

'America is back': Biden pushes past Trump era with nominees

By ALEXANDRA JAFFE,
MATTHEW LEE and AAMER
MADHANI

WILMINGTON, Del. (AP)

— Declaring "America is back," President-elect Joe Biden introduced his national security team on Tuesday, his first substantive offering of how he'll shift from Trump-era "America First" policies by relying on experts from the Democratic establishment to be some of his most important advisers.

"Together, these public servants will restore America globally, its global leadership and its moral leadership," Biden said from a theater in his longtime home of Wilmington, Delaware. "It's a team that reflects the fact that America is back, ready to lead the world, not retreat from it."

The nominees are all Washington veterans with ties to former President Barack Obama's administration, a sign of Biden's effort to resume some form of normalcy after the tumult of President Donald Trump's four years in office. There are risks to the approach as Republicans plan attacks and progressives fret that Biden is tapping some officials who were too cautious and incremental the last time they held power. Still, Biden's nominees were a clear departure from Trump, whose Cabinet has largely consisted of men, almost all of them white. Biden's picks included several women and people of color, some of whom would break barriers if confirmed to their new positions.

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President-elect Joe Biden introduces his nominees and appointees to key national security and foreign policy posts at The Queen theater, Tuesday, Nov. 24, 2020, in Wilmington, Del.

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They stood behind Biden and Vice President-elect Kamala Harris spaced apart and wearing masks to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, a contrast with Trump and many of his top aides who have largely eschewed facial coverings. The president-elect's team includes Antony Blinken, a veteran foreign policy hand well-regarded on Capitol Hill whose ties to Biden go back some 20 years, for secretary of state; lawyer Alejandro Mayorkas to be homeland security secretary; veteran diplomat Linda Thomas-Greenfield to be U.S. ambassador to the United Nations; and Obama White House alumnus Jake Sullivan as national security adviser.

Avril Haines, a former deputy director of the CIA, was picked to serve as director of national intelligence, the first woman to hold that post, and former Secretary of State John Kerry will make a curtain call as a special envoy on climate change. Kerry and Sullivan's position will not require Senate confirmation.

With the Senate's balance of power hinging on two runoff races in Georgia that will be decided in January, some Senate Republicans have already expressed antipathy to Biden's picks as little more than Obama world retreads.

Sen. Tom Cotton, an Arkansas Republican and potential 2024 presidential candidate, derisively accused Biden of surrounding himself with "panda huggers" who will go soft on China. Sen. Marco Rubio, another potential White House hopeful who sits on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that will consider Blinken's nomination, broadly wrote off the early selections.

"Biden's cabinet picks went to Ivy League schools, have strong resumes, attend all



Vice President-elect Kamala Harris speaks as she and President-elect Joe Biden introduce their nominees and appointees to key national security and foreign policy posts at The Queen theater, Tuesday, Nov. 24, 2020, in Wilmington, Del.

Associated Press

the right conferences & will be polite & orderly caretakers of America's decline," Rubio tweeted.

Biden said his choices "reflect the idea that we cannot meet these challenges with old thinking and unchanged habits." He said he tasked them with reasserting global and moral leadership, a clear swipe at Trump, who has resisted many traditional foreign alliances.

The president-elect said he was "struck" by how world leaders have repeatedly told him during congratulatory calls that they look forward to the U.S. "reasserting its historic role as a global leader" under his administration.

Trump, who has debated recently whether to mount another presidential campaign in 2024, appeared to defend his worldview on Tuesday.

"We shouldn't go away from that — America First," he said at the annual turkey pardon, a lighthearted pre-Thanksgiving White House tradition.

While Trump expected to-

tal loyalty from his Cabinet and chafed at pushback from advisers, Biden said he expected advisers to tell me "what I need to know, not what I want to know." Further drawing a contrast with Trump, Haines said she accepted Biden's nomination knowing that "you value the perspective of the intelligence community, and that you will do so even when what I have to say may be inconvenient or difficult."

Haines said she has "never shied away from speaking truth to power" and added "that will be my charge as director of national intelligence."

Biden celebrated the diversity of his picks, offering a particularly poignant tribute to Thomas-Greenfield. The eldest of eight children who grew up in segregated Louisiana, she was the first to graduate from high school and college in her family. The diplomat, in turn, said that with his selections, Biden is achieving much more than a changing of the guard.

"My fellow career diplo-

mats and public servants around the world, I want to say to you, 'America is back, multilateralism is back, diplomacy is back,'" Thomas-Greenfield said.

Mayorkas, who is Cuban American, also offered a nod to his immigrant upbringing.

"My father and mother brought me to this country to escape communism," he said. "They cherished our democracy, and were intensely proud to become United States citizens, as was I."

But Mayorkas might pose the most difficult confirmation challenge from Biden's early round of nominees.

The Senate previously confirmed him in December 2013 by a party-line vote to be the deputy secretary of Homeland Security. The Senate was controlled by Democrats then, and all of the chamber's Republicans voted against his confirmation mainly because he was then under investigation by the Obama-appointed inspector general in that department. At the time, the Senate historian's office

said it was unprecedented for the Senate to vote on a nominee who was under investigation.

The inspector general, John Roth, found in March 2015 that Mayorkas, as director of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, appeared to give special treatment to certain people as part of the visa program that gives residency preference to immigrants who agree to invest in the U.S. economy.

Meanwhile, there were signs on Tuesday that the stalled formal transition of power is now underway.

At the Pentagon, Kash Patel, chief of staff to the acting secretary of defense, is heading the department's transition work. A transition task force has been assembled, led by Tom Muir, head of the Pentagon office that provides administrative and management services to all Defense Department facilities in the Washington area.

Muir said the first meeting with Biden's team was held virtually on Tuesday morning and that he expected daily meetings to come — some virtually and some in person. He said normal accommodations for the Biden team have been made, including provision of briefing materials, videoconferencing capabilities, and office space inside the Pentagon.

Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar also said his agency is working to get briefing materials to Biden's aides immediately and pledged a "professional, cooperative and collaborative" transition.

The moves came a day after the head of the General Services Administration wrote the necessary letter of "ascertainment" acknowledging Biden as the apparent winner of the election, triggering the transition process. □

OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma pleads guilty in criminal case

By GEOFF MULVIHILL

Purdue Pharma pleaded guilty Tuesday to three criminal charges, formally taking responsibility for its part in an opioid epidemic that has contributed to hundreds of thousands of deaths but also angering critics who want to see individuals held accountable, in addition to the company.

In a virtual hearing with a federal judge in Newark, New Jersey, the OxyContin maker admitted impeding the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration's efforts to combat the addiction crisis.

Purdue acknowledged that it had not maintained an effective program to prevent prescription drugs from being diverted to the black market, even though it had told the DEA it did have such a program, and that it provided misleading information to the agency as a way to boost company manufacturing quotas. It also admitted paying doctors through a speakers program to induce them to write more prescriptions for its painkillers.

And it admitted paying an electronic medical records company to send doctors information on patients that encouraged them to prescribe opioids.

The guilty pleas were en-



In this Oct. 21, 2020, file photo Purdue Pharma headquarters stands in Stamford, Conn. Associated Press

tered by Purdue board chairperson Steve Miller on behalf of the company. They were part of a criminal and civil settlement announced last month between the Stamford, Connecticut-based company and the Justice Department.

The deal includes \$8.3 billion in penalties and forfeitures, but the company is on the hook for a direct payment to the federal government of only a fraction of that, \$225 million. It would pay the smaller amount as long as it executes a settlement moving through federal bankruptcy court with state and lo-

cal governments and other entities suing it over the toll of the opioid epidemic. Members of the wealthy Sackler family who own the company have also agreed to pay \$225 million to the federal government to settle civil claims. No criminal charges have been filed against family members, although their deal leaves open the possibility of that in the future. "Having our plea accepted in federal court, and taking responsibility for past misconduct, is an essential step to preserve billions of dollars of value" for the settlement it is pursuing through bankruptcy court,

the company said in a statement.

"We continue to work tirelessly to build additional support for a proposed bankruptcy settlement, which would direct the overwhelming majority of the settlement funds to state, local and tribal governments for the purpose of abating the opioid crisis," the statement read.

