Reilly. The Fox News host's latest recounting of a famous death, "Killing Patton: The Strange Death of World War II's Most Audacious General," has sold more than 700,000 copies, according to Nielsen. That's far more than the combined Nielsen sales for the most recent books (both published before 2014) by two of the world's most famous historians: Robert Caro's "The Passage of Power: The Years of Lyndon Johnson," and Doris Kearns Goodwin's "The Bully Pulpit: Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, and the Golden Age of Journalism." O'Reilly's book, co-written by Martin Dugard, also easily surpassed the combined sales of two of the biggest political books of 2014: Hillary Rodham Clinton's "Hard Choices" and George W. Bush's biography of his father, "41."



20th Century Fox/AP

Ben Affleck, right, and Rosamund Pike, pictured at left, star in "Gone Girl." The film, released in 2014, is based on the best-selling book by Gillian Flynn.



20th Century Fox/AP

Ansel Elgort and Shailene Woodley are teens in love in "The Fault in Our Stars," adapted from the book by John Green.



Summit Entertainment/AP

Shailene Woodley (again!) and Theo James are teens in a future dystopia in "Divergent," based on a novel by Veronica Roth.

OPERATION ENDURING FREEDOM: A look back in photos on 13 years of war

View the exclusive photos from

STARS AND STRIPES

at www.stripes.com/afghanphotos



THE YEAR IN VIDEO GAMES



YEAR
IN REVIEW

2014

Best games of 2014



'Bayonetta 2'

This was a contentious game. It's a hyper-sexualized brawler that eschews any sort of sense and logic in its setting or characters for something that would have to be toned down considerably to be called "off the wall." The absolutely pitch-perfect controls and combat simply can't be derided, though. This is strictly an adults-only game, but those with an open mind might be able to find what made this a top 10 game of 2014.



'Call of Duty: Advanced Warfare'

Although it sometimes feels like a "Titanfall" wannabe, "Advanced Warfare" is worthy of accolades. Set 40 years in the future, the characters sport gear that gives them almost as many abilities as a superhero. However, the game maintains the "Call of Duty" vibe in the campaign as well as online play. An added bonus: It actually has a good storyline.



'Destiny'

Developers were hoping for the stars but only reached Mars — and that's OK. Some gamers were disappointed when the much-hyped game from the creators of "Halo" didn't deliver an astounding new experience. However, the game did many things exceptionally well in bringing elements from online role-playing games into a shooter. The best parts were smooth gameplay, solid solo missions and exciting cooperative events.



'Dragon Age: Inquisition'

The term "epic adventure" was created for games like this. The fantasy role-playing game delivers a

BY MICHAEL DARNELL,
BRIAN BOWERS AND SAM LANEY
Stars and Stripes

It was a year of adventure. In 2014, role-playing games returned to their place of glory. Gamers spent countless hours roaming large open worlds, usually wielding special powers and a blade or gun as they vanquished evil. The best included "Dragon Age: Inquisition," "inFamous: Second Son," "South Park: The Stick of Truth," "Sunset Overdrive" and "Wasteland 2." But gamers also found some fun in such titles as "Assassin's Creed: Unity," "Borderlands: The Pre-Sequel," "Lord of the Rings: Shadow of Mordor" and "Watch Dogs."

It was also the first full year the Xbox One and PlayStation 4 were on shelves, and while proponents for both systems were busy arguing about parity clauses and Kinect, Wii U fans were happily feasting on "Mario Kart 8" and "Super Smash Bros."

There were easily 20 to 30 games that could be numbered among the 10 best video games of 2014. After several heated arguments and not an insignificant amount of name-calling, we here at Stars and Stripes have narrowed down our list of the best games of 2014.

complex and compelling story set on a sprawling continent inhabited by interesting people and vicious animals. Even if you try to cut corners and sprint to the end of this tale, it's going to take you longer than a marathon screening of Peter Jackson's "Lord of the Rings" and "Hobbit" films put together. And it would probably be more fun.



'inFamous: Second Son'

The year brought us several action games that featured heroes with unusual abilities and were set in big cities. This tale of a slacker-turned-mutant was definitely the best. This PS4-exclusive let us zip across the Pacific Northwest using powers based on smoke, stone and neon light to pry Seattle from the clutches of a government agency run amok. The competition couldn't quite keep pace. (However, if you have an Xbox One instead of a PS4, the hyperactive parkour/zombie-shooter "Sunset Overdrive" is an acceptable substitute.)



'Mario Kart 8'

Besides being colorful, beautiful and fast, "Mario Kart 8" was far and away the most accessible



"Destiny"

Photos courtesy of Activision

game Nintendo released this year, and for a family-focused system like the Wii U, that's a major selling point. What it lacks in innovation — it borrows many mechanics from earlier Mario Karts — it makes up for in polish. From the characters, to the replays, it delivers fast, fun racing for one player or four. On top of that, this is arguably the first console game that Nintendo has released compelling downloadable content for.



'Might & Magic X: Legacy'

This early-year release heralded the return of the classic role-playing game. It's a pure, unfiltered experience that harkens back to the days before "press A to win" mechanics and romance options. PC gamers who haven't given this a try should pick it up immediately.



'South Park: The Stick of Truth'

This was easily the most contentious entry on our list, and for good reason. If you're a fan of "South Park's" unique brand of humor, this is a must-buy. It perfectly captures everything that has kept "South Park" on the air for nearly 20 years.

Conversely, if you hate "South Park," "The Stick of Truth" perfectly captures everything you hate about "South Park." Still, it's a worthy entry onto the list.



'Super Smash Bros.'

The "Smash Bros." titles for Wii U and 3DS are a little more of everything. From custom characters to control options, mini-games to unusual solo modes, both new titles have a ton of things to do while maintaining their own identities.



'Titanfall'

This sci-fi shooter added easy-to-control jetpacks to the traditional formula, creating new vertical opportunities on the digital battlefield. It also took the lumbering mech of yore and turned it into an agile heavy-weapons platform. The combination made the fast-paced online-only "Titanfall" the most exciting shooter of the year.

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INDEPENDENT NEWS FOR THE U.S. MILITARY COMMUNITY

Whenever They Fight and Wherever They Live

The first Stars and Stripes was printed during the Civil War, when a band of Union soldiers published a handful of editions.

During World War I, Stars and Stripes reappeared in Paris on February 8, 1918, to serve the doughboys of the American Expeditionary Force (AEF), by order of General of the Armies John J. Pershing. An all-military staff produced it weekly until the war's end.

A second renaissance began on April 18, 1942, when a small group of servicemen began publishing a four-page weekly Stars and Stripes in London. They sold each copy for "tuppence" (about 5 cents) and in no time doubled their page count to eight pages, printing daily instead of weekly.

The first World War II edition of Stars and Stripes featured an interview with Gen. George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff. Marshall quoted Gen. Pershing, World War I Commander of the AEF, who described Stripes as a major factor in sustaining morale. Stars and Stripes later found a champion and protector in Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander and later president of the United States.

Eisenhower enforced a hands-off policy in regard to Stars and Stripes that continues to the present day.

Operations expanded, following GIs to the battlefield to bring them the news. During the war, Stars and Stripes published over 30

separate editions, running up to 24 pages per issue.

At one time, Stars and Stripes had some 25 printing locations in Europe, North Africa, the Middle East and the Pacific. The Pacific edition was launched a week after VE day (Victory in Europe, May 8, 1945).

The war ended—but Stars and Stripes kept going. Its reporters and photographers continued to join American troops in the field, throughout the Korean and Vietnam conflicts, during the 1990s Operations Desert Storm and Desert Storm, and in Bosnia and Kosovo.

From the 2003 outset of Operation Enduring Freedom, Stars and Stripes was there to report first-hand. The war in Afghanistan continues to receive steady coverage. And during Operation Iraqi Freedom, Stripes reporters embedded with military units in Kuwait and Iraq, as well as on Navy ships in the region.

Stars and Stripes today is a multimedia news organization. The majority of Stars and Stripes unique reporting efforts is read now in digital form, either online at stripes.com or via mobile offerings for iPhone, Android and iPad, in over 200 countries around the world.

The print newspaper is still available for servicemembers, government civilians and their families in



Europe, the Middle East and the Pacific—and in contingency areas. Washington, D.C., hosts the Central office, where daily editions are transported to printers in Afghanistan, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, and Djibouti, as well as in Germany, Italy, UK, Japan, and South Korea. Stars and Stripes also publishes several weeklies (Stripes Guam, Japan, Korea and Okinawa), designed to serve the

needs of their respective military communities.

