

STARS AND STRIPES®

Saturday, February 23, 2019

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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US to leave at least 400 troops in Syria

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump denied Friday that he was “reversing course” in Syria, despite deciding this week to leave at least 400 U.S. troops there, only two months after announcing that all American forces were coming home “now.”

Trump said he had agreed that “we can leave a small force along with others ... whether it’s NATO troops or whoever it might be” so that the Islamic State “doesn’t start up again.”

The administration’s latest change in its military plans would keep roughly 200 troops in Kurdish-controlled areas of Syria after the bulk of the U.S. force departs. Another

200 will remain at the remote Tanf garrison in the country’s southeast.

“A lot of people like that idea,” Trump told reporters, an apparent recognition of the diplomatic and practical difficulties created by his abrupt December decision to withdraw all U.S. troops in the spring.

The Thursday announcement of a residual “peacekeeping” force once again appeared to catch U.S. military officials by surprise, as they were undertaking preparations for a full departure by the end of April under Trump’s initial withdrawal decision. The withdrawal plan had generated military concerns about a possible Islamic State resurgence, conflict with Turkey and wide-

spread criticism from Capitol Hill.

European allies have rebuffed U.S. requests to keep their troops in Syria if American forces withdraw. France and Britain have troops on the ground as part of the U.S.-led coalition.

France offered no public response Friday to the new plan.

A British government spokesman, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, said, “We look forward to further discussions with the U.S. on their plans.”

Repeating remarks by Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt earlier this week, the spokesman said, “There is no prospect of U.K. forces taking the place of U.S. troops after the

U.S. withdrawal.”

France and Britain have never publicly revealed the size of their forces in Syria. While the U.S. military and Trump administration have referred to the U.S. force as including about 2,000 troops, the president on Friday said it was 2,500.

White House press secretary Sarah Sanders, speaking on “Fox & Friends” on Friday, said, “We’re in constant contact with our allies. At the end of the day, the president wants to bring our troops home, and he’s working towards that, and he wants to do that in a safe and peaceful way, in the best way possible to make sure that we have complete safety for our troops that are abroad.”

Microsoft workers: Army contract could ‘help people kill’

The Washington Post

Employees at Microsoft on Friday demanded the company cancel a contract to supply its augmented-reality headsets to the U.S. Army, warning in a letter that putting HoloLens in the military’s hands could “help people kill.”

Writing to chief executive Satya Nadella, more than 50 workers said the devices would be “turning warfare into a simulated ‘video game.’” They also urged Microsoft, which won the \$480 million contract in November, to “cease developing any and all weapons technologies” for the government.

“As employees and shareholders we do not want to become war profiteers,” the letter concluded. “To that end, we believe that Microsoft must stop in its activities to empower the U.S. Army’s ability to cause harm and violence.”

Spokespeople for Microsoft and the U.S. Army did not immediately respond to requests for comment. A Microsoft employee who helped draft the letter — speaking on condition of anonymity out of concerns about retribution — shared a copy with the Post and verified their identity.

The internal revolt at Microsoft highlights the heightened activism among employees at tech giants and follows similar uprisings at Amazon and Google, where workers have bristled over their companies’ business relationships with the U.S. military or law-enforcement agencies. Google, for example, opted last year against renewing one of its own contracts with the Pentagon — a partnership to develop image-recognition tools for drones — because employees felt the tech giant shouldn’t be in the

“business of war,” they said at the time.

Like its peers, Microsoft also has struggled to balance its relationship with the Department of Defense against its employees’ ethical and policy qualms about working with the U.S. government.

Last year, after workers petitioned the company to cancel a cloud-computing and artificial-intelligence contract with the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Microsoft said it would allow employees to change positions within the company if they found their existing roles betrayed their values. But Brad Smith, the president of Microsoft, has said the company would not cease working altogether with the Department of Defense, a business relationship that he said dates back decades.

“As we have discussed these

issues with governments, we’ve appreciated that no military in the world wants to wake up to discover that machines have started a war,” Smith wrote in an October blog post. “But we can’t expect these new developments to be addressed wisely if the people in the tech sector who know the most about technology withdraw from the conversation.”

Microsoft’s early marketing positioned the HoloLens as a “mixed reality” consumer device that architects, artists, video gamers and others could use to transpose computer graphics into real life. The holographic system is now being sold to developers and businesses but is not yet available for public use.

Microsoft is expected to unveil a new version of its HoloLens headset at a major industry trade show in Barcelona next week.

Video game helps train flight deck crews

The Virginian-Pilot

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. — In a windowless room on Naval Air Station Oceana, a handful of aviators watched an E2-Hawkeye prepare to catapult off of a simulation of the USS Nimitz.

Cmdr. Christopher “Swanny” Swanson issued commands from his cinder block tower, which instead of surveying an expansive aircraft carrier, looked directly into eight flat screens. From there, he issued his command to simulated sailors to secure their float coats, tools and any other objects.

“If you’re not supposed to be up here, get out of here,” Swanson, the officer in charge of the Landing Signal Officer school, called out.

Gaming already allows us to connect virtually with oth-

ers to transform ourselves into football players on the gridiron or troops in combat, so it seems fitting that the carefully crafted chaos of landing and launching aircraft from a flattop would be included.