Purdue's plea to federal crimes provides only minor comfort for advocates who want to see harsher penalties for the OxyContin maker and its owners.

The ongoing drug overdose crisis, which appears to be worsening during the

coronavirus pandemic, has contributed to the deaths of more than 470,000 Americans over the past two decades, most of those from opioids both legal and illicit.

Cynthia Munger, whose son is in recovery from opioid addiction after being prescribed OxyContin more than a decade ago as a high school baseball player with a shoulder injury, is among the activists pushing for Purdue owners and company officials to be charged with crimes.

"Until we do that and we stop accusing brick and mortar and not individuals, nothing will change," said Munger, who lives in Wayne, Pennsylvania.

The attorneys general for about half the states opposed the federal settlement, as well as the company's proposed settlement in bankruptcy court. In the bankruptcy case, Purdue has proposed transforming into a public benefit corporation with its proceeds going to help address the opioid crisis.

The attorneys general and some activists are upset that despite the Sacklers giving up control of the company, the family remains wealthy and its members will not face prison or other individual penalties. □

Mysterious shiny monolith found in otherworldly Utah desert

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Deep in the Mars-like landscape of Utah's red-rock desert lies a mystery: A gleaming metal monolith in one of the most remote parts of the state.

The smooth, tall structure was found during a helicopter survey of bighorn sheep in southeastern Utah, officials said Monday.

A crew from the Utah Department of Public Safety and Division of Wildlife Resources spotted the gleaming object from the air Nov. 18 and landed to check it out during a break from their work.

They found the three-sided stainless-steel object is about as tall as two men put together. But they discovered no clues about who might have driven it into the ground among the undulating red rocks or why.

"This thing is not from another world," said Lt. Nick Street of the Utah Highway Patrol, part of the Department of Public Safety.

Still, it's clear that it took some planning and work to construct the 10- to 12-foot (3- to 4-meter) monolith and embed it in the rock.

The exact location is so re-

mote that officials are not revealing it publicly, worried that people might get lost or stranded trying to find it and need to be rescued.

The monolith evokes the one that appears in the Stanley Kubrick movie "2001: A Space Odyssey." Because it's on federal public land, it's illegal to place art objects without authorization.

Bureau of Land Management officials are investigating how long it's been there, who might have created it and whether to remove it. □



This Nov. 18, 2020 photo provided by the Utah Department of Public Safety shows a metal monolith installed in the ground in a remote area of red rock in Utah.

Associated Press

Los Angeles to consider stay-home order as virus spreads

By **BRIAN MELLEY** and **CHRISTOPHER WEBER**

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Officials in the nation's largest county will discuss a possible stay-home order just days before Thanksgiving after a spike of coronavirus cases surpassed a threshold set by Los Angeles public health officials to trigger one.

An "impressive and alarming surge" of more than 6,000 new cases put Los Angeles County over a five-day average of 4,500 cases per day, Public Health Director Barbara Ferrer said Monday. She declined to take action until county supervisors meet Tuesday.

If the county orders residents to stay home, it would be the first such action since mid-March when Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom followed the lead of several counties and issued a statewide order that closed schools and severely restricted movement, except for essential workers and for people buy groceries or pick up food. Coronavirus cases and



A COVID-19-themed mural reads "You Can't Quarantine Love," outside of a restaurant, Monday, Nov. 23, 2020, in Santa Monica, Calif.

Associated Press

hospitalizations have been rapidly rising across California in November. The state recorded its highest day of positive test results on Saturday with more than 15,000. It had more than 14,000 cases Sunday. Hospitalizations have increased 77% over the past two weeks. "At this rate, our hospitals won't have any spare beds

by Christmas time," said Los Angeles Mayor Eric Garcetti about the situation in his city.

Medical centers are prepared to increase capacity and the city has plans to set up field hospitals if necessary, Garcetti said.

Newsom has issued a 10 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew for almost all state residents and

urged residents to avoid nonessential travel during what is typically the busiest travel period of the year. Anyone entering California is advised to quarantine for two weeks.

If another stay-home order is issued, it could create conflict for people planning to spend Thanksgiving together. Officials have

urged people not to meet with more than two other households and to celebrate outdoors and follow physical distancing rules.

Despite the advisory, millions of Californians are expected to travel on Thanksgiving, mainly by car.

In Los Angeles, the county of 10 million residents accounts for a quarter of the state's 40 million residents but has about a third of the cases and more than a third of the deaths.

The rapid rise has taken public health officials by surprise, outpacing a troubling summer surge when average cases increased 43%.

A week ago, Ferrer said she was hopeful the county wouldn't hit an average of 4,000 cases until early December and didn't think that it was inevitable.

But newly confirmed cases passed that threshold on Sunday, triggering an order shutting down restaurant dining for three weeks starting Wednesday at 10 p.m. and further crippling an industry that has reeled from the virus. □

U.S. agrees for now to stop deporting women who alleged abuse



In this Sept. 15, 2020, file photo, Dawn Wooten, left, a nurse at Irwin County Detention Center in Ocilla, Georgia, speaks at a news conference in Atlanta protesting conditions at the immigration jail.

Associated Press

By **NOMAAN MERCHANT**
Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — The U.S. government has agreed temporarily not to deport detained immigrant women who have alleged being abused by a rural Georgia

gynecologist, according to court papers filed Tuesday. In a motion that must still be approved by a federal judge, the Justice Department and lawyers for several of the women agreed that immigration authorities

would not carry out any deportations until mid-January.

Dozens of women have alleged that they were mistreated by Dr. Mahendra Amin, a gynecologist who was seeing patients from the Irwin County Detention Center in Ocilla, Georgia. The Justice Department is conducting a criminal investigation, and the Department of Homeland Security's inspector general is investigating as well. Amin has denied any wrongdoing through his lawyer.

Several women say they have faced retaliation by immigration authorities for coming forward. One woman has said that hours after she spoke to investigators, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement notified her that it had lifted a hold on her deportation. Another woman was taken to an airport to be placed on a deportation flight be-

fore her lawyers could intervene.

The agreement filed in court Tuesday proposes that no deportations would take place until at least mid-January for women who have "substantially similar factual allegations." Elora Mukherjee, a Columbia University law professor working with several of the women, said the agreement gives the women "a measure of protection for trying to expose the abuses there."

"ICE and others at Irwin thought they could silence these women," she said. "They thought they could act with impunity and nothing would ever happen. But the women have organized and had the audacity to speak out."

ICE said Tuesday that it "complies with all binding court orders." The agency has previously denied allegations that it tried to

deport women to silence them, saying in a written statement: "Any implication that ICE is attempting to impede the investigation by conducting removals of those being interviewed is completely false."

Scott Grubman, a lawyer for Amin, did not immediately respond to an email requesting comment.

The allegations were originally revealed by a whistleblower complaint. Further investigations have found several examples of Amin performing surgeries on women who later said they didn't consent to the procedures or didn't fully understand them.

Grubman has denied any wrongdoing by the doctor and previously described Amin as a "highly respected physician who has dedicated his adult life to treating a high-risk, underserved population in rural Georgia." □

German defense minister rejects Turkey complaint over search

By **GEIR MOULSON**

BERLIN (AP) — Germany's defense minister on Tuesday rejected Turkey's complaints over the search of a Turkish freighter in the Mediterranean Sea by a German frigate participating in a European mission, insisting that German sailors acted correctly.

Sunday's incident prompted Turkey to summon diplomats representing the European Union, Germany and Italy and assert that the Libya-bound freighter Rosaline-A was subjected to an "illegal" search by personnel from the German frigate Hamburg. The German ship is part of the European Union's Irini naval mission, which is enforcing an arms embargo against Libya.

German officials say that the order to board the ship came from Irini's headquarters in Rome and that Turkey objected while the team was on board. The search was then ended.

Turkey says the search was "unauthorized and conducted by force" and insisted that its objections prior to the search were ignored. German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer backed the German crew's actions.

"It is important to me to make really clear that the



In this Thursday, Oct. 24, 2019 file photo German Defense Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, front right, arrives for a meeting of NATO defense ministers at NATO headquarters in Brussels, Belgium.