A U.S. edition comprised exclusively of Stars and Stripes reports from around the world now serves stateside forces and veterans. The U.S. edition is published in partnership with commercial newspaper publishers who serve communities with large military populations.

STARS AND STRIPES RECOGNIZED FOR EXCELLENCE

2014 VFW News Media Award – For outstanding contribution to a better understanding of our American way of life and its institutions and interests by honest and forthright reporting.

2013 Best American Newspaper Narrative Writing Contest – Notable Narrative Winner
Recipient: Martin Kuz: "Soldiers Recount Attack"

2013 Military Reporters and Editors Awards – Notable Narrative Winner
Recipient: Laura Rauch

2013 National Headline Awards – Second Place: News Series (Forever After: A Warrior Wounded; A Family Challenged)

2013 min Best of Web: Redesign – Honorable Mention
Stripes UK website

2011 Military Photographer of the Year – Honorable Mention
Recipient: Joshua DeMotts

2011 Sigma Delta Chi Award – Breaking News Photography (Newspaper Circulation 100,001+ or Affiliated Website/National Magazine) Recipient: Laura Rauch: "For those love I will sacrifice"

2011 John Reagan "Tex" McCrary Award for Excellence in Journalism – Congressional Medal of Honor Foundation

2010 Military Reporters and Editors Awards – Overseas coverage (< 100,000 circulation)
Recipient: Jon Rabinoff

2010 National Headline Awards – First Place: Public Service (Forcing Change) – Third Place: News Series (Coming Home: The Men of Triple Deuce)

2009 George Polk Awards in Journalism – George Polk Award for Military Reporting
Recipients: Charlie Reed, Leo Shane III and Kevin Baron

2009 min Editorial & Design Awards – Editorial Print / Special Supplement: HEROES 2009; Custom Publication Design: Stripes GAMER

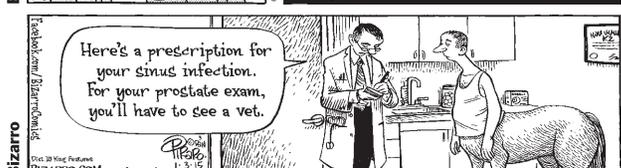
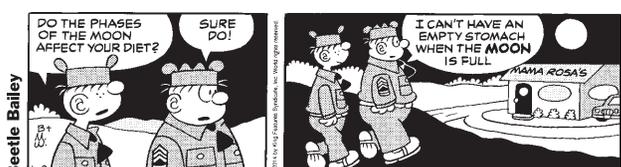
2007 Military Reporters and Editors Awards – Overseas coverage (< 100,000 circulation)
Recipient: Monte Morin

2006 Military Reporters and Editors Awards – Overseas coverage (< 100,000 circulation)
Recipients: Monte Morin, Joe Giordano; Honorable mention: Nancy Montgomery Photography; Fred Zimmerman

2005 Military Reporters and Editors Awards – Overseas coverage (< 100,000 circulation)
Recipient: Steve Lower Photography; Terry Boyd

2004 American Legion Excellence in Journalism Award – Ground Truth Series

2003 Scripps Howard Foundation National Journalism Award – First Amendment, Finalist



Eugene Sheffer Crossword

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- ACROSS**
- 1 Michelangelo masterpiece
 - 2 Saudi neighbor
 - 3 Animated movie of 2002
 - 4 Straightens
 - 5 Alpine alternative
 - 6 Actress Sorvino
 - 17 Doing
 - 19 Squid squirt
 - 20 1492 carrier
 - 22 Crony
 - 24 Poorly lit
 - 27 Diana of 'The Avengers'
 - 29 Weld scissors
 - 32 Where a car goes only up or down
 - 35 Last few notes
 - 36 Rewrite, maybe
 - 37 Spy org.
 - 38 "Impossible"
 - 40 Novelist Seton
 - 42 TV watchdog grp.
 - 44 War injury (Abbr.)
 - 46 Combine
 - 50 Speaker
 - 52 Napoleon's realm, e.g.
 - 54 Go to bed
 - 55 Tossed the dice
 - 56 Reservation residence
 - 57 Permission
- DOWN**
- 1 Sandwich shop
 - 2 Eastern bigwig (Var.)
 - 3 Meat and dairy avoider
 - 4 Traveler's stop-over
 - 5 Break up
 - 6 "Misbehavior"
 - 7 Reporter's coupon
 - 8 The girl
 - 9 Escalator, for one
 - 10 Not "fer"
 - 11 Bottle feature
 - 12 Thanksgiving veggie
 - 18 Taiwan temples
 - 21 Glass of NPR
 - 23 Interlaken intersection
 - 24 Year-end abbr.
 - 25 Worldwide workers' grp.
 - 26 Treat, in a way
 - 28 Hoagies
 - 30 "— Had a Hammer"
 - 31 Bake-sale org.
 - 33 Cistern
 - 34 Pippen
 - 39 Future fungus
 - 41 Seek a job
 - 42 Garrison
 - 43 Saskatchewan tribe
 - 45 Genealogy chart
 - 47 Rembrandt's supply
 - 48 Dunkable treat
 - 49 Started
 - 51 Point
 - 53 Extinct bird

Answer to Previous Puzzle

F	A	T	C	H	E	F	G	A	G	S
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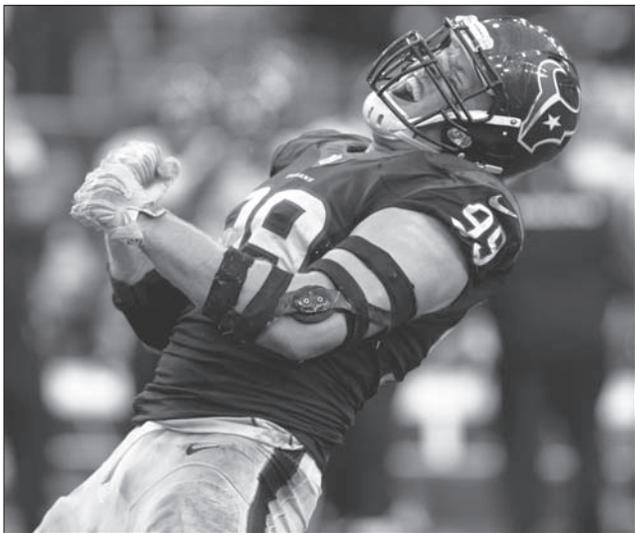
CRYPTOQUIP

EF NQXMDAAD LZYQ YK
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Z NSVMWYMO DBHDQYDMGD.
 Yesterday's Cryptoquip: FIENDISH VILLAINESS WHO'S KNOWN TO SERVE PEOPLE POISONED FOOD: THE WICKED WITCH OF THE EATS.

Today's Cryptoquip Clue: H equals P

SPORTS BRIEFS/COLLEGE BASKETBALL



DANIEL R. PATMORE/AP

Houston Texans defensive end J.J. Watt was one of two unanimous picks to the 2014 Associated Press NFL All-Pro team, along with New England Patriots tight end Rob Gronkowski.

Briefly

All-Pro team: Gronkowski, Watt are unanimous picks

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — J.J. Watt found a unique way to make the 2014 Associated Press NFL All-Pro team announced Friday.

Houston's Watt was listed on all 50 ballots by a nationwide panel of media members who regularly cover the league, with 45 of the votes for defensive end and the other five for defensive tackle. So he actually was a first-team end and a second-team tackle in gaining his third straight selection.

"Everybody always says you try and make it so the other team can't game plan you because they don't know where you're coming from," Watt said. "I mean, half the time I have no clue where I'm coming from, so it makes it pretty tough for the other people, I think, and that's the goal."

No such confusion for New England's Rob Gronkowski as the other unanimous pick. He grabbed all the votes for tight end.

"He's, I think, when you say a kid playing the game, that's him," Patriots safety Devin McCourty said. "He don't care about anything, stats, if we're up or down, he's playing one way. He's playing hard and you can tell he's just having fun with his friends on the field."

Dallas led all teams with four All-Pro, including guard Zach Martin, the only rookie on the squad.

In other NFL news:

■ A person familiar with the Buffalo Bills coaching search tells The Associated Press that general manager Doug Whaley is serving as the point man.

The person adds that aside from a meeting with Denver Broncos offensive coordinator Adam Gase this weekend, San Diego Chargers offensive coordinator Frank Reich is also on the list of coaching candidates.

The person spoke on the condition of anonymity Friday because the Bills have not outlined plans to replace Doug Marrone, who left Wednesday.

Reich is very familiar to Buffalo. He was the backup quarterback to Bills Hall of Famer Jim Kelly in the 1990s.