Students at Oceana training to lead flight deck operations — roles called “Air Boss” and “Mini Boss” in Navy speak — recently got their first look at technology that could someday transform how they prepare for the reality of running one of the world’s most dangerous workplaces.

Called Flight Deck Crew Refresher Training Expansion Packs, the technology simulates a variety of operations that build on each other to create a virtual training environment. The packs were developed as a collaboration between the Office of Naval Research and the

Orlando-based Naval Air Warfare Center Training Systems Division. Two have been at Oceana since late last year; one simulates running the flight deck from an aircraft carrier’s tower. Another simulates the job of a landing signal officer team, which works to safely recover incoming aircraft on the flight deck. A third, at Lakehurst, N.J., simulates the work of crews that launch aircraft.

“It’s a trainer for flight deck crew members where they can run as an individual, they can run with just their single team or they can run multi-team training,” said Courtney McNamara, a computer scientist who helped develop the software and leads advanced interactive gaming at the Navy’s Warfare Center Training Systems Division.

Until now, the only place to

really train for those tasks was on the job.

“Typically the way this is done in the fleet right now is, you know, crew members are sent to other ships that are on deployment for training which cost the ships money,” McNamara said. “There’s limited berthing, especially for females, to be able to go to other ships and they’re training with people that aren’t their own teams.”

Cmdr. Tom Jillson, an F/A-18 pilot, was among the first to see a demonstration. Jillson is training to lead tower operations on the USS John C. Stennis and though he’s seen tower operations before, getting a handle on the systems and learning “where to look” is key, he said.

‘Caliphate’ holdouts in Syria depart last pocket

Associated Press

OUTSIDE BAGHOUZ, Syria — They were living in holes in the ground, with only dry flatbread to eat at the end. Those injured in an intense military campaign had no access to medical care, and those who were sick had no medicine.

Yet if it were not for the call from their leaders to leave, they would have stayed.

Such is the devotion of several hundred men, women and children who were evacuated Friday from the last speck of land controlled by Islamic State, a riverside pocket that sits on the edge of Syria and Iraq. Hundreds, if not thousands more remain holed up in Baghouz — the last redoubt of the militants’ self-proclaimed caliphate that leaders once said would stretch to Rome.

They include militants, of course, but also their family members and other civilians who are among the group’s most determined supporters. Many of them traveled to Syria from all over the world. And they stuck around as the militants’ control crumbled.

At least 36 flatbed trucks used for transporting sheep carried the disheveled, haggard crowd out of the territory

to a desert area miles away for screening. They were the latest batch of evacuees from the territory following airstrikes and clashes meant to bring about the militants’ complete territorial defeat.

For now, the civilians are expected to be sent to a displaced people’s camp, while suspected fighters will go to detention facilities. Previous evacuations have already overwhelmed camps in northern Syria, and at least 60 people who left the shrinking territory have died of malnutrition or exhaustion.

In a dusty area surrounded by grass, women engulfed in black robes from head to toe and children in dirty jackets — many of them crying for food — formed one line. Men wearing tattered headscarves formed another. Foreign men were in yet a third.

One woman had given birth in one of the trucks. An old man was carried in a blanket by two others to the screening line. A young girl sat under the shade of the wheel of a truck looking dazed, while another moved between the crowd, asking for food.

The evacuees included French, Polish, Chinese, Bengali, Egyptians, Tajiks, Moroccans, Iraqis and Syrians.

It is impossible to know if all are wholeheartedly behind the militant group or

how many expressed support out of fear of reprisals. But many vehemently defended ISIS, arguing the group was down — but not out — and said they only left because of an order from the remaining religious leader in the area.

Some referred to the wali, the provincial leader, while others said the order was from the group’s top leader, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, who is referred to as the “Caliph.”

It is not clear if ISIS leaders were in agreement. Amid the military pressure, reports have emerged of disagreements among them. The war monitor group, the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said one ISIS leader was beheaded in recent days for urging civilians to leave.

All those interviewed gave nicknames or spoke on condition of anonymity because they feared for their safety.

“Baghouz maybe is the most difficult moments of all my life,” said Um Youssef, 21, a Tunisian-French woman who came to Syria at 17 with her mother. “I didn’t make Hirjah (migration) for the food, or for the good life. It is jihad (holy war) for the sake of God.”

1K more troops going to border

The Washington Post

The Pentagon will increase the number of active-duty troops along the U.S.-Mexico border to about 6,000 by the start of next month, a return to the peak force size deployed shortly after the mission began last fall, a senior U.S. defense official said Friday.

About 1,000 additional personnel will join the roughly 5,000 already operating on the border, amid orders to string more concertina wire and install detection systems in remote areas away from official ports of entry, the senior defense official said.

The official, who was authorized by the Pentagon to speak to reporters only on the condition of anonymity, said that so far active-duty military forces had installed 70 miles of concertina wire, reinforced ports of entry, provided medical support to migrants and helped

transport Customs and Border Protection agents by aircraft.

"That mission has evolved," the senior defense official said. "We are now transitioning to supporting [areas] between the ports of entry. We're laying down another 140 miles of concertina wire — we're about 30 percent done with that — as well as providing a ground-based detection and monitoring mission in support of CBP."