Associated Press

Bundeswehr soldiers behaved completely correctly," she said during an appearance in Berlin. "They did what is asked of them in the framework of the European Irini mandate."

"That there is this debate with the Turkish side points to one of the fundamental problems of this European mission," Kramp-Karrenbauer added, without elaborating. "But it is very important to me to say clearly here that there are

no grounds for these accusations that are now being made against the soldiers." This was the second incident between Turkey and naval forces from a NATO ally enforcing an arms blockade against Libya.

In June, NATO launched an investigation over an incident between Turkish warships and a French naval vessel in the Mediterranean, after France said one of its frigates was "lit up" three times by Turkish

naval targeting radar when it tried to approach a Turkish civilian ship suspected of involvement in arms trafficking.

Turkey supports a U.N.-backed government in Tripoli against rival forces based in the country's east. It has complained that the EU naval operation focuses its efforts too much on the Tripoli administration and turns a blind eye to weapons sent to the eastern-based forces.

In Ankara, Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar said that Irini was "flawed from the onset."

"It is not based on firm international legal foundations," Akar said. He renewed Turkey's criticism of the German ship's actions.

"The incident was against international laws and practices. It was wrong," he said.

The state-run Anadolu Agency quoted Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu as saying Turkey would "respond" to the incident and keep a watch on legal and political processes that may ensue.

A Turkish Defense Ministry statement described the incident as "bullying" and urged allies to respect international maritime laws. The statement added, however, that Turkey was ready to "increase the necessary cooperation and coordination to prevent such incidents from recurring and to protect peace and stability in the region."

Peter Stano, a spokesman for the European Commission, said in a statement that Irini had made "good faith efforts" to secure Turkey's consent to the search by giving its Foreign Ministry four hours' notice in line with international maritime practice. □

Trudeau: Canadians won't be among the first to get vaccine

By **ROB GILLIES**

TORONTO (AP) — Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Tuesday Canada will have to wait for a vaccine because the very first ones that roll off assembly lines are likely to be given to citizens of the country they are made in.

Trudeau said the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany have mass vaccine-production facilities but Canada does not. Trudeau said it is understandable that an American pharmaceutical company will distribute first in the U.S. before they distribute internationally.

"Shortly afterwards they will start honoring and delivering the contracts that they

signed with other countries including Canada," Trudeau said. "We're expecting to start receiving those doses in the first few months of 2021."

Trudeau said Canadians won't have to wait for everyone in the U.S. to be vaccinated before Canada gets doses.

Trudeau said having pre-bought an array of vaccine candidates from foreign manufacturers will help get Canadians effective doses as soon as possible. He noted Canada pre-bought millions of doses from a number of pharmaceutical companies.

"Since the very beginning we knew there would be challenges because unlike

the Germans, Americans and the British we don't have a mass production capacity for vaccines so we had to come up with broader sources than those sources and that's precisely what we did and we were even criticized internationally because we got too much access to vaccines," Trudeau said.

The issue of access to vaccines was discussed at the G-20 this past weekend and Trudeau said he's working with allies to make sure there is a free flow of contracts. He said countries recognize that "no one place gets through COVID-19 until all places are through COVID-19."

Opposition Conservative



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau speak to the media about the COVID-19 virus outside Rideau Cottage in Ottawa, Friday, Nov. 20, 2020.

Associated Press

leader Erin O'Toole criticizing Trudeau for not ensuring Canadians get priority access to vaccines. □

Cubans receive last of remittances via Western Union

By **ANDREA RODRÍGUEZ**
and **DÁNICA COTO**
Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — Western Union closed its 407 locations across Cuba on Monday, a sanctions-driven move that will leave thousands bereft of remittances on an island that depends heavily on them — or force them to use less reliable ways to bring in money. The closure of offices that have operated for more than 20 years in Cuba resulted from a barrage of sanctions that the administration of U.S. President Donald Trump imposed while courting conservative Cuban-American voters in Florida ahead of the Nov. 3 election.

"The problem is not the closure of Western Union, but that Western Union is practically the only U.S.-to-Cuba provider of remittance payments," said Manuel Orozco, director of the Center for Migration and Economic Stabilization at Creative Associates International, a development-oriented advisory firm in Washington, D.C. "The impact will be felt." While Cuba doesn't publish figures on remittances,



A woman waits to be attended at a Western Union office on its last day of business in Havana, Cuba, Monday, Nov. 23, 2020.

Associated Press

economists estimate it receives billions of dollars a year and Orozco said that roughly half comes from the United States and 20 percent of the overall total through Western Union. Some Cubans said they were taken aback by the imminent closures despite the sanctions being announced in late October. Eighty-two-year-old retiree Luis Nuñez said he found

out when his son called him on Sunday night and deposited \$200 for him. Many lamented the closures and the need to find less convenient or more costly alternatives. "We have other ways because there are private services that take it to your home ... but it's not the same," said Esperanza Piñeda, a 62-year-old retired teacher.

Family and friends abroad can still use other banks, agencies and small informal businesses to send money to people Cuba, or relay it through visitors travelling to the island through Havana's airport, which reopened this month. They've even used cryptocurrency, noted Cuban economist Omar Everleny Pérez. Granma, the Communist Party's official newspaper,

said Monday that the closures hit the safest way to send money to Cuba for those who cannot travel frequently to the island or don't want to rely on third parties. Trump's administration has taken more than 200 measures against Cuba in recent years, including limiting trips, barring cruise ship visits and limiting remittances to \$1,000 per person per quarter. Those have been a severe blow for many on an island whose tourism industry was devastated by the pandemic and which has seen long lines for food and fuel and related shortages throughout the year. One of the newest sanctions hit Western Union by banning its Cuban partner company, Fincimex, from handling remittances because of its ties to the military-run company Gaesa. U.S. officials accuse Cuba's military of supporting Venezuela and systematically violating human rights. Cuba's government has refused to use a finance company not associated with its military, and Western Union's effort to find a way around the sanctions was to no avail. □

China criticizes pope over comment on Uighur Muslim minority



In this Nov. 22, 2020, file photo, Pope Francis incenses the altar as he celebrates Mass on the occasion of the Christ the King festivity, in St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican.

Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China criticized Pope Francis on Tuesday over a passage in his new book in which he mentions suffering by China's Uighur Muslim minority group. Foreign ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said Francis'

remarks had "no factual basis at all." "People of all ethnic groups enjoy the full rights of survival, development, and freedom of religious belief," Zhao said at a daily briefing.

Zhao made no mention of the camps in which more than 1 million Uighurs and members of other Chinese Muslim minority groups have been held. The U.S. and other governments, along with human rights groups, say the prison-like facilities are intended to divide Muslims from their religious and cultural heritage, forcing them to declare loyalty to China's ruling Communist Party and its leader, Xi Jinping. China, which initially denied the existence of the facilities, now says they are centers intended to provide job training and prevent terrorism and religious extremism on a voluntary basis. In his new book "Let Us Dream," due Dec. 1, Francis listed the "poor Uighurs" among examples of groups

persecuted for their faith. Francis wrote about the need to see the world from the peripheries and the margins of society, "to places of sin and misery, of exclusion and suffering, of illness and solitude." In such places of suffering, "I think often of persecuted peoples: the Rohingya, the poor Uighurs, the Yazidi — what ISIS did to them was truly cruel — or Christians in Egypt and Pakistan killed by bombs that went off while they prayed in church," Francis wrote. Francis has declined to call out China for its crackdown on religious minorities, including Catholics, much to the dismay of the Trump administration and human rights groups. The Vatican last month renewed its controversial agreement with Beijing on

nominating Catholic bishops, and Francis has been careful to not say or do anything to offend the Chinese government on the subject. On Tuesday the Vatican confirmed that Qingdao Bishop Thomas Chen Tianhao had been recently consecrated bishop with papal consent as a result of the 2018 deal, the third such ordination. In a statement, the Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said the Holy See expected more bishops to be named as a result of the deal "because several procedures are under way for new episcopal nominations." China and the Vatican have had no formal relations since the Communist Party cut ties and arrested Catholic clerics soon after seizing power in 1949. □

Punishing hurricanes to spur more Central American migration

Associated Press

SAN PEDRO SULA, Honduras (AP) — At a shelter in this northern Honduran city, Lilian Gabriela Santos Sarmiento says back-to-back hurricanes that hit with devastating fury this month have overturned her life. Her home in what was once a pretty neighborhood in nearby La Lima was destroyed by flooding. The 29-year-old woman who never finished middle school had managed to build a life for herself, most recently cleaning COVID-19 wards at a local hospital. Now, having lost everything, she says she sees no future in Honduras at her age and with her level of education.