This is the first time Whaley is leading a coaching search. He will be assisted by team president Russ Brandon.

Cincinnati coach Cronin to miss rest of season

CINCINNATI — Cincinnati basketball coach Mick Cronin will not work games or practices for the rest of the season because of an artery problem.

The 43-year-old coach says he will do everything else he can with the team. Cronin discussed the restrictions placed on his job during a news conference Friday.

His doctors say he has a "flap in his artery wall." The coach says

he is treating his condition with medication and rest and maintaining proper blood pressure.

Cronin has missed three games since Dec. 20, when Cincinnati announced he had an aneurysm. The Bearcats are 2-1 under assistant Larry Davis. Cronin is 169-109 in nine seasons as Cincinnati's coach and 238-133 in 12 seasons.

Yankees acquire 2 relievers from Braves

NEW YORK — The New York Yankees have bolstered their bullpen by acquiring David Carpenter and Chasen Shreve in a trade with the Atlanta Braves.

Carpenter went 6-4 with three saves and a 3.54 ERA in 65 games with Atlanta last year. Shreve made his major league debut in July, and the left-hander allowed one earned run in 12½ innings covering 15 games.

The Braves received minor league left-hander Manny Banuelos in the deal. Banuelos went 2-3 with a 4.11 ERA in 26 games over three stops last season, finishing with Triple-A Scranton/Wilkes-Barre.

The trade was announced on Thursday. The YES Network was the first to report the deal.

Carpenter made his major league debut with Houston in 2011. The 29-year-old righty is 11-10 with a 3.62 ERA in 188 career games.

Purple Aces rally to knock off No. 23 Panthers

By NATHAN BLACKFORD
The Associated Press

EVANSVILLE, Ind. — Northern Iowa's vaunted defense lived up to its billing. That wasn't enough to hold off Evansville.

D.J. Balentine scored 17 points and the Purple Aces came all the way back from 16 down to beat No. 23 UNI 52-49 on Thursday night.

"We did not rebound well enough to finish it off," Northern Iowa coach Ben Jacobson said. "And if we had finished off possessions in the second half, we were going to win."

Egidijus Mockevicius added 12 points and 13 rebounds for Evansville (11-2, 1-0 Missouri Valley Conference). Jaylon Brown made four free throws in the last 7 seconds to seal it.

Seth Tuttle led UNI with 18 points, but fouled out in the final minute. Nate Buss added nine for the Panthers (11-2, 0-1).

Jeremy Morgan's desperation three-pointer in the final second sailed well to the left. "They stepped up their game in the second half and we were not able to handle it," Tuttle said. "We never really got a run going in the second half. That credit goes to them, I guess. We had a couple of opportunities, but we didn't execute."

The Panthers came into the

game allowing opponents to shoot just 39.5 percent from the field.

And for one half, Northern Iowa's swarming defense completely frustrated Evansville, holding the Purple Aces to 20 points on 30.4 percent shooting as the Panthers built a lead as large as 16.

The second half was a different story.

UNI led 28-12 late in the first following Tuttle's one-handed shot as he drifted across the lane, but Evansville pulled to 30-20 at halftime. The Purple Aces shot 7-for-23 from the floor in the period, including 0-for-7 on three-pointers.

"We felt fortunate to only be down 10 at half, to be honest," Evansville coach Marty Simmons said. "I thought our guys showed some grit."

Evansville never did find its shooting touch, ending the game at 32.7 percent (16-for-49), but used offensive rebounding to get numerous second chances. The Purple Aces finished with 14 offensive rebounds to three for UNI.

Evansville pulled to 36-35 with 10:57 to play on Duane Gibson's bank shot, and it was back and forth from there. Tuttle's three-pointer with 6:12 left briefly pushed the Panthers' lead back to 41-35, but the Purple Aces hit 13 of 14 free throws in the second half to make up the difference.



DANIEL R. PATMORE/AP

The Purple Aces' Egidijus Mockevicius jumps with teammate Mislav Brzoja (5) while celebrating a 52-49 victory over No. 23 Northern Iowa on Thursday in Evansville, Ind.

NBA

Sacramento turns back Minnesota

Struggling Timberwolves drop 10th straight game

By JON KRAWCZYNSKI
The Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Rudy Gay had 21 points, six rebounds and five assists, and the struggling Sacramento Kings handed the Minnesota Timberwolves their 10th straight loss with a 110-107 victory on Thursday night.

DeMarcus Cousins had 19 points and seven rebounds after being ejected one night earlier, and the Kings shot 54 percent while each of their starters scored in double figures. Darren Collison scored 21 points and Derrick Williams had 17 points, including a big three-pointer down the stretch.

Andrew Wiggins had 27 points and nine rebounds, but the Timberwolves couldn't take advantage when Cousins and Gay both fouled out in the fourth quarter. Troy Daniels' three-point attempt at the buzzer was partially blocked.

The Kings were one of the feel-good stories of the first month of the season, with coach Michael Malone instilling a new commitment to defense and getting Cousins to harness his volatile temper while they put together a 9-5 start. But Cousins was sidelined with meningitis and Malone was surprisingly fired on Dec. 15.

Sacramento was just 2-6 in its first eight games without Malone, and a loss to the lowly Timberwolves (5-26) may have been rock bottom, especially with how Sacramento was humming on offense early.

The Kings hit 78 percent of their shots in a 37-point first quarter, but led by a modest eight points thanks to six turnovers and allowing the Wolves to shoot 57 percent themselves.

Sacramento led 81-68 midway through the third quarter, but Gay fouled out with 4:21 to play and Cousins picked up his sixth less than two minutes later.

Wiggins scored on a drive and a spin move and Thaddeus Young hit two free throws to tie it at 99 with four minutes to go.

Then Williams, the former Timberwolves No. 2 overall pick, responded with a three-pointer that put Sacramento up for good.



ANN HEISENDEL/AP

Sacramento forward Carl Landry, left, swats away a shot attempted by Minnesota Timberwolves forward Jeff Adrien (12) as Kings guard Ben McLemore, right, adds pressure during the fourth quarter of Thursday's game in Minneapolis. Sacramento won 110-107.

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference				
Atlantic Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Toronto	24	8	.750	—
Brooklyn	15	16	.484	8½
Boston	11	19	.363	13½
New York	5	29	.147	20
Philadelphia	4	26	.133	19
Southeast Division				
Atlanta	23	8	.742	—
Washington	22	7	.710	—
Miami	14	19	.424	10
Orlando	13	22	.371	11
Charlotte	10	23	.303	14
Central Division				
Chicago	23	10	.697	—
Cleveland	18	14	.563	4½
Milwaukee	17	15	.515	6
Indiana	12	21	.364	11
Detroit	8	23	.258	14
Western Conference				
Southwest Division				
	W	L	Pct	GB
Memphis	23	9	.762	—
Houston	22	9	.710	1
Dallas	23	9	.697	1
San Antonio	20	14	.588	4½
New Orleans	23	15	.500	7½
Northwest Division				
Portland	26	7	.788	—
Oklahoma City	16	17	.485	10
Denver	13	20	.394	13
Utah	11	21	.344	14½
Minnesota	5	26	.161	20
Pacific Division				
Golden State	5	833	—	—
L.A. Clippers	22	11	.667	4½
Phoenix	18	15	.550	9
Sacramento	14	19	.424	12½
L.A. Lakers	10	22	.313	16

Wednesday's games
Boston 106, Sacramento 84
Indiana 106, Miami 95
L.A. Clippers 99, New York 78
Houston 102, Charlotte 83
San Antonio 95, New Orleans 93, OT
Milwaukee 96, Cleveland 80
Oklahoma City 137, Philadelphia 134, OT

Thursday's games
Chicago 105, Denver 101
Sacramento 110, Minnesota 107

Friday's games
Brooklyn at Orlando
Cleveland at Charlotte
Dallas at Boston
Detroit at New York
Houston at New Orleans
Washington at Oklahoma City
Indiana at Milwaukee
Philadelphia at Phoenix
Atlanta at Utah
Toronto at Golden State
Memphis at L.A. Lakers

Saturday's games
Charlotte at Orlando
Boston at Chicago
Miami at Houston
Utah at Minnesota
Washington at San Antonio
Memphis at Denver
Atlanta at Portland
Philadelphia at L.A. Clippers

Thursday Kings 110, Timberwolves 107

SACRAMENTO — Gay 7-12 7-8 21, D.Williams 6-10 2-2 7, Cousins 8-14 3-13 19, Collison 8-15 4-4 21, McLemore 6-9 1-2 14, Thompson 3-2 2-8, Slauska 0-4 0-0 0, Landry 1-4 6-8 8, McCallum 1-3 0-0 2. Totals 40-74 25-29 110.