CBP agents use unattended ground sensors to detect and monitor migrants who come across the border illegally.

The new influx of troops brings the deployment size back near its high of about 5,900 last November.

It comes as Trump prepares to take \$6.1 billion from the Pentagon budget, without authorization from Congress, to fund construction of a border wall. He is using a combination of emergency powers and coun-

terdrug authorities to do so.

In addition to the active-duty forces, another roughly 2,300 members of the National Guard are deployed to the border to help relieve what the Trump administration has described as strain on CBP due to a large number of Central American families crossing the border.

The governors of California and New Mexico ordered the withdrawal of most of the guardsmen from the border in their states, calling the deployment political theater.

As a result, the overall number of guardsmen deployed could soon decrease.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said Friday that lawmakers plan to vote Tuesday on a measure rejecting Trump's national emergency declaration.

Democrats anticipate they will have some Republican support in the House and the Senate.

House Dems advance legislation to reject Trump's national emergency declaration

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Congressional Democrats moved rapidly Friday to advance legislation to reject President Donald Trump's declaration of a national emergency, an effort that will force Republican lawmakers to choose between their support for Trump and their oft-stated opposition to the expansion of presidential power.

The measure, introduced Friday, is expected to pass easily in the Democratic-controlled House, where Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said she would bring it up for a vote Tuesday. But the GOP's dilemma will play out in public view days later in the Republican-controlled Senate, where numerous GOP senators have voiced opposition to Trump's emergency declaration.

If Senate Democrats were united, they would need only four Republican defections to pass the measure and send it to Trump's desk.

On Friday, Trump said he would veto the measure "100 percent" if that happened. And he predicted that Congress would be unable to muster the votes to override his veto.

"We have too many smart people that want border security, so I can't imagine it can survive a veto," Trump said, adding that he expects most Republicans to support him. "I think they'll stick."

However, conservative commentators and other GOP opinion leaders have been ratcheting up pressure on Republican senators to hold the line against what they view as an unacceptable overreach of presidential authority. For Republicans who routinely accused former President Barack Obama of exceeding his constitutional powers, "this should not be a difficult vote," said Charlie Sykes, a conservative commentator who edits *The Bulwark*, an online publication critical of Trump.

"There's not one Republican in Congress who did not object

strenuously to Obama's use of executive authority," Sykes said. "So it would be monumentally hypocritical for them to turn around and endorse Trump's use of executive authority to override Congress's constitutionally mandated power of the purse."

In a nod to that thinking, Pelosi and other Democrats have couched their arguments against the emergency declaration in constitutional terms, arguing that Congress cannot stand idly by while the president usurps the authority of the legislative branch.

While more than a dozen Republican senators have made skeptical comments about Trump's declaration, only one — Sen. Susan Collins, of Maine — has said she would vote to end it.

In the House, Rep. Justin Amash, R-Mich., is the only Republican among 220 co-sponsors of the Democratic resolution opposing Trump's emergency declaration.

Mueller's report not expected this week

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Special counsel Robert Mueller's report on the Russia investigation is not expected to be delivered to the Justice Department this week, a senior department official told *The Associated Press* on Friday.

The official could not discuss the matter publicly and spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity. It was not immediately clear when the report might come, though Mueller is showing signs of concluding his probe into Russian interference in the 2016 election and ties to the Trump campaign.

President Donald Trump will be in Asia this week seeking a nuclear deal with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

Since the special counsel's appointment in May 2017, Trump has repeatedly tried to undermine Mueller's work, casting the probe as a "witch hunt" and proclaiming there was "NO COLLUSION" with Russia.

Under Justice Department guidelines, Mueller will produce a confidential report to Attorney General William Barr that explains his decisions to pursue or decline prosecutions.

Barr will then prepare his own report that would be released to Congress. He has said he intends to share some information with the public, though it's unclear whether Mueller's actual report will ever be made public.

Six Trump aides or advisers have been charged in Mueller's investigation.

On Friday, six House Democratic committee heads called on Barr to make Mueller's full report public, including any "evidence of misconduct" by Trump.

R. Kelly turns self in, charged with 10 counts

The Washington Post

For decades, it was one of the music industry's most disturbing open secrets: R&B singer R. Kelly was hounded by sexual misconduct allegations, often involving minors, but continued to enjoy the spoils of stardom.

But Friday saw a moment many were skeptical would ever come. Illinois prosecutors outlined charges that Kelly abused four victims, three of whom were between 13 and 16, for a total of 10 counts of aggravated criminal sexual abuse from 1998 through 2010. Each count carries a possible sentence of three to seven years. Kelly was expected to appear in bond court Saturday afternoon, Cook County State's At-

torney Kim Foxx said at a news conference Friday.

Over the years, the 52-year-old singer, best known for his hits "I Believe I Can Fly" and "Bump n' Grind," left a trail of settlements with teenagers he allegedly sexually assaulted.

In 2002, he was charged with child pornography after a graphic videotape was turned over to a Chicago Sun-Times reporter and later the police. Kelly, whose given name is Robert, was eventually acquitted and continued his chart-topping career but finally started to see public backlash in the #MeToo era.

Renewed interest in his behavior peaked with a ratings-grabbing docuseries, "Surviving R. Kelly," which

aired on Lifetime last month.