"I think that in Honduras it is very difficult to do again what it took me 10 years to do," Santos said. So her plan is to leave for the United States.

"If there's a caravan, I'm going," she said, referring to the large groups of migrants who make the arduous journey together, often on foot.

Inside shelters and improvised camps across Central America, families who lost everything in the severe flooding set off by the two major hurricanes are arriving at the same conclusion. According to the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, more than 4.3 million Central Americans, including 3 million Hondurans, were affected by Hurricane Eta alone. Those numbers only rose when Iota, another Category 4 storm, hit the region last week.

The hurricanes' destruction comes on top of the economic paralysis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the persistent violence and lack of jobs that have driven families north from Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador in great numbers during recent years. Add an element of hope from the incoming government of President-elect Joe Biden, and experts predict the region is on the verge of another mass migration. "This is going to be much



In this Nov. 6, 2020 file photo, a resident walking through a flooded street looks back at storm damage caused by Hurricane Eta in Planeta, Honduras.

Associated Press

bigger than what we have been seeing," said Jenny Arguello, a sociologist in San Pedro Sula who studies migration flows. "I believe entire communities are going to leave."

"The outlook is heartbreaking."

It's still early. Tens of thousands remain in shelters, but those along the migration route have already started to see storm victims begin to trickle north.

Eta made landfall Nov. 3 in Nicaragua, leaving a path of death and destruction from Panama to Mexico. Iota hit the same stretch of Nicaragua's Caribbean coast Nov. 16, pouring more rain on still flooded countries. At least 150 people were killed and more than 100 remain missing.

The same day Eta landed, U.S. voters elected Biden amid a pandemic that has devastated the continent for more than eight months. The Democrat has promised a more compassionate approach to immigration even as desperate families weigh their options inside mud-filled Central American homes.

Among the hardest-hit areas was Honduras' north, the country's most produc-

tive agricultural region. The Sula Valley reported massive crop losses raising fears of food shortages. Damaged businesses mean fewer jobs.

Thousands of homes were destroyed and the infamous gang violence has not relented. Some residents around San Pedro Sula reported gangs charging a tax to boats trying to rescue people from flooded neighborhoods.

Mauro Verzeletti, director of the Casa del Migrante in Guatemala City, said the storms will increase poverty on top of the violence people already faced, forcing more to migrate.

"They've already started to come, it has begun," he said, adding that a group of eight Hondurans driven out by the storms had arrived last week, stayed the night and continued on their way.

Jarlin Antonio Lorenzo has been living for days under a San Pedro Sula overpass in an encampment without any bathrooms after being flooded out of his home. He said there was no other option but to migrate.

"You're going to see all of these faces in the caravan," he said, pointing to

those around him. "We're going because we can't stand the poverty, the hunger."

Felipe Del Cid, Americas chief of operations for the Red Cross, described a "triple emergency" in countries like Honduras and Guatemala, referring to Eta, the pandemic and the years-long drought that has made even subsistence agriculture impossible across a long swath of the region. He said the Red Cross was preparing for internal displacement, as well as migration to other countries.

Honduras' Red Cross was just finishing up its search and rescue phase after Eta when Iota hit, said Mauricio Paredes, vice president of the Honduras Red Cross in San Pedro Sula.

"There's a lot of flooding again in some cities that had flooded before, but this time it has been more severe and faster because the levees that protect the cities had been damaged by Eta," Paredes said.

Meanwhile, big expectations are building for the incoming Biden administration. A dramatic change in tone toward migrants is the most immediate expect-

tation, followed by hopes for the elimination of the Trump administration policy that made asylum seekers wait out their cases from Mexico.

Still, changes, particularly to the U.S. asylum process, could take time.

Last week, U.S. Rep. Nydia Velázquez, a Democrat from New York, introduced a bill that would grant Temporary Protected Status to Guatemalans, Hondurans and Nicaraguans already living in the United States. Trump had sought to end so-called TPS, potentially sending thousands of families back to their native countries, in some cases decades after they left.

But experts caution that Biden will be careful not to make changes that could attract a new wave of migrants.

They also warn that policies in Mexico and Guatemala to stop migrant caravans are unlikely to change. Guatemala dissolved a caravan of mostly Hondurans in early October before it reached Mexico.

"The change of government doesn't mean the United States is going to weaken its borders so that there would be a massive migration. All of the families in the region have to take this into account," said César Ríos, director of the non-governmental Salvadoran Migrant Institute.

"The fact that (Biden) has committed to a respectful approach to human rights doesn't mean they're going to make immigration easier."

At the same time, Ríos sees only growing necessity. "We are going to enter a very painful reality in the region. Poverty is going to increase in our countries in Central America and families are going to have more needs."

For Santos, back at the San Pedro Sula shelter, losing everything has reinforced why so many of her countrymen have left.

"When they go, it's that the anguish has already overwhelmed them, they can't anymore," she said. "I'm headed there too." □

Manchebo Beach Resort & Spa adds flair to classic Thanksgiving



EAGLE BEACH — There is no arguing whether to dine at a trendy, untraditional venue or enjoying the classic mood because at Manchebo you get it all in one. Ike's Bistro and The chophouse at Manchebo Beach Resort & Spa have an amazing Thanksgiving Dinner featuring your classic Thanksgiving dishes, while contemporary menu options shake it up.

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Chef Sandro Herold.

the resort has everything you need for a fabulous feast. Just gaze over the pool and palm trees and let Aruba's breeze take you away to a journey with the delicacies of

A wide variety of options

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and a 3-course Tasting Menu for only \$45, served with a complimentary cup of coffee or tea. Indeed: great bang for the buck.

You will start off with a soft Cream of Pumpkin with a hint of cinnamon served with homemade warm bread rolls and butter, followed by a selection of appetizers: Waldorf Salad (Apples, walnuts, grapes, and refreshing celery dressed in chef's special mayonnaise dressing served over locally-grown gourmet lettuce) or Fried Brie Bites (Crisp gourmet lettuce topped with fried brie, cranberry sauce, radish, cherry tomato and candied walnuts).

The main course offers wonderful choices such as, Roasted Turkey Breast Platter (a juicy oven roasted turkey breast, creamy potato gratin, red wine-stewed pear, Brussel sprouts and a delightful cranberry gravy sauce) and Holiday Seafood Casserole (Snapper, clams, mussels, shrimp, and calamari slowly simmered in a creamy garlic sauce, served over linguini pasta & melted cheese) or Honey Glazed Duck Breast (Crispy skin on duck breast, creamy potato gratin, red wine-stewed pear, Brussel sprouts and a delightful cranberry gravy sauce) or 8 oz. Churrasco & Chimichurri (The Thanksgiving version of our famous churrasco steak, grilled to perfection and is served with steamed baby potatoes, market vegetables & chimichurri sauce). Pick a heavenly dessert like Pecan Pie served warm with vanilla ice cream or Carrot Cake served with candied walnut and vanilla ice cream.

The restaurant naturally lends itself to social distancing as it is open-air, set perfectly by the tropical pool. Ike's Bistro and The Chophouse have an established name on the island for its excellent food and highly-rated service level. Come over to celebrate your Thanksgiving and create a lifetime memory. □



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Donation Employees Cabinet Governor Aruba to foundation providing breakfast to school children



ORANJESTAD — On last Friday, International Day of the Rights of the Child, a donation was made on behalf of the employees of the Cabinet of the Governor of Aruba to Fundacion Ban Uni Man Pa Cria Nos Muchanan, freely translated Let's Put Our Hands Together to Support Our Children. This foundation provides breakfast at school from three kitchens for more than 630 children who cannot get breakfast from home.