MINNESOTA — Muhammad 5-13 4-5 15, Young 4-8 1-2 9, Deng 7-10 1-4 15, LaVine 2-9 0-6 5, Wiggins 2-2 2-4 4, Rose 1-4 0-0 2, Adrien 3-5 4-4 10, Bennett 2-7 0-0 4, McWilliams 3-10 0-0 8, Daniels 3-7 2-2 11. Totals 42-91 15-22 107.

Sacramento 37 23 24 26 110
Minnesota 23 20 28 29 107
Three-Point Goals—Sacramento 5-12 (D.Williams 3-6, McLemore 1-2, Collison 2, Slauska 0-2, Minnesota 0-1, Bennett 0-1, Young 0-2). Fouled Out—Cousins, Gay, Rebounds—Sacramento 48 (Landry 9), Minnesota 26 (Deng 10). Assists—Sacramento 23 (Collison 6), Minnesota 22 (McWilliams 6). Total Fouls—Sacramento 26, Minnesota 24. Technicals—Minnesota Coach Saunders. A—13,337 (15,356).

Bulls 106, Nuggets 101

DENVER — Chandler 9-16 4-4 22, Faried 7-14 4-18, Mozgov 4-2 2-4, Lawson 8-16 3-4 20, Afflalo 8-14 2-2 19, Hickson 0-5 1-2 1, Nurkic 0-0 4-5 10, Harris 2-7 2-7, Robinson 0-7 0-1 0. Totals 37-92 22-27 106.

Chicago — Dunleavy 2-6 0-0 6, Gasol 7-17 3-17, Noah 3-6 0-0 6, Rose 7-25 2-2 17, Butler 8-14 9-26, Hitchcock 4-4 0-10, Gibson 3-8 3-4 9, Brooks 3-9 4-12, Snell 0-0 0-0 0, Mirovic 1-2 1-3 2. Totals 46-92 22-25 106.

Denver 31 31 31 21 101
Chicago 22 20 28 29 106
Three-Point Goals—Denver 5-14 (Chandler 2, Lawson 2, Afflalo 1), Chicago 8-15 (Hitchcock 2, Dunleavy 2-3, Brooks 2-4, Butler 1, Rose 1-3, Mirovic 0-1). Fouled Out—Mozgov, Chandler, Gibson. Rebounds—Denver 43 (Faried 19), Chicago 53 (Noah 11). Assists—Denver 19 (Lawson 7), Chicago 22 (Rose, Butler 4). Total Fouls—Denver 27, Chicago 15. Technicals—Chicago defensive three second. A—21,794 (20,917).

Rose's late surge lifts Bulls over Nuggets

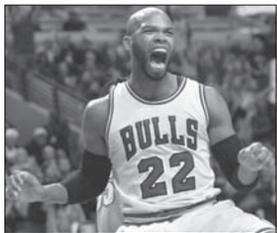
By ANDREW SELIGMAN
The Associated Press

CHICAGO — Derrick Rose scored 13 of his 17 points in the fourth quarter, and the Chicago Bulls beat the Denver Nuggets 106-101 on Thursday night.

Jimmy Butler scored 26 for Chicago, and Pau Gasol added 17 points, nine rebounds and a career-high nine blocks.

The late surge by Rose lifted the Bulls to their 11th win in 13 games. The 2011 NBA MVP missed his first eight shots, including all seven in a scoreless first half, but the point guard dominated down the stretch, coming up with one big basket after another.

Wilson Chandler led Denver with 22 points. Ty Lawson scored 20, while Arron Afflalo had 19 points. Kenneth Faried added 18 points and 19 rebounds, but the Nuggets fell 4-12 on the road.



PAUL BEATY/AP

Bulls forward Taj Gibson celebrates after dunking during Thursday's 106-101 win over the Denver Nuggets in Chicago.

Chicago, which trailed by 13 early in the third, was clinging to a 100-97 lead after Denver's Jusuf Nurkic scored on a layup with 46 seconds left.

Rose then nailed a jumper, and the Bulls hung on after Faried dunked with 22 seconds remaining to get the Nuggets within three again. Chicago's Aaron Brooks hit two free throws to make it a five-point game before Nurkic hit two of his own after he got fouled trying to dunk on Taj Gibson with 11 seconds left. But Rose then hit two more foul shots to make it 106-101.

The Bulls were trailing 74-70 late in the third quarter when Gasol blocked Nurkic. Butler then got fouled and hit two free throws, sparking a nine-point run.

The crowd came unglued when Kirk Hinrich nailed a three from the corner with 16 seconds left, giving the Bulls a three-point lead, and Gasol capped the run with a running hook to make it 79-74 22 seconds into the fourth.

NHL

Scoreboard

Eastern Conference

Atlantic Division							
GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Tampa Bay	39	24	11	4	52	127	105
Montreal	37	24	11	2	50	100	86
Detroit	36	20	9	3	49	108	95
Toronto	38	21	14	3	45	128	114
Boston	38	19	15	4	42	101	103
Florida	35	16	10	9	41	82	93
Ottawa	36	15	14	7	37	97	99
Buffalo	36	14	21	3	31	76	128

Metropolitan Division

Pittsburgh	37	25	9	5	51	111	87
N.Y. Islanders	37	25	11	1	51	117	103
Washington	37	19	11	7	45	108	96
N.Y. Rangers	35	20	11	4	44	107	89
Columbus	35	16	16	3	35	89	110
Philadelphia	37	14	16	7	35	103	113
New Jersey	39	13	19	7	33	83	111
Carolina	37	10	23	4	24	73	100

Western Conference

Central Division							
GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Chicago	38	23	11	2	52	119	81
Nashville	36	24	9	3	51	106	78
St. Louis	37	22	12	3	49	108	92
Winnipeg	38	19	12	7	45	96	92
Minnesota	35	17	14	4	38	100	98
Colorado	37	17	14	6	36	96	112

Pacific Division							
GP	W	L	OT	Pts	GF	GA	
Anaheim	39	24	9	6	54	107	104
Los Angeles	39	19	12	6	46	106	94
Vancouver	36	21	12	3	45	105	97
San Jose	38	20	13	5	45	104	96
Calgary	39	21	15	3	45	114	103
Arizona	37	14	19	4	32	86	121
Edmonton	38	8	22	4	24	82	131

Note: Two points for a win, one point for overtime loss.

Thursday's games

Washington 3, Chicago 2
Los Angeles 3, Vancouver 2

Friday's games

Florida at Buffalo
Montreal at New Jersey
Tampa Bay at Pittsburgh
Philadelphia at Carolina
Toronto at Minnesota
Edmonton at Colorado
N.Y. Islanders at Calgary
St. Louis at Anaheim

Saturday's games

Ottawa at Boston
Nashville at Los Angeles
Philadelphia at New Jersey
Buffalo at N.Y. Rangers
Montreal at Pittsburgh
Toronto at Winnipeg
Minnesota at Dallas
Columbus at Arizona
Detroit at Vancouver
St. Louis at San Jose

Sunday's games

Boston at Carolina
Florida at Washington
Tampa Bay at Ottawa
Dallas at Chicago
Columbus at Colorado
Nashville at Anaheim
N.Y. Islanders at Edmonton

Thursday

Capitals 3, Blackhawks 2

Chicago	1	1	0	2
Washington	1	0	1	2

First Period—1, Washington, Febr 11, 7:01. 2, Washington, Ovechkin 18 (Green, Hillen), 11:58. 3, Chicago, Sharr 7 (Koth, Kane), 13:36 (pp).

Second Period—4, Chicago, Saad 9 (Toews, Hossa), 3:15.

Third Period—5, Washington, Brouwer 11 (Ovechkin, Green), 13:47 (pp).

Shots on Goal—Chicago 13-13-9—35, Washington 19-7-25—51.

Power-play opportunities—Chicago 1 of 6; Washington 1 of 4.

Goalies—Chicago, Crawford 14-7-2 (35 shots-32 saves). Washington, Holtby 17-8-6 (35-33).

A—42,832 (41,408), T—2:50.

King's 3, Canucks 2

Los Angeles	0	1	0	2
Vancouver	1	0	1	2

First Period—1, Vancouver, Burrows 9 (D.Sedin, Vrba), 12:18 (pp).

Second Period—2, Vancouver, Vrba 15 (Dingell, Hossa), 13:39. 3, Los Angeles, Kip 5 (Richards), 14:39.