Fallout from the series led his longtime record label, Sony, to finally drop him, while Foxx put out a call for victims of the singer to come forward to aid in possible prosecution.

"R. Kelly has never admitted what he's done," filmmaker Dream Hampton, the executive director of the series, said Friday. "It infuriates me that so many of his fans and so many black people have been willing to forgive him for something for which he's never shown any contrition. I hope this time the courts get it right and he pays for his almost three decades of harm."

Steve Greenberg, Kelly's attorney, called the charges "old regurgitated stuff" when ap-

proached by reporters Friday outside the singer's studio.

"They're making him a sacrificial lamb for their own sake and there's no merit to any of this," he said.

Friday's announcement pleased Asante McGee, 39, who ended what she termed an abusive two-year relationship with Kelly in 2016. She is glad Kelly is facing charges but says she's concerned about the young women in their early 20s who remain with him. The parents of those women, who met Kelly in their teens, were highlighted in the Lifetime special and one of the couples, Timothy and JonJelyn Savage, are part of a separate investigation of Kelly in Fulton County, Georgia.

Trump administration sets up abortion hurdles

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Trump administration on Friday set up new obstacles for women seeking abortions, barring taxpayer-funded family planning clinics from making abortion referrals. The new policy is certain to be challenged in court.

The final rule released Friday by the Health and Human Services Department also would prohibit federally funded family planning clinics from being housed in the same locations as abortion providers, and require stricter financial separation.

Clinic staff would still be permitted to discuss abortion with clients, along with

other options. However, that would no longer be required.

The move is the latest in a series of Trump administration efforts to remake government policy on reproductive health. The American Medical Association warned it could have an impact far beyond abortion, potentially affecting access to health care services now provided to low-income women by the clinics, including birth control, cancer screenings, and testing and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases. By law, the family planning program does not pay for abortions.

"This is the wrong prescription and threatens to compound a health equity def-

icit in this nation," AMA president Barbara L. McAneny said in a statement. "Women should have access to these medical services regardless of where they live, how much money they make, their background, or whether they have health insurance."

It could be some time before women served by the federal family program feel the full impact. Women's groups, organizations representing the clinics, and Democratic-led states are expected to sue to block the policy from going into effect.

Abortion is legal, but federal laws prohibit the use of taxpayer funds to pay for abortions except in cases of rape, incest, or to save the life of the woman.

Rivers rise in soggy South as days of rain flood roads

Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. — A soggy South saw floodwaters push into homes and submerge highways Friday as a week of relentless rain continued to pound the Mississippi and Tennessee valleys.

Saturday was expected to be worse across parts of eastern Arkansas, northern Mississippi and western Tennessee as forecasters predicted inches more rain and a strong chance of tornadoes. The water will take weeks to drain, with the worst flooding since 2011 predicted for parts of the lower Mississippi River.

In places like Bruce, Miss., rivers leaped into flood stage and flash floods poured into homes and businesses.

"It's worse than I've ever seen it," said the Rev. Eddie Spearman, pastor of the Light-house Church of Christ Jesus in Bruce.

He said flash floods pushed into his church Wednesday, but by the time he got it cleaned up Thursday night, another drenching was underway. National Weather Service radar estimated the 2,000-person north Mississippi town saw 6 inches of rain Thursday and Friday. Spearman said water was more than a foot deep in his church Friday morning, even though town officials placed sand-

bags trying to keep it dry.

More than 30 school districts in Alabama, Mississippi and Tennessee closed Friday, in part because school buses couldn't navigate flooded roads.

Road officials in Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama and Mississippi reported Friday that more than 50 state or federal highways were closed by flooding, plus scores more local roads.

Kentucky announced Friday that it was closing the U.S. 51 bridge over the Ohio River to Cairo, Ill., because of flooding on the southern approach. The bridge, which carries 4,700 vehicles a day.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Sheriff: Mayor fired at deputies during raid

FL PORT RICHEY — The mayor of a small Florida city fired two shots at sheriff's deputies who raided his home Thursday to arrest him on allegations of practicing medicine without a license, authorities said.

Port Richey Mayor Dale Massad fired at Pasco County deputies during an early morning raid, but no one was hit and they did not return fire, Sheriff Chris Nocco said. The deputies retreated and Massad, 68, soon surrendered.

State officials said Massad was treating patients at his home even though he lost his physician's license in 1992.

Horses up for adoption after Mardi Gras parade

LA NEW ORLEANS — Sixteen horses that will march in this year's Mardi Gras parades will be up for adoption as part of an effort to save them from being resold at auctions or for slaughter.

News outlets reported that the Humane Society of Louisiana, Cascade Stables and Barney's Farm Sanctuary are working together to find new owners for the 16 parade horses after Mardi Gras.

The program was started to prevent the transactions for horses that Cascade Stables in New Orleans wasn't able to care for following the celebrations.

Husband, wife stole \$1.2M from church

PA SOUTH PARK — Authorities said a western Pennsylvania church administrator stole \$1.2 million that he and his wife used to pay for vacations, sports tickets and other personal expenses.

The Allegheny County District Attorney's Office said David Reiter, 50, of South Park is charged with theft, forgery and receiving stolen property. His wife, Connie Reiter, 44, faces two counts of receiving stolen property.