The donated money was originally intended for an event for Cabinet employees, which was canceled this year due to corona. In order to spend the saved money in a valuable way, this one-off donation was chosen. The employees of the Cabinet consider this foundation important because education is a fundamental right of every child, just like good food and drink. Good nutrition is essential for good learning at school. Walter Maduro, who has been with the Cabinet of the Governor in Aruba since 1986, has presented the check on behalf of all employees to Rachelle Roos (Secretary) and John Fun (Chairman) of Fundacion Ban Uni Man Pa Cria Nos Muchanan. □

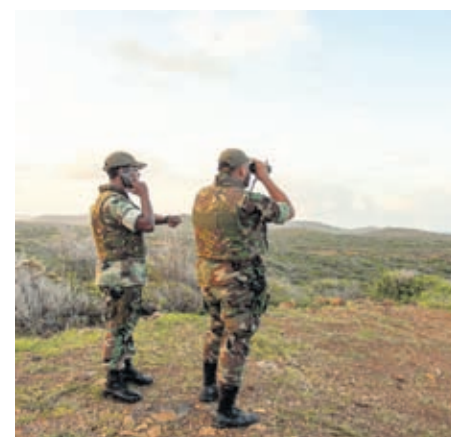
Defense expands coastal surveillance

ORANJESTAD — Dutch Defense is making more people and resources available to the Coast Guard in its support to the Caribbean region with maritime border surveillance.

The extra support has, in addition to Curaçao, also been expanded to Aruba. The military has been conducting for quite some time additional coastal observations in the Caribbean to possible identify landings with undocumented migrants in a timely manner. After a request for assistance from Aruba, Defense has decided to join the Coast Guard support with coastal observations. Earlier this year, the Ministry of Defense delivered the same current assistance to Curaçao at the request of the Curaçao government. Besides to prevent undocumented migrants from crossing to the ABC islands, often with non-seaworthy boats, this deployment also has a preventive effect against illegal weapons or drug smuggling. Caribbean soldiers, consisting of the ARUMIL and the CURMIL, as well

as soldiers from 32 Raiding Squadron (Aruba) and the Company in the West (Curaçao) are used for this task.

The commitment is paying off because last night, partly because of the efforts of Defense, a landing of undocumented migrants was detected in Aruba. Six people were arrested. Supporting the civil authorities is one of the three main tasks of Defense in the Caribbean. This happens in several ways, from emergency relief during hurricanes to support for the police or Coast Guard. □



AHATA Excellence in 2020 Awards recognize the highly motivated



ORANJESTAD — Each year, the Aruba Hotel & Tourism Association (AHATA) organizes the AHATA Excellence Awards with a dinner event to honor exceptional employees within the tourism industry. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the elaborate award evening cannot take place this year. However, during a year where the tourism industry was devastated and needs a renewed commitment from one and all to rebuild, it is even more important to recognize the individuals that contributed extraordinarily during a crisis.

Many dedicated employ-

ees of Aruba's tourism industry have continuously shown resilience, motivation, and productivity during the 2020 crisis and are contributing significantly to the recovery of Aruba's tourism and economy.

Consequently, AHATA is determined to recognize the extraordinary efforts of employees in the sector that are at the front line of the tourism industry recovery efforts. AHATA will be honoring these exemplary employees in the sector with the "AHATA Excellence in 2020 Awards".

AHATA member companies had the opportunity to

select one employee that stood out most during the crisis for their motivation, dedication, and productivity in the battle to overcome our economic crisis and lift the tourism industry back on its feet.

Honorees will be recognized individually between November 23rd and December 11th, 2020 by AHATA's President and CEO Tisa LaSorte for their remarkable dedication in this challenging year and will receive a wonderful gift with the purpose to incentivize savings and help build financial reserves for a more secure future.

AHATA expresses gratitude to the Caribbean Mercantile Bank N.V. (CMB) for sponsoring this year's award program and rewarding the employees at the front line of tourism recovery efforts.

Each honoree will be highlighted on AHATA's social media pages during the upcoming weeks. □

Thanksgiving Dinner at the Sunset Grille



ORANJESTAD — The festive season opens at the Sunset Grille at Hilton Aruba Caribbean Resort & Casino with an enhanced three course Thanksgiving dinner on Thursday, November 26th, 2020, at \$48 per person. The resort's wine sommelier has also prepared an excellent wine pairing to go along with the delicious food.

The classic Thanksgiving dinner includes old-time favorites that never change, the culinary brigade has given them a contemporary twist. The menu, put together by French-trained Executive Chef Matt Boland and French-born, Sous Chef Katia Soujol, offers patron a great opportunity to dine out and be grateful, after almost eight months of home-cooking and partial social isolation.

Patrons may choose Pumpkin Soup with Caribbean Lobster, Crispy Pancetta and Fresh Thyme or Steakhouse Wedge Lettuce, Bacon, Roma Tomatoes, Gorgonzola Chunks and Blue Cheese Dressing, as appetizers.

A plentiful platter of Roasted Vermont Turkey and Glazed Virginia Ham, Sausage Sage Stuffing with Turkey Gravy, Garlic Mashed Potatoes, and Baby Vegetables or as an alternative Grilled Salmon with Dill Buerre Blanc, Forbidden Rice, Charred Brussels Sprouts and Bacon, as main courses.

The noteworthy Thanksgiving Trio Dessert featuring Mini Pumpkin Cheesecake - Spiced Chantilly Crème, Old Fashioned Apple Pie and Southern Pecan Pie, sweetly conclude, the culinary experience.

The Sunset Grille sommelier has carefully selected a number of wines by the glass to pair with the food: Seven Falls Chardonnay, Chateau Ste Michelle Riesling, H3 Horse Heaven Hills Merlot and Seven Falls Cabernet Sauvignon, at \$12 a glass.

Dinner may be enjoyed outdoor on the wraparound terrace overlooking the waterfalls, or in the air-conditioned dining room.

Reservations can be made at hiltonconcierge@depalmtours.com or by calling +297 526 6612. All prices are subject to 18% service charge. □





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Left for dead, twice, RadioShack gets another shot online

By **MATT OTT**

AP Business Writer

SILVER SPRING, Md. (AP) —

RadioShack, a fixture at the mall for decades, has been pulled from brink of death, again.

It's the most prized name in the basket of brands that entrepreneur investors Alex Mehr and Tai Lopez have scooped up since the coronavirus pandemic bowled over the U.S. retail sector and sent a number of chains into bankruptcy protection.

Mehr and Lopez plan to make RadioShack a competitive again, this time online, rather than on street corners or in malls. However, unlike RadioShack's glory years, it's Amazon's world now.

The big question is: How much value does the RadioShack brand have when the prized target audience of millennials or Gen Z have likely never owned a radio, let alone stepped inside a store?

"It's a very thin line between being iconic and being dead," said Robert Pasikoff, founder and president of Brand Keys Inc., a marketing and research consultancy. "Being iconic a lot of the time just means people have a memory of it. I'm not sure that just remembering something is leverageable enough to be able to convert some-



This Tuesday, Feb. 3, 2015 file photo shows a RadioShack store in Dallas.

Associated Press

thing into success."

Success is something that's been in RadioShack's rear-view mirror for quite some time. The company, which would celebrate its 100th birthday in 2021, appeared to be on top of the tech world in the pre-personal computer days of the late 1970s and early 1980s, the place kids and hobbyist would go to buy radios, walkie-talkies and all the parts to fix them, or even build them themselves.

Somewhere along the way, "The Shack" got lost. Unable to capitalize on the PC boom that began in the

mid-eighties, it also found itself largely on the outside of the portable device revolution of the aughts and drifting toward irrelevancy. It booked its last profit in 2011. After store redesigns and other changes failed to draw customers, the Fort-Worth, Texas company filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in 2015 and then again two years later.

Mehr and Lopez have no designs on rebuilding the brick-and-mortar RadioShack empire. But they say there is a path back to profitability, and it all starts

with the name.

"We bought the raw material to build a big business," Mehr said. "Brand means trust. And the brand is very, very strong. I have quantifiable data that the brand is very strong."

Mehr said REV's formula for measuring public opinion of a brand differs significantly from the way other experts value such things, including their own polling and analysis of how the company might work in a specific "ecosystem." The plan, in short, is to build a vast online marketplace on top of the RadioShack

brand. Trust in that name will get consumers to the site, where the quality and variety of merchandise will dictate whether or not shoppers click the "Buy" button, they say.