Third Period—1, Los Angeles, Williams 9 (Doughty, Martinez), 17:53 (pp). 5, Los Angeles, Stoll 4 (Pearson, Greene), 18:46.

Shots on Goal—Los Angeles 16-14-10—40, Vancouver 8-2-6—16.

Power-play opportunities—Los Angeles 1 of 4; Vancouver 1 of 1.

Goalies—Los Angeles, Beck 16-9-7 (16 shots-14 saves). Vancouver, R.Miller 19-8-1 (40-37).

A—18,870 (18,910), T—2:25.

Scoring leaders

Through Jan. 1

Player	GP	G	A	Pts
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Jakub Voracek, Phi 37 15 32 47
Tyler Seguin, Phi 37 16 25 41
Claude Giroux, Phi 37 13 30 43
Ryan Getzlaf, Ana 37 16 25 41
Patrick Kane, Chi 38 18 23 41
Phil Kessel, Tor 38 18 23 41
Erik Ikonen, Tor 37 16 25 41
Tyler Johnson, TB 38 13 27 40
Vladimir Tarasenko, STL 37 16 24 39
Steven Stamkos, TB 39 20 18 38
Nicklas Backstrom, Was 37 12 26 38
Steve Staley, Phi 41 17 27 38
Nikita Kucherov, TB 39 17 20 37
Jiri Hudler, Cgy 38 13 24 37



SUSAN WALSH/AP

Fans of the Washington Capitals and the Chicago Blackhawks watch their teams play Thursday during the third period of the Winter Classic at Nationals Park in Washington. The Capitals won 3-2 on Troy Brouwer's goal with just over 12 seconds remaining in the game.

Roundup

Winter Classic: Fun in the sun

Brouwer's goal with 12.9 second left lifts Caps over Blackhawks

The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A bit too much sunshine filled the sky at the opening faceoff of the Winter Classic, and seat cushions rained down when the winning goal was scored just before the final whistle.

The replica of the U.S. Capitol in center field was a nice touch, given that the real thing is obscured by scaffolding because of ongoing repairs.

Alex Ovechkin, the player most responsible for making the nation's capital worthy of hosting the NHL's annual outdoor game, scored a goal, and he was also among the first to mob teammate Troy Brouwer when Brouwer's power-play goal decided the game with 12.9 seconds to play Thursday.

The NHL showcase was every bit the thrill for the host Washington Capitals, who beat the Chicago Blackhawks 3-2 on New Year's Day.

"We start talking about Winter Classic since we started the season, and this is it," Ovechkin said. "I remember Brouwie said it's a good time to show up and make a show. And he did."

Brouwer scored against his former team to cap a chaotic sequence. Ovechkin had his stick broken on a slash by Brandon



ALEX BRANDON/AP

Washington center Nicklas Backstrom, second from left, defenseman Mike Green (52) and left wing Alex Ovechkin (8) surround right wing Troy Brouwer after Brouwer scored the winning goal as Chicago right wing Marian Hossa, left, looks on.

Saad. While Ovechkin was raising his hands to make sure the officials would call the penalty, Brouwer gathered the loose puck in the left circle.

"Somebody had to try and keep it alive, so I just kind of turned around, threw it to the net," Brouwer said. "I'm not even sure where it went in, but I heard the noise of the crowd, heard the noise of the

guys on the ice." What a noise it was, a playoff-level celebration by players on the ice and fans in the stands, many of whom flung their commemorative Winter Classic seat cushions high into the air.

The seventh Winter Classic drew 42,832 to Nationals Park, an exclamation point to an event that helped validate D.C. as an

established hockey town. Players stood on a sheet of blue ice meant to represent the Reflecting Pool during the national anthem, then faced off under a gorgeous blue sky — too gorgeous, if truth be told.

The sun's glare on the white ice of the main rink made it difficult to see the puck, and Capitals defenseman Karl Alzner made good on his plan to play the game wearing sunglasses.

The teams switched sides at the 10-minute mark of the first period to even things out as the shadows from the stands began to cover the rink. It seemed totally unfair when Patrick Sharp launched a sun-to-shade slap shot that beat goalie Braden Holtby on a power play for Chicago's first goal.

King 3, Canucks 2: Justin Williams and Jarret Stoll scored 53 seconds apart late in the third period to rally visiting Los Angeles past Vancouver.

Williams tied the game on a power-play goal with 2:07 left before Stoll scored the winner with 1:14 to go.

Dwight King had the other goal for Los Angeles, which got 14 saves from Jonathan Quik.

Radim Vrba had a goal and an assist, and Alexandre Burrows also scored for Vancouver. Ryan Miller stopped 37 shots.

NFL PLAYOFFS

Revived defense carries Panthers into playoffs

By STEVE REED
The Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — The Carolina Panthers are back in the playoffs, thanks in large part to the resurgence of their defense.

The Panthers clinched the NFC South with a 34-3 victory over the Atlanta Falcons on Sunday, a win punctuated by a pair of interception returns for touchdowns by safeties Roman Harper and Tre Boston.

They'll host the Arizona Cardinals on Saturday in an NFC wild-card game.

Carolina's win Sunday was the culmination of a big turnaround in its defense, which ranked 27th in the NFL through Week 7, but rallied to finish in the top 10 for the third straight year under coordinator Sean McDermott.

The Panthers (7-8-1) allowed 388.3 yards and 27.9 points per game in their first seven games. They allowed just 302.1 yards and 19.8 points per game over the final nine games.

"When I looked at it, I felt we had to put more speed in the defensive secondary," Panthers coach Ron Rivera said Monday.

That meant releasing defensive backs Charles Godfrey and Antoine Cason, and moving cornerback Josh Norman into the starting lineup. It also meant adding young, but aggressive rookie defensive backs Bene Benwikere and Boston to the starting mix after recovering from early-season injuries.

"We were trying to find answers as a coaching staff, the



Arizona Cardinals at Carolina Panthers
AFN-Sports
10:20 p.m. Saturday CET

right combination of guys — and we found it," Rivera said.

Rivera also credits the emergence of defensive end Charles Johnson as a huge reason for the turnaround.

Johnson, a normally reserved eight-year veteran, has stepped into a leadership role under the stretch.

It was Johnson who spoke to the team after the win on Sunday, telling them beating the Falcons isn't enough and "we're not done."

"He's a unique individual," Rivera said. "He cares a lot, but he's really guarded. Lately he's been very emotional and very outspoken, which in my opinion is very uncharacteristic of him. But I'm glad he's doing it."

Johnson also helped get the team's mindset right midway through the season when it became clear Pro Bowl defensive end Greg Hardy would not be returning this season following the fallout from his domestic violence conviction.

Hardy had 15 sacks last season.

"I do think there was a part



CURTIS COMPTON, ATLANTA JOURNAL CONSTITUTION/AP

Falcons offensive lineman Ryan Schraeder, rear left, pursues Panthers safety Tre Boston, who runs back an interception of a Matt Ryan pass for a touchdown Sunday. Carolina clinched the NFC south with the 34-3 victory.

of us that said, 'Guys, we've got to get past it. We've got to move on,'" Rivera said. "And it's hard because he's such an integral part of what we had planned for going into this year and what he was for us last year. So was he missed? Most certainly. But I think it's also been part of what's helped with Charles now, is knowing that 'Hey, I'm the guy.'"

To win their first playoff game

since 2005, the Panthers must exorcise some old demons.

In 2008, the Cardinals (11-5) came into Charlotte and upset the second-seeded Panthers 33-13 in one of the most painful losses in franchise history.

"This would appear to be a good matchup for the Panthers defense given the uncertainty surrounding Arizona's quarterback situation and the fact the Cardinals

have lost four of their past six games.

Carson Palmer is out for the season and primary backup Drew Stanton's status for this weekend remains uncertain.

Ryan Lindley is 0-2 as his replacement.

He's thrown four interceptions and two touchdown passes and has been sacked six times in those two defeats.

Ravens prepare to face nemesis Steelers again

By DAVID GINSBURG
The Associated Press

OWINGS MILLS, Md. — As a reward for squeezing into the playoffs on the final day of the regular season, the Baltimore Ravens face a loushorne foe in a very unfriendly environment.

Baltimore's contentious rivalry with the Pittsburgh Steelers resumes Saturday night at Heinz Field, where the Ravens have experienced nothing but agony during the postseason.

Pittsburgh and Baltimore met in the playoffs in 2002, 2009 and 2011. The Steelers won each time.

And now, here we go again. "It's a great challenge," Ravens coach John Harbaugh said Monday. "It's another playoff game there. We'd like to win one, one of these days."