Authorities said the money was stolen from the Westminster Presbyterian Church in Upper St. Clair over the course of about 17 years.

Diabetes issues may be cause of bus crash

NJ NEWARK — A school bus company official said a New Jersey driver who was given an opioid antidote after hitting a tree may have been experiencing diabetes complications.

Ahmed Mahgoub, owner of F&A Transportation, told WPIX-TV that the woman behind the wheel was actually an aide covering for the regular driver.

He said that Lisa Byrd had told him about a medical issue related to a diabetic condition and that her medication did not work well.

The bus appeared to cross a street and bump a tree during a snowstorm Wednesday in Newark. The dozen special-needs children on board were not hurt.

Authorities said they used the overdose antidote naloxone on her. Byrd is charged with child endangerment, driving while impaired and possession of drug paraphernalia.

Museum exhibit may have saved man's life

NC BURLINGTON — A museum exhibit may have saved the life of a North Carolina man.

The Times-News of Burlington reported that Boyd Hudson used a "Listen to Your Heart"

exhibit at the Children's Museum of Alamance County last month.

Boyd placed both hands on the brass hand prints in front of a large drum. Sensors recorded his pulse and translated it for the drum, which then beat in time with it.

A normal, resting heart rate will stay steady, somewhere between 70 and 100 beats-per-minute. Hudson's pulse jumped back and forth erratically.

Boyd was diagnosed with atrial fibrillation. He's now undergoing treatment.

Man thought dog was spying on him for police

MO BARNHART — Court documents indicate a man who authorities say wrapped a small dog with tape and threw him in a ditch believed the animal was spying on him for police.

Paul Garcia, 39, of Barnhart is charged with felony animal abuse and armed criminal action.

A sheriff's deputy found the dog Feb. 9 in a rural Jefferson County ditch. The dog, named Flick, recovered and was reunited with its owner Saturday.

The St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported Garcia told police when he found the dog under his truck, he thought it might have a camera attached to him to help law enforcement track Garcia's movements.

140-year-old pet supply store to close its doors

CT BERLIN — A Connecticut pet supply store that has been in business for more than 140 years will soon close its doors for good.

A.S. Labieniec is a small business that's been a part of the town of Berlin since the presidency of Rutherford B. Hayes.

Owner John Connery blames big box stores and internet sales as the reason for the store's closure. He bought the business from the Labieniec family four years ago.

The store will close Feb. 28.

Snow blower fight leads to a hospital and jail

WA SPOKANE — Two neighbors fighting over where to pile snow left one man in the hospital and the other in jail.

The Spokane County Sheriff's Office reported that Michael P. Jones, 48, allegedly attacked a man in his late 60s who had asked him to stop using his snowblower to throw snow on the older man's property Friday.

The Spokesman-Review said the victim was taken to a local hospital where he was treated and released.

Jones was arrested on suspicion of assault, which he is denying.

Weightlifter helps save motorist after crash

MI YPSILANTI TOWNSHIP — A weightlifter from Michigan is being credited for helping to save a motorist by lifting a wrecked SUV off him following a crash.

Ryan Belcher recounted jumping into action Thursday in an interview with MLive.com and told the news organization that he met over the weekend with the hospitalized man that he helped save.

Belcher said instinct took over when he came upon the rollover crash. The 29-year-old from Belleville said he "just kind of got tunnel vision," grabbed the back of the SUV and lifted. He said the SUV rotated enough for bystanders to free the man.

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Beilein, Izzo friendly rivals off the court

Associated Press

ANN ARBOR, Mich. — Michigan coach John Beilein, shaking off the effects of anesthesia, looked at his phone for the first time a few days after having double-bypass heart surgery last summer.

As Beilein scrolled through hundreds of texts sent from well-wishers, he noticed Michigan State coach Tom Izzo was among the first to reach out.

"He actually suggested, 'I'd like to come down and visit,'" Beilein recalled in an interview with The Associated Press. "I sort of quelled that right away. No, I'm not going to be doing visits for a long time. I appreciate it."

"But that was how our relationship is — much respect."

Izzo simply shrugged his shoulders, saying Beilein would've done the same thing if the roles were reversed.

"Back when he had his heart issues, the human side of me felt bad for him because I know he's a good guy who lives his life the right way," Izzo told the AP. "I couldn't believe when it happened."

Beilein and Izzo are friendly rivals whose highly ranked teams will play for the first time this season on Sunday at

Crisler Arena with Big Ten title and NCAA Tournament seeding implications.

The seventh-ranked Wolverines (24-3, 13-3 Big Ten) will host the first of two scheduled games against the 10th-ranked Spartans (22-5, 13-3) before wrapping up the regular season March 9 at the Breslin Center in East Lansing.

As much as Beilein and Izzo genuinely like and respect each other, that does not dampen the competition.

"I would be shocked if either side now doesn't want to beat the brains out of the other one," Izzo said. "But I would think it is in a very respectful manner."

Izzo has not always had a warm-and-fuzzy relationship with Michigan coaches during his 24-season run as head coach, following 12 years as Jud Heathcote's assistant. Izzo spent countless hours recruiting some players who ended up playing for the Wolverines, including Chris Webber, and felt as if he wasted his time in some cases because a federal investigation revealed the now-deceased Michigan booster Ed Martin gave Webber and other Wolverines more than \$600,000.