Since it was founded in 2019 REV has been in the hunt for other names that could once be described as "household." It's snapped up Pier1, Dressbarn and Modell's, also turning them into online-first businesses.

Other bankrupt retailers have found a second life online. The overhead is low and there are people who remain loyal to the brand, even after the store lights go out. But they are typically much reduced affairs. American Apparel, which went bankrupt and closed all its stores a few years ago, now sells hoodies and sweatpants online. Toys R Us, which closed its doors two years ago, opened a couple of small stores and it has a website. However, the Toys R Us site redirects those who want toys to Amazon.com.

REV says that its much leaner RadioShack will sell from its own website and an Amazon storefront. RadioShack was the place to go for batteries, phone chargers and headphones. Those are products that Amazon sells under its own brand name in vast quantities. □

Americans turn up heat and Cholula sells for \$800 million

By **MICHELLE CHAPMAN**

AP Business Writer

With millions dining at home for safety and a swing to the spicier side in the U.S. in recent years, Cholula, the hot sauce with the distinctive wooden cap and a cult following, has become a very valuable brand.

McCormick & Co., the spice maker that dominates U.S. grocery shelves, said Tuesday that it was buying Cholula for \$800 million from L Catteron, a private equity firm.

McCormick made a notable tilt toward the hot sauce shelf three years ago when it acquired Frank's RedHot, the preferred fuel

in Buffalo wing recipes, as part of its \$4.2 billion acquisition of Reckitt Benckiser's food business.

"The sauce with the little wooden cap is, like Frank's RedHot, well-known to 'chili-heads' around the globe but its appeal is much wider," said Dean Best, food editor of Global Data.

The acquisition arrives with the pandemic warping how America and the rest of the world eats, meaning largely at home. There was evidence of that trend in recent regulatory filings from McCormick, a company in Hunt Valley, Maryland with a valuation of close to \$25 billion.

McCormick said in September that revenue surged 8% during the third quarter as people replaced the contents of outdated spice racks, or started one for the first time.

And hot sauce is increasingly part of the pantry mix. The volume of hot sauce produced for North America has risen in each of the past five years by an average of 4.7%, to 127.5 million tons in 2020, according to the data service Euromonitor. That production is expected to rise by 16% within the next five years, according to the group.

"Hot sauce is an attractive, high-growth category

and, as an iconic premium brand, Cholula is outpacing category growth," said McCormick Chairman and CEO Lawrence Kurzius in prepared remarks Tuesday. Cholula has made its own adaptations during the pandemic to get the sauce to its cult followers.

Earlier this month the company teamed up with simplehuman to create a touch-free Cholula dispenser for restaurants or other places that serve the hot sauce, allowing those eating out to bring the heat in relative safety.

Shares of McCormick, which have hit an all time high this year, rose more



than 2% Tuesday. □

This Tuesday Nov. 24, 2020 photo shows a bottle of Cholula Hot Sauce.

Associated Press

China launches mission to bring back material from moon

By **SAM McNEIL**

WENCHANG, China (AP) —

China launched an ambitious mission on Tuesday to bring back rocks and debris from the moon's surface for the first time in more than 40 years — an undertaking that could boost human understanding of the moon and of the solar system more generally.

Chang'e 5 — named for the Chinese moon goddess — is the country's boldest lunar mission yet. If successful, it would be a major advance for China's space program, and some experts say it could pave the way for bringing samples back from Mars or even a crewed lunar mission.

The four modules of the Chang'e 5 spacecraft blasted off at just after 4:30 a.m. Tuesday (2030 GMT Monday, 3:30 p.m. EST Monday) atop a massive Long March-5Y rocket from the Wenchang launch center along the coast of the southern island province of Hainan.

Minutes after liftoff, the spacecraft separated from the rocket's first and second stages and slipped into Earth-moon transfer orbit. About an hour later, Chang'e 5 opened its solar panels to provide its independent power source. Spacecraft typically take three days to reach the moon.

The launch was carried live by national broadcaster CCTV which then switched to computer animation to show its progress into outer space.

The mission's key task is to drill 2 meters (almost 7 feet) beneath the moon's surface and scoop up about 2 kilograms (4.4 pounds) of rocks and other debris to be brought back to Earth, according to NASA. That would offer the first opportunity for scientists to study



A Long March-5 rocket carrying the Chang'e 5 lunar mission lifts off at the Wenchang Space Launch Center in Wenchang in southern China's Hainan Province, early Tuesday, Nov. 24, 2020.

Associated Press

newly obtained lunar material since the American and Russian missions of the 1960s and 1970s.

The Chang'e 5 lander's time on the moon is scheduled to be short and sweet. It can only stay one lunar daytime, or about 14 Earth days, because it lacks the radioisotope heating units to withstand the moon's freezing nights.

The lander will dig for materials with its drill and robotic arm and transfer them to what's called an ascender, which will lift off from the moon and dock with the service capsule. The materials will then be moved to the return capsule to be hauled back to Earth.

The technical complexity of Chang'e 5, with its four components, makes it "remarkable in many ways," said Joan Johnson-Freese, a space expert at the U.S. Naval War College.

"China is showing itself capable of developing and successfully carrying out sustained high-tech pro-

grams, important for regional influence and potentially global partnerships," she said.

In particular, the ability to collect samples from space is growing in value, said Jonathan McDowell, an astronomer at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics. Other countries planning to retrieve material from asteroids or even Mars may look to China's experience, he said.

While the mission is "indeed challenging," McDowell said China has already landed twice on the moon with its Chang'e 3 and Chang'e 4 missions, and showed with a 2014 Chang'e 5 test mission that it can navigate back to Earth, re-enter and land a capsule. All that's left is to show it can collect samples and take off again from the moon.

"As a result of this, I'm pretty optimistic that China can pull this off," he said.

The mission is among China's boldest since it first put

a man in space in 2003, becoming only the third nation to do so after the U.S. and Russia.

Chang'e 5 and future lunar missions aim to "provide better technical support for future scientific and exploration activities," Pei Zhaoyu, mission spokesperson and deputy director of the Chinese National Space Administration's Lunar Exploration and Space Engineering Center told reporters at a Monday briefing.

"Scientific needs and technical and economic conditions" would determine whether China decides to send a crewed mission to the moon, said Pei, whose comments were embargoed until after the launch. "I think future exploration activities on the moon are most likely to be carried out in a human-machine combination."

While many of China's crewed spaceflight achievements, including building an experimental space station and conducting a spacewalk, reproduce those of other countries from years past, the CNSA is now moving into new territory.

Chang'e 4 — which made the first soft landing on the moon's relatively unexplored far side almost two years ago — is currently

collecting full measurements of radiation exposure from the lunar surface, information vital for any country that plans to send astronauts to the moon.

China in July became one of three countries to have launched a mission to Mars, in China's case an orbiter and a rover that will search for signs of water on the red planet. The CNSA says the spacecraft Tianwen 1 is on course to arrive at Mars around February.

China has increasingly engaged with foreign countries on missions, and the European Space Agency will be providing important ground station information for Chang'e 5.

U.S. law, however, still prevents most collaborations with NASA, excluding China from partnering with the International Space Station. That has prompted China to start work on its own space station and launch its own programs that have put it in a steady competition with Japan and India, among Asian nations seeking to notch new achievements in space.

China's space program has progressed cautiously, with relatively few setbacks in recent years. The rocket being used for the current launch failed on a previous launch attempt, but has since performed without a glitch, including launching Chang'e 4.

"China works very incrementally, developing building blocks for long-term use for a variety of missions," Freese-Johnson said. China's one-party authoritarian system also allows for "prolonged political will that is often difficult in democracies," she said.

While the U.S. has followed China's successes closely, it's unlikely to expand cooperation with China in space amid political suspicions, a sharpening military rivalry and accusations of Chinese theft of technology, experts say.

"A change in U.S. policy regarding space cooperation is unlikely to get much government attention in the near future," Johnson-Freese said. □



Drones to the rescue: Berlin lab seeks quicker virus tests

By JONA KALLGREN

Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — A German lab is hoping to cut the time it takes to send coronavirus tests across Berlin by using drones, thereby avoiding the capital's clogged roads.