Pittsburgh and Baltimore have already played twice this season, with each AFC North team winning by 20 points at home. Including the playoffs, the Steelers lead the series 24-17.

"We love this rivalry, we love being a part of it," Harbaugh said, "and I believe they feel the same way."

Memories of Hines Ward jaw-



NICK WASS/AP

Ravens running back Justin Forsett, left, rushes past Cleveland Browns defenders in Sunday's game. Baltimore edged into the playoffs with a 20-10 win and a San Diego loss. The Ravens and Steelers meet for the fourth time in the playoffs Saturday.

ing at the Ravens, Terrell Suggs yelling at the Steelers and Jacoby Jones skipping past Mike Tomlin on the sideline are some of the highlights of the Steelers-Ra-

vens rivalry. Mostly, the rivalry is about hard hits, helmet-jarring tackles and bloody noses.

Asked what stands out most, Harbaugh replied, "The physical-



Baltimore Ravens at Pittsburgh Steelers
AFN-Sports
2 a.m. Sunday CET

ity, first of all, and the intensity. Every play, whether it's a playoff game or not, is played at that level."

Baltimore (10-6) finished third in the division behind Pittsburgh (11-5) and needed some help Sunday just to qualify as the sixth seed. A combination of the Ravens' 20-10 win over Cleveland and San Diego's 19-7 loss to Kansas City provided Baltimore a return to the postseason after last year's 8-8 disappointment.

Harbaugh sent a thank-you text to Chiefs coach Andy Reid, his former boss in Philadelphia.

"I promised Andy dinner, and he responded very favorably to that," Harbaugh said. "It probably won't be cheap."

The Ravens stumbled in Houston before rallying to defeat the Browns, so it's not as if they're entering the playoffs with a full head of steam. But here they are, and they figure they've got as good a chance as anyone to advance to the Super Bowl.

"It's all equal now," Harbaugh said.

"All you've got to do is win all your games," Suggs said. "If you ask me, I think we're a [heck] of a team on the road. Sometimes, that's the way you've got to go. But everything's 0-0, all things are new, and we've gotten to the second season."

Two years ago, Baltimore needed to win at Denver and New England to advance to the Super Bowl. That is exactly what happened.

So, why not now? "I think that we're battle-tested and we've been through a lot," guard Marshal Yanda said. "We're ready to roll."

Ravens defensive tackle Haloti Ngata returns from a four-game suspension for using the amphetamine Adderall. But Baltimore might be without rookie defensive lineman Timmy Jernigan, who hurt his left foot against Cleveland.

NFL

SUPER BOWL HOPEFULS: PROS AND CONS

Twelve teams with a dream

Each playoff squad has reasons to believe — and reasons to question — its title hopes

BY ARNIE STAPLETON
The Associated Press

DENVER — Each of the dozen NFL teams still standing has reason to believe next month will bring a party and a parade.

Every one of them also has a potentially costly flaw that could have them dejectedly clearing out their lockers instead.

“The game gets a little faster and certainly everything’s on the line,” Denver quarterback Peyton Manning said of the

“I think the more experience you have, the different types of games you’ve been through, those things can certainly help you. But it usually comes down to kind of who executes better.”

Peyton Manning
Broncos quarterback, on how difficult it is to win in the NFL postseason. Manning would know — the former Super Bowl MVP has an 11-12 career playoff record, including a 1-2 mark in the Super Bowl

playoffs, where he’s experienced plenty of pain — 12 losses — to go with lots of euphoria — 11 wins. “I think the more experience you have, the different types of games you’ve been through, those things can certainly help you. But it usually comes down to kind of who executes better.”

As the dandy dozen prepare for the playoffs, here’s a look at the signature strength of each team along with their most worrisome weakness:

AFC

New England Patriots

Weakness: The O-line struggled early after LG Logan Mankins was traded to Tampa Bay. The unit settled down when rookie center Bryan Stork took over in Week 4. With little depth, the Patriots need the O-linemen to stay healthy and protect the franchise, Tom Brady.

Strength: With apologies to Rob Gronkowski, the addition of cornerbacks Darrelle Revis and Brandon Browner gets the nod here. They have greatly improved New England’s pass defense. The emergence of second-year linebacker Jamie Collins also has been a big plus.

“He’s turned into a leader and a linebacker who is able to control the whole defense,” safety Devin McCourty said of Collins. “There’s not much he can’t do on the field.”

Denver Broncos

Weakness: Manning often looks rushed even when he’s not. The O-line hasn’t done him many favors and must step up its play for Manning to be able to find Demaryius Thomas and Emmanuel Sanders, who combined for 212 catches, 3,023 yards and 20 TDs this season.

Strength: Defense newcomers Aqib Talib, DeMarcus Ware and T.J. Ward came up big. So did Von Miller, Chris Harris Jr., Rahim Moore and Derek Wolfe, who were sidelined a year ago. Add in Bradley Roby and Brandon Marshall and this unit atones for any offensive hiccups.

“I’ll just ask the fans this: Do you want Peyton to throw 70 million touchdowns and break 80 million touchdowns or do you all want a parade downtown?” running back C.J. Anderson said.

Pittsburgh Steelers

Weakness: Pittsburgh’s defense is no longer the menacing group it was during three Super Bowl trips from 2005-11. The Steelers were 18th in total defense and 27th against the pass. Ike Taylor and Troy Polamalu were hurt and Cortez Allen failed to develop into a shutdown CB.

Strength: Antonio Brown has become as big a part of the offense as Ben Roethlisberger. His 129 catches were the second-highest single season total in NFL history, and he led the league with 1,698 yards receiving to go with a team-record 13 TD catches.

“He needs no endorsement from me,” coach Mike Tomlin said of Brown. “He is who he is. I don’t think any of us are surprised when he delivers for us time and again.”

Indianapolis Colts

Weakness: Over the last six weeks, the Colts have lost nine fumbles and thrown six interceptions. That’s a real concern for a team that had seven interceptions in two playoff games last year. After committing a league-low 66 penalties in 2013, Indy was called for 105.

Strength: Even with all the blunders and bruises, Andrew Luck has an uncanny knack for winning. The Chiefs saw his genius in the playoffs last year, when he rallied the Colts from a 28-point deficit. Luck’s finishing touch means anything is possible in his postseason.

“I don’t think the kid ever feels any pressure,” coach Chuck Pagano said. “I think he performs best when his back’s to the wall.”

Cincinnati Bengals

Weakness: Andy Dalton is 0-3 in the playoffs and has played some of his worst games in the pressurized postseason. In those three games, two losses at Houston and one at home last year against San Diego, Dalton has one TD, six interceptions and a paltry pass rating of 56.2.

Strength: Rookie RB Jeremy Hill has provided a spark. The Bengals’ commitment to the run takes pressure off Dalton. Fourteen of his 17 passes went to a tight end or running back in a big win over the Broncos, a low-risk approach that goes hand-in-hand with handing it off.

“We just have a new attitude. The running game has really sparked kind of a feistiness,” left tackle Andrew Whitworth said.

Baltimore Ravens

Weakness: The Ravens have five cornerbacks on injured reserve, most notably Jimmy Smith, along with safety Terrence Brooks. If the Ravens don’t get pressure from sack specialists Elvis Dumervil and Terrell Suggs, the beat is on a backfield that ranked 24th against the pass.

Strength: Justin Forsett ran for a career-high 1,266 yards. He gives Joe Flacco time to pick from Torrey Smith, Steve Smith and Owen Daniels. That formula enabled the Ravens to score 17 fourth-quarter points against Cleveland when Forsett had runs of 27 and 26 yards.

“To open those runs up in the fourth quarter, to finish the game, that’s what you need to do,” coach John Harbaugh said. “Especially this time of year.”

NFC

Seattle Seahawks

Weakness: Seattle’s O-line remains shaky in pass protection. The front five are good at opening lanes for bruising running back Marshawn Lynch, but too often quarterback Russell Wilson is asked to improvise out of sheer survival.

Strength: The key to the Seahawks’ stout defense is its ability to stop the run, led by middle linebacker Bobby Wagner. Opponents become one-dimensional and end up having to deal with a standout secondary featuring Richard Sherman, Earl Thomas and Kam Chancellor.

“Right now we’re playing better than we have all of last year. Guys are putting their egos to the side, guys are buying in and playing for one another,” defensive end Bruce Irvin said.

Green Bay Packers

Weakness: The Packers don’t travel well. They were 4-4 on the road and 8-0 at Lambeau Field. If Seattle and Green Bay win in the divisional round, the Packers’ road to the Super Bowl would go through the Great Northwest, where they were thumped 36-16 in the opener.