"There were some tough

times there," Izzo said.

These days, though, Izzo and Beilein publicly say they don't worry about either program breaking NCAA recruiting rules, while federal prosecutors are in the midst of one of the biggest crackdowns on the corrupting role of money in college basketball.

Izzo's program was mentioned in a positive light during a federal trial that began in New York last fall surrounding the recruitment of high school star Brian Bowen Jr. Former sports agent Christian Dawkins pleaded not guilty to charges he plotted to pay Bowen's father in exchange for his son's promise to commit to Louisville. Dawkins' defense attorney Steve Haney said Michigan State was one of the only schools that would not have paid Bowen to attend, according to the Arizona Daily Star.

"It never crossed my mind at one time with either us or with Michigan State in any way," Beilein said. "We just don't operate that way. You don't have this level of success for all these years without a certain amount of integrity in your program. It will show up, it will eventually show up, if you're cutting corners."

The 64-year-old Izzo, induct-

ed into the Basketball Hall of Fame in 2016, won a national championship in 2000 and has coached in a Big Ten-record seven Final Fours. Michigan State's all-time winningest coach has a 596-230 record and won his eighth Big Ten regular-season title last season and will aim for his sixth conference tournament championship next month. Izzo will then lead the Spartans to the NCAA Tournament for a 22nd straight year, a streak that trails just two coaches: the late North Carolina coach Dean Smith and Duke's Mike Krzyzewski.

The 66-year-old Beilein may also be enshrined someday with basketball's all-time greats in Springfield, Mass. He led the Wolverines to the national championship game last season for the second time in six years. Beilein has won a school-record 272 games, two Big Ten regular-season and two conference tournament championships. He has won more than 800 basketball games over 43 seasons, including his first job as the junior varsity coach near his hometown at Newfane High School in 1975, in a career that doesn't include ever being an assistant coach.

College basketball roundup

Bohannon's 3-pointers push Iowa past Indiana in OT

Associated Press

IOWA CITY, Iowa — With his teammates struggling to get anything going, Iowa's Jordan Bohannon stepped up and pulled off perhaps the best 15-minute stretch of his career.

Bohannon hit three three-pointers in overtime, including one with 20.2 seconds left, and 21st-ranked Iowa rallied to beat Indiana 76-70 in overtime on Friday night for its fifth win in six games.

Tyler Cook had 18 points and Bohannon added 17 for the Hawkeyes (21-6, 10-6 Big

Ten) — all of them in the final 15:45 of the second half and overtime.

"I've been doing this for a while, and I haven't seen much of this," Iowa coach Fran McCaffery said of Bohannon. "He just keeps grinding."

Bohannon, whose three with 28 seconds left in regulation forced overtime, buried another one to put Iowa ahead 68-65 with 2:47 to go. De'Ron Davis answered with a three-point play, but Bohannon hit a three off a loose ball with 2 minutes left to give the Hawkeyes a

71-68 lead. Cook's free throw with 1:10 left made it a two-possession game, but Morgan responded with a putback.

No. 25 Buffalo 80, Kent State 57: Nick Perkins scored a career-high 27 points and the Bulls won their 24th consecutive home game by beating the Golden Flashes.

Perkins scored eight points in the final 1:15 of the first half as part of an electrifying 10-0 run in which Buffalo built a 35-27 lead. CJ Massinburg scored 18 for Buffalo (24-3, 12-2 Mid-American Conference)

in matching No. 5 Tennessee for the nation's second-longest home winning streak and before the largest crowd in school history.

Buffalo moved into sole possession of first place in the East Division following Bowling Green's loss to Ohio. And the win also clinched the Bulls a bye into the quarterfinals of the MAC tournament next month as they can't finish lower than second in the East.

Antonio Williams scored 17 before fouling out to lead Kent State (19-8, 8-6).

Almirola leads Ford sweep in qualifying

Associated Press

HAMPTON, Ga. — Aric Almirola gave the new Mustang its first pole of the NASCAR season in a Ford sweep of NASCAR Cup qualifying at Atlanta Motor Speedway.

Almirola turned a lap at 181.472 mph Friday to take the top qualifying spot and deny Stewart-Haas Racing teammate Clint Bowyer a slot on the front row. Bowyer was fastest in the lone practice session of the day but slipped to third, behind Roush Fenway Racing driver Ricky Stenhouse Jr.

"It's cool to be the first guy to put the Ford Mustang on the pole," Almirola said. "It's like my first one in seven years, too."

The pole is the second of Almirola's career, but first since 2012 at Charlotte Motor Speedway in the Coca-Cola 600.

Ford was the heavy favorite to win last week's Daytona 500 but was locked out of even a podium finish as Toyotas took all three of the spots. Denny Hamlin won the Daytona 500, and led two of his Joe Gibbs Racing teammates across the finish line for the sweep, and was the highest-qualifying Toyota driver at Atlanta in fourth.

Daniel Suarez, another SHR driver, qualified fifth in a strong day for that camp. Only Kevin Harvick, the defending race winner, struggled but his issue was a steering problem that hampered his team all afternoon. He qualified 18th.