California-based company Matternet is currently testing drone deliveries between a hospital and Labor Berlin, one of the largest laboratories in Europe.

The route from drone to lab is about 11 kilometers (7 miles) as the drone flies, and officials expect to cut standard delivery times

from about an hour to around 10 minutes when service on the route begins in January.

Eventually, the hope is that drones will provide regular deliveries to the lab from six points around Berlin, shaving vital minutes off the turnaround time for COVID tests.

"The whole topic of 'time to the result' is really important, especially when there is the suspicion of an infection," said Klaus Tenning, who is leading the project for Labor Berlin. "You want to identify the person and get the result as soon as



Drone and logistic operator Peter Trempeck monitors the automatic landing of a drone with a case for medical stuff during a presentation for media, near the Labor Berlin laboratory in Berlin, Germany, Monday, Nov. 23, 2020.

Associated Press

possible so that the person can self-isolate or be able to just continue with normal daily life."

Each route will be served by two drones that can theoretically fly 24 hours a day.

The batteries in the drone simply get switched when they are running low, eliminating charging time.

Each drone can carry about 40 samples. It won't just be COVID tests that are transported, but any samples that need to be examined in a lab.

"We said from the start that

this would be a working project," said Tenning. □

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Kurt Russell, Goldie Hawn and Chris Columbus save Christmas

By **LINDSEY BAHR**
AP Film Writer

They may be one of Hollywood's most beloved couples, but Kurt Russell and Goldie Hawn have never felt the pressure to use that unmatched chemistry for the big screen time and time again. Since 1987's "Overboard," they've received hundreds of opportunities to reunite in a film. Although none seemed quite right until another longtime, A-list pair landed at their feet: Santa and Mrs. Claus.

The film is "The Christmas Chronicles: Part Two," a sequel to the 2018 Netflix picture that introduced Russell as a Santa who's more superhero-meets-Elvis speedracing his sled than jolly old Saint Nick sitting by a fire. At the urging of Chris Columbus, who produced the first, Hawn appeared as Mrs. Claus in a cameo at the end.

"When Goldie appeared on screen, she brought the house down," said Columbus, who stepped up to direct this one. "We knew we had to do the next one with Goldie, if she would do it, if she would have us."

It debuts on Netflix on Wednesday right in time for Thanksgiving. And, unsurprisingly, the Clauses have never looked better.

This wasn't some slapdash, stunt Christmas cash grab,



This image released by Netflix shows Kurt Russell, left, and Goldie Hawn from the holiday film "The Christmas Chronicles: Part Two," premiering Friday on Netflix.

Associated Press

either. It was born of a genuine love of the holiday and became a deeply personal endeavor for all three.

Christmas was big in the Russell and Columbus houses growing up. Columbus even said he was downright obsessed, although he hated the aluminum tree that his mother used.

He had previously set "Gremlins," which he wrote, and "Home Alone" at Christmastime, but both of those were kind of horror films in different ways — one a horror comedy and the other a horrific situation. In his

mind, he'd never made a real Christmas movie, most of which he considers pretty bad. This was chance to unapologetically lean into the yuletide spirit.

He and Russell worked on the script for months going deep into character questions about where Santa comes from, how he met Mrs. Claus, how long have they been together and what is their relationship like. Russell even composed a 200-page "bible" as backstory.

"Kurt approached this like any actor approaching a

great role, which is rare for Santa Claus, if we're being honest. It's only been played well a couple of times," Columbus said. "And this is the great one right here."

That seriousness extended to Mrs. Claus, who they crafted into a pillar of strength and love. Hawn wanted to ensure that she did more than bake cookies too. "There was no Mrs. Claus we could really identify with. She was a character that was iconic for no other reason than she was the wife of Santa," Hawn

said. "I thought, I don't want to be the one that continues to bring him his slippers. I mean, it's just not the way women are today."

She was tempted to bring her classic playfulness to the role, but Columbus encouraged her to make this Mrs. Claus a little more grounded.

Hawn, who just turned 75 this weekend, is deeply sincere when she says she loves this film and this character. In fact, she took a souvenir from set and plans to hang it in her Aspen house, which she said she's redoing to make it look like Santa's Village.

Russell can't help but think of his late father Bing Russell, who loved Christmas deeply and helped make the holiday a major event in their household.

"I dedicate these to my dad," Russell said.

He's also excited that their six grandchildren will be able to watch the film and maybe even earn some bragging rights among their peers.

"I like the idea that there's a period of time when those kids can go to school and say, well, my grandmother and grandfather are Mrs. Claus and Santa," Russell said, beaming. "OK, so top that!" Each film in the Hawn and Russell oeuvre has come at distinctly different phases for the couple. □

Helen LaFrance, who painted rural memories, dies at 101

MAYFIELD, Ky. (AP) — A prominent Black Kentucky artist whose painted memories of rural life in Kentucky are featured in U.S. and European museums and in the collections of well-known personalities including Oprah Winfrey, has died. Helen LaFrance was

101 years old.

LaFrance died in Mayfield on Sunday, according to Brown Funeral Home.

LaFrance was self-taught, and her works show people at church, family gatherings, funerals and other aspects of small-town life in western Kentucky.



In this photo provided by Bruce Shelton, Painter Helen LaFrance sits under one of her paintings during her 100th birthday party on Saturday, Nov. 2, 2019, in Mayfield, Ky.

Associated Press

One of her first known public works is a mural in the St. James AME Church in Mayfield, completed in 1947. LaFrance also has worked in wood carving and quilting.

"Mom used to hold my hand and help me to draw things," LaFrance said in a news release celebrating her 100th birthday last year. Her first work was a large gray rabbit painted in watercolors on the back of a piece of wallpaper, according to a bio on the website of the Kentucky Commission on Human Rights.

Later in life, LaFrance worked in a hospital, to-

bacco barns and a ceramic factory, where she decorated whiskey bottles. Still, she did not begin painting her well-known "memory paintings" full time until 1986, when she was in her late 60s. □

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24/7

Braves boost rotation, sign Morton for a year at \$15 million

By CHARLES ODUM
AP Sports Writer

ATLANTA (AP) — The Atlanta Braves were looking for more than just experience and depth when they signed two-time All-Star Charlie Morton to a \$15 million, one-year deal Tuesday.

As was the case when the Braves recently signed another veteran for the rotation, Drew Smyly, general manager Alex Anthopoulos sought a power arm to help push Atlanta to the World Series.

"It's swing and miss stuff," Anthopoulos said. "There's a theme there with both Charlie and with Drew. Power swing-and-miss stuff, in the postseason it certainly plays."

Morton, a 37-year-old right-hander, is returning to the Braves after helping Tampa Bay reach the World Series this season.

The Rays declined his \$15 million option and the Braves gave him what he would have earned.

The Braves relied on their young starting pitchers to move within one game of the World Series this year, falling to the Los Angeles Dodgers in Game 7 of the NL Championship Series.

Braves left-hander Max Fried finished fifth in the



Tampa Bay Rays starting pitcher Charlie Morton sits in the dugout after pitching against the Baltimore Orioles in a spring training baseball game Tuesday, Feb. 25, 2020, in Sarasota, Fla.

Associated Press

NL Cy Young Award voting. Rookie sensation Ian Anderson and Kyle Wright also boosted the rotation after Atlanta lost ace Mike Soroka with a torn Achilles tendon.

The Braves are counting on Soroka's return in 2021, but the injury was a reminder of the need for depth.

"It's going to be a longer season than it was last season with 60 games, and depth is critically important," Anthopoulos said. "Whoever you think your

five are going to be when you get into spring training, I can pretty much guarantee you those five will not be standing upright by the time you break for opening day. You want to have at least six that you feel good about.

"Even though our young starters took a step, having that depth was critically important for us and it's something that if we could get done early we certainly were going to try."

In addition to losing Soroka,

the Braves demoted struggling right-hander Mike Foltyniewicz. Cole Hamels made only one start after signing an \$18-million, one-year deal for 2020 that became more than \$6.6 million prorated during the season shortened by the novel coronavirus.