Strength: A limping Aaron Rodgers is better than most healthy QBs. His notorious grit was especially impressive last weekend when he fought through a left calf injury to help the Packers beat Detroit. At home, Rodgers threw 36 TD passes without a single interception.

“If there was a word of a greater magnitude than respect, that’s what I have for Aaron,” defensive lineman Mike Daniels said.

Dallas Cowboys

Weakness: The Cowboys aren’t getting many difference-making plays from their cornerbacks. Orlando Scandrick picked off a pair of passes and high-priced veteran Brandon Carr went without an interception for the first time in his seven-year career.

Strength: Long reliant on Tony Romo, Dallas committed to the run. NFL rushing leader DeMarco Murray set franchise records for carries (392) and yards (1,845) and three first-round picks on the O-line got Pro Bowl nods: Tyron Smith, Travis Frederick and Zack Martin.

“This team is completely different than some of those teams in years past,” Romo said. “We’re much better up front.”

Carolina Panthers

Weakness: The O-line and secondary were big problems before Ron Rivera found the right mix. Even so, the Panthers are relying on so much youth at key positions. Seven rookies started the last two games, and that inexperience could prove costly in the playoffs.

Strength: Behind second-year linebacker Luke Kuechly, the Panthers’ defense was dominant during a 4-0 December run. Cam Newton tends to play much better when his defense is making stops and he’s not forced into making big plays. He has won both of his starts since his auto accident.

“Sometimes it’s good to be young and dumb,” veteran safety Roman Harper said of the team’s abundance of rookies.

Cardinals

Weakness: Arizona’s problems at quarterback may finally be too much. Carson Palmer was 6-0 before his season-ending knee injury. Effective backup Drew Stanton sprained his right knee and an infection slowed his recovery. That means Ryan Lindley — whose only NFL victory came against the 4-12 Lions in 2012 — could get the nod.

Strength: The defense was the backbone of the team for much of the year but it is coming off its two worst performances of the season. Todd Bowles loves the blitz and brings it from all sorts of angles, relying on man coverage for his secondary.

“We can’t have those mistakes next week, because everything is on the line,” cornerback Patrick Peterson said.

Detroit Lions

Weakness: Detroit’s O-line has been disappointing, allowing quarterback Matthew Stafford to be sacked 45 times. The Lions have a potentially dynamic passing game with receivers Calvin Johnson and Golden Tate, but their blocking problems have held the team back.

Strength: The Lions held opponents to an NFL-low 69 yards rushing per game, forcing teams — even Chicago and Matt Forte on Thanksgiving — to abandon the run. Ndamukong Suh anchors the D-line and the Lions and their fans exhaled when his suspension was overturned.

“This time of year you have to be able to control the line of scrimmage,” coach Jim Caldwell said.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL

Title: Ducks favored to win championship

FROM BACK PAGE

"I gotta go. We gotta get ready for that one."

The oddsmakers have installed the Ducks as seven-point favorites.

The College Football Playoff, a four-team tournament that replaced the Bowl Championship Series, has provided a jolt to the sport.

The BCS matched the top two teams and didn't allow much room for error: An early slip often could spell doom for a team's national title hopes.

In the old system, it would have been very difficult for Ohio State to recover from a September home loss to Virginia Tech. The Buckeyes were a team looking for an identity back then. They had lost star quarterback Braxton Miller to a preseason injury and redshirt freshman J.T. Barrett was still developing.

Ohio State lost by 14 to the Hokies on the same day Oregon beat Michigan State.

Two weeks into the season, the Big Ten was already being counted out for the first playoff.

But a funny thing happened. Ohio State just kept getting better.

Barrett turned into a Heisman contender, but then in the season finale against Michigan, he broke his ankle. In stepped Jones, who helped Ohio State blast Wisconsin in the Big Ten title game to earn the final spot in the playoff.

It was no fluke. The Buckeyes beat Alabama, eliminating the Southeastern Conference from title contention. After winning seven straight national championships in the BCS, it's now two straight seasons in which the SEC won't wear the crown.

Oregon's loss came at home, too, in early October against Arizona.

The Ducks have been a juggernaut since, winning nine straight games, all by double digits and scoring at least 42 points in each. Ohio State can put up some points, too. The Buckeyes haven't scored less than 31 since losing 35-21 to Virginia Tech.

For what it's worth, Ohio State is 8-0 all-time against Oregon.



BRANDON WAGE/AP

Baylor quarterback Bryce Petty, bottom, fumbles the ball while being sacked by Michigan State defensive lineman Joel Heath, left, and defensive end Shilique Calhoun during the second half of Thursday's Cotton Bowl in Arlington, Texas.

Bowls roundup

Michigan St. stuns Baylor

Spartans rally from 20 points down to win Cotton Bowl

The Associated Press

ARLINGTON, Texas — Connor Cook and the Michigan State Spartans want to have a different role in the playoff talk next season.

With their big comeback finish in the Cotton Bowl, the No. 7 Spartans could be set up as a viable championship contender next season, after their only losses this season were to playoff teams.

Michigan State scored three touchdowns in the fourth quarter on New Year's Day to beat playoff-snubbed and No. 4 Baylor 42-41 in the highest-scoring Cotton Bowl ever.

"For us to win in such an emotional and dramatic fashion like you just saw out there, really just I think with all the guys coming back, all the juniors, really just makes us feel good and brings us closer together," said Cook, who threw a 10-yard TD pass to Keith Mumphrey with 17 seconds left.

Michigan State (11-2), which won the Rose Bowl as Big Ten champion last season, has won four consecutive bowl games after trailing in each of them at halftime. The Spartans' only two losses this season were to Pac-12 winner Oregon and Big Ten champ Ohio State.

Down 41-21 going into the fourth quarter, Michigan State got the winning touchdown after Marcus Rush blocked Chris Callahan's 43-yard field goal attempt with 1:05 left.

"It's just sort of crazy," coach Mark Dantonio said. "I really probably can't put it into words. We just kept pace. We didn't panic."

When two-time Big 12 champ Baylor got the ball back for one last try, Bryce Petty was sacked on consecutive plays before Riley Bullough's clinching interception.

That was quite a final defensive stand under coordinator Pat Narduzzi, who after 11 seasons and two schools with Dantonio is leaving the Spartans to take over as head coach at Pittsburgh. Narduzzi will be about 20 miles away Friday to watch the Panthers play Houston in the Armed Forces Bowl on the TCU campus.

The Cotton Bowl was the lead-in game Thursday to the two national semifinals that Baylor (11-2) hoped to be part of instead — though that doesn't matter now.

Outback Bowl

No. 17 Missouri 34, No. 19 Auburn 31 (OT): Melvin Gordon ran for an Outback Bowl-record 251 yards and three touchdowns and Rafael Gaglianone kicked a 25-yard field goal in overtime to lift the Badgers over the Tigers in Tampa, Fla.

Gaglianone tied it with a 29-yarder with 7 seconds left in regulation. Athletic director Barry Alvarez coached the Badgers (11-3) following Gary Andersen's move to Oregon State.

Gordon scored on runs of 25, 53 and 6 yards, bouncing back from a subpar

performance against Ohio State in the Big Ten championship game to threaten Barry Sanders' FBS single-season rushing record.

Gordon finished with 2,587 yards in 14 games — second most in FBS history. Sanders had 2,628 for Oklahoma State in 11 games in 1988, when the NCAA did not include bowl results in a player's statistics.

Nick Marshall threw two touchdown passes for Auburn, which also got a pair of TDs on the ground from Cameron Artis-Payne. The Tigers were unable to move the ball in overtime, though, and lost when Daniel Carlson's 45-yard field goal hit the right upright and bounced away.

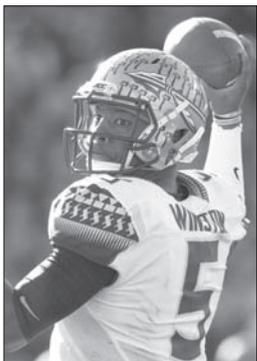
Citrus Bowl

No. 16 Missouri 33, Minnesota 17: Marcus Murphy ran for 159 yards, Russell Hansbrough added 114 yards and a touchdown and the Tigers beat the Gophers in the Citrus Bowl at Orlando, Fla.

Missouri (11-3) won its third straight bowl game to reach 11 victories for the fourth time in school history. Minnesota (8-5) trailed 19-17 entering the fourth quarter, but Missouri pulled away on Hansbrough's 78-yard touchdown run and Maty Mauk's 7-yard scoring pass to Bud Sasser.