"Everybody at SHR is building incredible race cars, it doesn't matter what rules they throw at us," Almirola said. "You give 400 really talented employees a challenge with a new race car, with a Ford Mustang, and a new rules package

from NASCAR and they just go to work. They put their head down and go to work and figure out how to make everything work to make the cars go fast."

Kevin Harvick, the defending race winner, was the only SHR driver not to advance to the final round of qualifying. He struggled with a steering problem all afternoon and qualified 18th, unsure of what to expect of a competition package that will be introduced in Sunday's race. NASCAR has overhauled the rules package this season to slow the cars, bunch them together and create a more competitive on-track product, but because it is untested, Sunday is a mystery for most of the field.

"Today has been a complete waste of time for us. The car won't steer. It won't turn to the right. We can't figure out what is wrong with the steering to

make it go straight," Harvick said. "We were kind of just hoping for the best there and it didn't fix any of it."

Kyle Larson was the highest Chevrolet driver at seventh.

It was a rough qualifying session for Team Penske, which advanced Brad Keselowski to the second round of qualifying but saw Joey Logano and Ryan Blaney eliminated in the first round.

Keselowski was fastest from Ford's other flagship team with a 19th-place qualifying effort.

"We just weren't fast enough," Keselowski said. "I think it is definitely different but I don't think this whole rules change was made for qualifying, I think it was made for the race. We will have to get to the race and see what it looks like there and let the smart people that know everything figure it out from there."

NBA roundup

Leonard, Raptors spoil DeRozan's return to Toronto

Associated Press

TORONTO — A crucial turnover brought a sour end to DeMar DeRozan's first game back in Toronto.

Kawhi Leonard stole the ball from DeRozan to score the go-ahead dunk with 15 seconds left and the Raptors beat the San Antonio Spurs 120-117 on Friday night, spoiling the former Toronto star's return to Canada.

"Tonight was like a playoff game," Leonard said. "We had to grind it out all the way to the end."

Leonard scored 19 of his 25 points in the second half, and combined with Kyle Lowry to strip DeRozan at midcourt before racing in alone for a one-handed slam.

"I knew they were going to be aggressive, trying to make a play on the ball and then foul," DeRozan said. "I've just got to be more aware."

Traded to San Antonio in the offseason deal that sent Leonard to Toronto, DeRozan received a warm welcome but was denied a second victory over his former team. He finished with 23 points.

Lowry and DeRozan embraced near center court following the final whistle as the sellout crowd of 20,058 cheered its approval.

Fans rose for a standing ovation when DeRozan and the Spurs jogged out for pregame warmups, and were on their feet again when San Antonio's starters were introduced.

The longest, loudest cheer came after a tribute video that ran during the first timeout. With the crowd roaring, DeRozan got up from the bench and walked onto the court, acknowledging the fans with several waves.

Thunder 148, Jazz 147 (2OT): Paul George floated in a basket with less than a second

remaining in double-overtime, capping a 45-point night with the winning shot as Oklahoma City topped visiting Utah.

Russell Westbrook added 43 points, 15 rebounds and eight assists, helping Oklahoma City overcome 38 points from Donovan Mitchell. Westbrook fouled out with 1:09 left in the first overtime, ending his NBA streak of 11 consecutive games with a triple-double.

Timberwolves 115, Knicks 104: Derrick Rose scored 20 points, Taj Gibson added a season-high 19 and Minnesota overcame the first missed game of Karl-Anthony Towns' career to beat host New York.

Nuggets 114, Mavericks 104: Nikola Jokic had 19 points and 13 rebounds and visiting Denver beat Dallas for its third straight win.

Pistons 125, Hawks 122: Thon Maker made a tiebreaking three-pointer with 16.7 seconds remaining and Detroit

overcame Blake Griffin's ejection to beat host Atlanta.

Pacers 126, Pelicans 111: Wesley Matthews scored 15 of his 24 points during a third-quarter rally, Domantas Sabonis had 18 points and 12 rebounds and Indiana overcame a 20-point deficit to beat visiting New Orleans.

Hornets 123, Wizards 110: Kemba Walker had 27 points and 11 assists in his first outing since the All-Star game and host Charlotte overcame Bradley Beal's 46-point night for Washington.

Bulls 110, Magic 109: Lauri Markannen made two of three free throws with 1.5 seconds left to lift Chicago past host Orlando.

Clippers 112, Grizzlies 106: Montrezl Harrell matched his career high with 30 points, Danilo Gallinari added 23, including 10 straight points in the fourth quarter, and visiting Los Angeles beat Memphis.

Pats owner denies charges of solicitation

Associated Press

JUPITER, Fla. — Robert Kraft, the billionaire owner of the New England Patriots, faces charges of soliciting a prostitute after he was twice videotaped in a sex act at a shopping-center massage parlor in Florida, police said Friday.

The 77-year-old Kraft denied any wrongdoing. The case comes amid a crackdown on sex trafficking from Palm Beach to Orlando in which police planted cameras in massage parlors.

Kraft was not immediately arrested. Jupiter police said a warrant will be issued and his attorneys will be notified. They said details about the misdemeanor charges against the

owner of the Super Bowl champion team will not be released until next week.