Smyly and Morton provide significant experience to the group of young starters. Smyly signed an \$11 million, one-year deal with the

Braves on Nov. 16. Smyly, 31, became the first of the 181 free agents to switch teams.

Atlanta was impressed with Smyly's four September starts with San Francisco when he had 31 strikeouts in 18 innings, allowing 13 hits and seven earned runs. Morton was 2-2 with a 4.74 ERA in nine starts with Tampa Bay in 2020. He was 3-1 with a 2.70 ERA in four postseason starts as the Rays advanced to the World Series.

He was an All-Star in 2018 and 2019 and helped the Houston Astros win the World Series in 2017. Anthopoulos said he believes Morton may have had a slow start in 2020 because of the coronavirus quarantine but showed his All-Star form in the postseason.

Morton was drafted by Atlanta in 2002 and made his major league debut with the Braves in 2008 before he was traded to Pittsburgh in 2009.

He is 93-89 with a 4.08 ERA in 13 seasons. Since 2017, he is 47-18 with a 3.34 ERA. He was third in the AL Cy Young voting in 2019.

"We saw him trending back to where he was in 2019," Anthopoulos said. □

Manning, Woodson, Megatron are Hall of Fame semifinalists

By BARRY WILNER

Peyton Manning, Charles Woodson, Jared Allen and Calvin Johnson are first-year eligible players to make the list of 25 semifinalists for the Pro Football Hall of Fame's class of 2021.

Joining them are four players who previously have been eligible, but never made the semifinals: Eric Allen, Willie Anderson, Cornelius Bennett and Rodney Harrison.

A player must be retired for five seasons before being considered for entry to the Canton, Ohio, shrine.

The group of 25 announced Tuesday also includes Ronde Barber, Tony Boselli, LeRoy Butler, Alan Faneca,

Torry Holt, John Lynch, Clay Matthews, Sam Mills, Richard Seymour, Steve Tasker, Fred Taylor, Zach Thomas, Hines Ward, Reggie Wayne, Patrick Willis, Darren Woodson and Bryant Young.

Candidates will be trimmed to 15 modern-day finalists who will be considered for entry by the selection committee during Super Bowl week in February. Inductions are scheduled for next August, when the 2020 class and a special centennial class also will be enshrined after the COVID-19 pandemic forced postponement of those ceremonies last summer.

Also on the voting ballot in the coaching category is

Tom Flores; in the contributors category is Bill Nunn; and in the seniors category is Drew Pearson.

Between four and eight new members will be selected. Of the 25 semifinalists, several have been finalists in the past, including Boselli, Faneca, Holt, Lynch, Mills, Seymour, Thomas, Wayne and Young in 2019. Manning, of course, is a record five-time league MVP and held several career passing records when he retired after 17 seasons; he missed 2011 with a severe neck problem. He played in three Super Bowls, winning two — one with the Colts and the other with Denver. □

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Goff throws for 376 yards, 3 TDs in Rams' 27-24 win vs Bucs

By FRED GOODALL

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — Jared Goff likes how the Los Angeles Rams are shaping up. "We can be as good as we want to be, honestly," the fifth-year quarterback said after Monday night's 27-24 victory over Tom Brady and the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. "We've got it all in front of us. Everything is there for us to take."

Goff threw for 376 yards and three touchdowns, and Matt Gay kicked a 40-yard field goal with 2:36 remaining to lift the Rams back into first place in the NFC West.

Goff completed 39 of 51 passes, including short scoring throws to Robert Woods, Van Jefferson and Cam Akers. The Rams' defense pressured Brady all night and sealed the win with rookie safety Jordan Fuller's second interception of the six-time Super Bowl champion.

Goff threw a pair of interceptions, too, helping the Bucs remain close in the second half.

But when the Rams (7-3) needed him to stand tall, he rebounded to lead them right down the field to retake the lead after Brady tied it with his second TD pass.

"I've always believed in myself in any situation, but when you actually do it in a tough environment, it makes you feel good," Goff



Los Angeles Rams quarterback Jared Goff (16) throws a pass as he is pressured by Tampa Bay Buccaneers inside linebacker Lavonte David (54) and defensive end William Gholston (92) during the first half of an NFL football game Monday, Nov. 23, 2020, in Tampa, Fla.

Associated Press

said.

"Jared just continued to demonstrate resilience," Rams coach Sean McVay said. "I love the fact he was outstanding from the jump. We had that one little mistake, and he just kept competing. What he did in terms of leading us down the field at the most important moment was critical." Cooper Kupp had 11 receptions for 145 yards and Woods finished with 10 catches for 130 yards. Both caught passes on the eight-play, 53-yard drive Goff led to move Los Angeles into position for Gay's

winning kick.

Brady was 26 of 48 for 216 yards and two touchdowns. The Rams sacked him once after getting to Russell Wilson six times in the previous week's 23-16 victory over the Seattle Seahawks.

"Disappointed. I have to do a better job," Brady said.

Tampa Bay was limited to a touchdown and field goal in the second half, both set up by interceptions thrown by Goff.

"They did a good job preventing (the big play)," Brady said. "They play a defense that makes them tough to hit. Not impossible,

but we didn't hit any."

Gay, a 2019 Bucs draft pick who was released after a rookie season marked by inconsistency, is the Rams' third kicker in four weeks.

"I found out on Monday that the Rams were bringing me in," Gay said. "It was a quick flight so I could begin testing so I could be eligible for the game. Saturday was the first day I could be in the building. Luckily we played Monday night." The Bucs (7-4) fell to 1-3 in four prime-time games despite avoiding the type of slow start that hurt them in losses to the Chicago Bears

and New Orleans Saints and nearly cost them in a narrow victory over the New York Giants.

Coach Bruce Arians adjusted the team's preparation schedule last week, holding two practices at night — one at Raymond James Stadium.

"Everybody is disappointed. Everybody was ready to play," Arians said. "We played a good football team. Nobody's head is down."

Brady answered a 10-play, 80-yard, 7-minute, 55-second drive Goff led to give the Rams a 7-0 lead with a couple of long scoring drives of his own to put the Bucs up 14-7 with a 9-yard TD pass to Mike Evans.

Goff threw first-half TD passes to Woods and Jefferson, then used Woods' 20-yard catch and run to the Tampa Bay 20 to set up Gay's 38-yard field goal as time expired to give Los Angeles a 17-14 lead at halftime.

With the Bucs trailing 24-17, Brady took advantage of Goff throwing his second interception of the night. Chris Godwin's 13-yard TD catch made it 24-all, setting the stage for Goff to move the Rams downfield for the go-ahead field goal.

Fuller, a sixth-round draft pick who came off injured reserve last week, ensured Los Angeles improved to 32-0 when leading at half-time under McVay. □



NFL officials, from left, umpire Barry Anderson, field judge Anthony Jeffries, down judge Julian Mapp, referee Jerome Boger, back judge Greg Steed, side judge Dale Shaw (104), line judge Carl Johnson (101) pose for a photo before an NFL football game between the Tampa Bay Buccaneers and the Los Angeles Rams Monday, Nov. 23, 2020, in Tampa, Fla.

Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — An all-Black officiating crew

NFL makes history with all-Black officiating crew for MNF

worked an NFL game for the first time in league history when the Los Angeles Rams faced the Tampa Bay Buccaneers on Monday night.

Referee Jerome Boger led the crew, which also included umpire Barry Anderson, down judge Julian Mapp, line judge Carl Johnson, side judge Dale Shaw, field judge Anthony Jeffries and back judge Greg Steed.

When the NFL announced the crew was being assembled last week, league

executive vice president of football operations Troy Vincent hailed the move a "a testament to the countless and immeasurable contributions of Black officials to the game, their exemplary performance, and to the power of inclusion that is the hallmark of this great game."

Five members of the crew work together regularly. Johnson and Steed joined the group for Monday night's matchup between NFC playoff contenders. The members of the crew

have a combined 89 seasons of NFL experience and have worked six Super Bowls.

Bucs coach Bruce Arians, who's been supportive of diversity in hiring throughout the league, applauded the decision.

"Way too long coming," Arians said. "I know a lot of those guys. They're great officials. ... It's a historic night, and I think it's fantastic."

The first Black official in any major sport was Burl Toler, hired by the NFL in 1965. □