Mauk settled down to throw two TD passes after interceptions on the Tigers' first two possessions.

Minnesota quarterback Mitch Leidner was 21-for-31 for 258 yards and a TD.



JAE C. HOWE/AP

Quarterback James Winston and Florida State won't get the opportunity to defend the national title they won a year ago.

COLLEGE FOOTBALL PLAYOFF

Ducks fly high in beatdown of Seminoles

Turnover-prone Florida State walloped by Mariota, Oregon

By RALPH D. RUSSO
The Associated Press

PASADENA, Calif. — Touchdown. Turnover. Touchdown. Turnover. Touchdown.

And on it went for Oregon. Marcus Mariota and the Ducks are built for speed and in a flash they turned the first College Football Playoff semifinal game into a Rose Bowl rout.

The Ducks ousted Florida State 59-20 on Thursday and now it's on to Texas to try to win their first national championship.

"It's incredible. I'm so proud of these guys right here," Mariota said. "We've got one more to take care of."

Paired champion Oregon (13-1) will play Ohio State in the title game Jan. 12 in Arlington, Texas.

The second-seeded Ducks scored six straight times when they touched the ball in the second half, with five of the touchdowns covering at least 21 yards and the last four coming after Florida State turnovers.

In a span of 12:54 on the game clock, the score went from 25-20 to 59-20.

"A lot of fun," said Oregon coach Mark Helfrich of the Ducks' run, "but at the same time these guys were able to retain a tremendous focus."

In the matchup of Heisman Trophy winners, Jameis Winston matched Mariota's numbers, but the Seminoles (13-1) were no match for the Ducks.

Third-seeded Florida State's winning streak ended at 29. In Winston's first loss as a college starter, maybe his last game in college, he threw for 348 yards and turned the ball over twice.

"I think what he did as a competitor and what he does with his teammates, he's one of the great players in not only college football, but college football history to me," Florida State coach Jimbo Fisher said. "It was a tough day out there."

Mariota was mostly brilliant again. Directing the Ducks' warp-speed, hurry-up offense, the junior passed for 338 yards and two touchdowns. When he sprinted for a 23-yard touchdown with 13:56 left in the fourth quarter it made the score 52-20 and it made the Ducks the first team to reach 50 points in Rose Bowl his-



MARK J. TERRILL/AP

Oregon quarterback Marcus Mariota, left, pushes away Florida State safety Tyler Hunter during the first half of the Rose Bowl on Thursday in Pasadena, Calif. The Ducks beat the Seminoles 59-20.

tory. This was game No. 101.

With the sun just about set behind the San Gabriel mountains, the Ducks put the "Noles away."

On fourth-and-5 in Oregon territory, Winston had lots of time but couldn't find a receiver. He

was flushed from the pocket and as he loaded to throw his foot slipped and the ball popped out of his hands.

"It kind of looked like he slipped on a banana, like in cartoons," Oregon linebacker Tor-

rodney Prevot said.

The fumble bounced into Tony Washington's arms and the defensive end went 58 yards for a score.

"It was just a crazy play," Winston said.

Elliott's record night lifts Ohio St. over Alabama

By PAUL NEWBERRY
The Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS — Urban Meyer had barely sat down after the Sugar Bowl when someone told him the score from the other semifinal game.

He started to bolt from his chair, feigning a sense of urgency with another game left against a team that wiped out the defending national champion.

"We've got to go get ready for that one," Meyer said.

Actually, he's not intimidated in the least. Meyer knows he's got a pretty good team, too.

Cardale Jones turned in another savvy performance in his second college start and Ezekiel Elliott ran for a Sugar Bowl-record 230 yards Thursday night, leading Ohio State to a 42-35 upset of top-ranked Alabama in the second semifinal of the College Football Playoff.

The Buckeyes (13-1 and seeded fourth in the playoff) kicked off at the Superdome right after Oregon finished its 59-20 rout of reigning champ Florida State in the Rose Bowl.

Now, it's on to the Jan. 12 championship game at Arlington, Texas.

Denied a shot at his fourth national title in six years, Alabama coach Nick Saban held over at Ohio State can hang with the high-scoring Ducks.

"They're capable of playing with any team in the country," he said.

Meyer also likes his team's chances. "We're good enough," he said. "That was a sledgehammer game. That was a classic."

This is what Meyer has in mind when he took over at Ohio State in 2012, having taken a year off from coaching after leading Flor-



BYRON ANDERSON/AP

Ohio State quarterback Cardale Jones (12) leaps over Alabama defensive back Geno Smith (24) in the first half of the Sugar Bowl on Thursday in New Orleans.

ida to a pair of national titles. Coming from the Southeastern Conference, Meyer knew what he had to do. Recruit more speed. Bring a more athletic style to the plodding Big Ten. Turn Columbus into the SEC North.

After just three years on the job, he's one win away from a national championship. And, for the first time in nine years, the SEC

won't be part of the championship game.

"Maybe the Big Ten is not that bad," said Meyer, whose team rallied from a 21-6 deficit. "Maybe it's pretty damn good."

Jones threw for 243 yards, including a 47-yard touchdown to Devin Smith that put the Buckeyes ahead for good early in the third quarter. He also ran for 43 yards and

converted a crucial third-down play with a spinning, 1-yard dive and Ohio State clinging to a 34-28 lead.

The fumble bounced into Tony Washington's arms and the defensive end went 58 yards for a score. "It was just a crazy play," Winston said.

Alabama (12-2) didn't go down quietly. Blake Sims threw a 6-yard touchdown pass to Amari Cooper with 1:59 remaining. The Buckeyes recovered the onside kick, but Alabama got it back one more time after some questionable clock management.

The Tide's final shot ended when a desperation heave into the end zone was picked off by Tyvis Powell as time ran out, Sims' third interception of the game.

"I feel like I'm going to Disney World," a giddy Powell said.

Alabama hardly looked like Saban's usual defensive powerhouse, giving up 537 yards to the Buckeyes. Elliott scored on a 3-yard run with 2:55 left in the first half to spark the comeback, and he wound up averaging a staggering 11.5 yards on 20 carries to earn the award as the most outstanding offensive player.

"He's probably the most underrated back in the United States," Meyer said. For the second year in a row, Alabama's season ended at the Sugar Bowl.

This one was especially painful, costing the Tide a chance to advance in college football's first playoff.

"I'm proud of this team," Saban said. "They excelled all year long and kept Alabama at the forefront of college football."

SPORTS



Drought continues
Kings extend Timberwolves'
skid to 10 games » **NBA, Page 26**



COLLEGE FOOTBALL

The O's have it



LENNY IGONELZI, LEFT, AND BRYNN ANDERSON, RIGHT/AP

Quarterback Marcus Mariota, left, will lead Oregon against running back Ezekiel Elliott, right, and Ohio State in the national championship game on Jan. 12 in Arlington, Texas.

First playoff sends Oregon, Ohio State to title game

Inside:

- Buckeyes stun Crimson Tide to win Sugar Bowl, Page 31
- Ducks throttle Seminoles in Rose Bowl, Page 31

BY RALPH D. RUSSO
The Associated Press

Ohio State is looking for its first national title since 2002. Oregon is seeking its first period.

Pac-12 champion Oregon and Big Ten champion Ohio State will meet in Arlington, Texas, at the home of the Cowboys on Jan. 12 in the first College Football Playoff championship game.

"It's perfect," Oregon linebacker Derrick Malone Jr. said. "I need another game. I'm glad I can still be a part of this. If we didn't have another game I wouldn't know what to do with myself."

The Ducks (13-1) and Buckeyes (13-1) last played

in the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, Calif., in 2010. Ohio State won that game 26-17. Now the Rose Bowl comes to Texas, but with so much more at stake.

Cardale Jones, Ezekiel Elliott and fourth-seeded Ohio State rallied, and then held on for a 42-35 victory over No. 1 Alabama at the Sugar Bowl on Thursday night.

Heisman Trophy winner Marcus Mariota and Oregon had it much easier: The second-seeded Ducks crushed Florida State 59-20 at the Rose Bowl.

"Oregon won by 40?" Ohio State coach Urban Meyer said, startled when he heard about the results during his postgame news conference in New Orleans.

SEE TITLE ON PAGE 30

Did you know

Ohio State is 8-0 all-time against Oregon. The teams last met in the 2010 Rose Bowl, a 26-17 Ohio State victory.



SOURCE: The Associated Press

Analyzing each team's strengths and weaknesses

NFL playoffs, page 29

Capitals win Winter Classic with last-minute goal

NHL, Page 27