Hundreds of arrest warrants have been issued in recent days as a result of the six-month investigation, and more are expected. Ten spas have been closed, and several people have been taken into custody on sex trafficking charges.

Jupiter Police Chief Daniel Kerr said he was shocked to learn that Kraft, who is worth \$6 billion, was paying for sex inside a shopping-center massage parlor, the Orchids of Asia Day Spa. "We are as equally stunned as everyone else," Kerr said.

Most people charged for the

first time with soliciting a prostitute in Florida are allowed to enter a diversion program, said attorney David Weinstein, a former prosecutor. Kraft would probably have to perform 100 hours of community service and attend a course on the harmful effects of prostitution and sex trafficking, he said.

The arrest could also get Kraft in trouble with the NFL, which in a statement said only that it is "aware of the ongoing law enforcement matter and will continue to monitor developments."

Under league policy, players, owners, coaches and other employees can be punished for "conduct detrimental to the in-

tegrity of and public confidence in" the NFL.

"Ownership and club or league management have traditionally been held to a higher standard and will be subject to more significant discipline," the policy says.

The Patriots won the Super Bowl this month over the Los Angeles Rams for their sixth NFL championship in the past 18 seasons, making them the most successful team in pro sports during that span. Before the Super Bowl, several retired NFL players appeared in a public service announcement decrying sexual exploitation and human trafficking in Atlanta, the host city.

NHL roundup

Blue Jackets acquire Duchene, beat his former team

Associated Press

OTTAWA, Ontario — Sergei Bobrovsky made 22 saves, and Matt Duchene's first game with the Columbus Blue Jackets was a 3-0 win over his former team, the Ottawa Senators, on Friday night.

Duchene, traded by Ottawa to Columbus hours earlier, was held pointless. Josh Anderson, Cam Atkinson and Oliver Bjorkstrand scored for the Blue Jackets.

Craig Anderson made 37 saves for the Senators, who were shut out for the second straight game and have lost three straight. Ottawa has gone 125 minutes, 17 seconds, since its last goal.

With the NHL trade deadline approaching Monday, Mark Stone and Ryan Dzingel were scratched again as the struggling Senators move forward with a rebuild.

Jets 6, Golden Knights 3: Patrik Laine scored twice and Connor Hellebuyck made 31 saves to lead visiting Winnipeg over Vegas.

The Central Division-leading Jets entered 2-4-2 in their pre-

vious eight games but rebounded from an embarrassing 7-1 loss at Colorado on Wednesday to improve to 12-3-2 against Pacific Division opponents this season. The Jets are 22-4-4 in their last 30 games versus the Pacific Division since last season.

Nikolaj Ehlers, Kyle Connor, Adam Lowry and Andrew Copp also scored for Winnipeg. Blake Wheeler and Bryan Little each had two assists.

The victory was Paul Maurice's 685th as an NHL coach. He passed Pat Quinn for eighth on the career list.

Pierre Edouard Bellemare, Shea Theodore and Jonathan Marchessault scored for Vegas. Marc-Andre Fleury made 23 saves.

Fleury has lost five in a row and eight of his past 10 starts, allowing 24 goals over his last six games.

The Golden Knights are 3-9-1 in the past month. They have just one win in their last eight home games (1-6-1).

Wild 3, Red Wings 2: Luke Kunin and Jordan Greenway scored in the first period, and

visiting Minnesota went on to beat Detroit.

Eric Staal added a goal in the second for the Wild, who are 3-6-3 in their last 12 games but occupy the final playoff spot in the Western Conference after sweeping back-to-back road games against the Rangers and Red Wings.

Tyler Bertuzzi and Anthony Mantha scored for Detroit.

Avalanche 5, Blackhawks 3: J.T. Compher scored his second goal of the game on a breakaway to snap a tie with 5:22 left, and visiting Colorado topped Chicago for its third straight victory.

Carl Soderberg also had two goals, including a short-handed empty-netter, and Gabriel Landeskog scored his 32nd of the season early in the third. The Avalanche got 41 saves from Semyon Varlamov.

Patrick Kane scored his 39th goal to extend his point streak to 20 games and goal-scoring run to five straight. Dylan Strome and Alex DeBrincat also scored for the Blackhawks. Jonathan Toews and Erik Gustafsson each had two assists.

Collin Delia made 26 saves as Chicago lost for just the third time in 13 games. Kane has 17 goals and 26 assists during his point streak.

Colorado is one point behind Minnesota for the final wild-card spot in the Western Conference.

Flames 2, Ducks 1: Andrew Mangiapane scored the go-ahead goal with 3:29 left and host Calgary edged Anaheim for its fourth straight victory.

The rookie left wing tried to pass the puck across to Garnet Hathaway on a 2-on-1. Instead it hit Ducks defenseman Jaycob Megna and came right back to Mangiapane, who ripped a shot over the shoulder of goalie Ryan Miller.

TJ Brodie also scored for Calgary, which moved three points ahead of San Jose atop the Pacific Division. The Flames lead the Western Conference standings as well.

Making his fifth consecutive start for the first time this season, Mike Smith had 25 saves to improve to 18-11-2.

Derek Grant scored for Anaheim, which dropped to 1-1-0 on a four-game road trip.