

STARS AND STRIPES®

Wednesday, January 15, 2020

A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

stripes.com

House to send 2 impeachment articles to Senate

Associated Press

The U.S. House voted on Wednesday to send two articles of impeachment against President Donald Trump to the Senate and approve House prosecutors for only the third impeachment trial in American history.

The nearly party-line vote moved Trump's impeachment from Speaker Nancy Pelosi's Democratic-run House to the Republican-majority Senate, where Trump expects acquittal, even as new evidence is raising fresh questions about his Ukraine dealings.

The vote was 228-193, coming at the start of a presidential election year and one month after the House impeached Trump. The president is charged with abuse of power over his pressure on Ukraine to investigate Democratic rival

Joe Biden, using military aid to the country as leverage. Trump was also charged with obstructing Congress' ensuing probe.

"We are here today to cross a very important threshold in American history," Pelosi said, addressing the House before the vote. Earlier, she declared: "This is what an impeachment is about. The president violated his oath of office, undermined our national security, jeopardized the integrity of our elections."

Trump, during an event at the White House, rejected the charges as a "hoax."

The seven-member prosecution team will be led by the chairmen of the House impeachment proceedings, Reps. Adam Schiff of the Intelligence Committee and Jerry Nadler of the Judiciary Committee, two of Pelosi's top lieutenants

for only the third presidential impeachment in the nation's history.

Ahead of Wednesday's session, Schiff released new records from Lev Parnas, an associate of Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani, about the Ukraine strategy, including an exchange with another man about surveilling later-fired Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch.

Schiff said the new evidence should bring more pressure on Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, who is reluctant to allow witnesses to testify.

"If McConnell makes this the first trial in history without witnesses, it will be exposed for what it is and that is an effort to cover up for the president," Schiff said.

Later on Wednesday, the House managers are to walk the articles across the Capitol

to the Senate in a dramatic procession. The Senate trial is set to start on Thursday.

The Senate is expected to transform into an impeachment court as early as Thursday, although significant proceedings wouldn't begin until next Tuesday after the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday. The Constitution calls for the chief justice of the United States to preside over senators, who serve as jurors and swear an oath to deliver "impartial justice."

The managers are a diverse group with legal, law enforcement and military courtroom experience, including Hakeem Jeffries, of New York; Sylvia Garcia, of Texas; Val Demings, of Florida; Jason Crow, of Colorado; and Zoe Lofgren, of California.

Navy SEAL, Harvard grad becomes NASA astronaut

By SETH ROBSON

Stars and Stripes

A former enlisted Navy SEAL, decorated Iraq veteran and Harvard Medical School graduate just added NASA astronaut to his résumé.

Navy Reserve Lt. Jonny Kim, 35, who completed astronaut training on Jan. 10, said in a telephone interview Wednesday from the Johnson Space Center in Houston that he plans to draw on his battlefield experiences when he goes into space. Kim is now eligible for missions to the International Space Station, the moon and even Mars.

Kim's path to the stars started in South Central Los Angeles, where his father, a South Korean immigrant, ran a liquor

store.

He learned about the SEALs while he was still a student at Santa Monica High School and set about training his mind and body in the hopes of earning his trident, he said. He enlisted in the Navy in 2002 and, after a grueling qualification course, joined SEAL Team 3, but even tougher tests were waiting when he deployed to Iraq.

Members of his unit who fell in battle included Petty Officer 2nd Class Marc Alan Lee, who was killed in action during a firefight with insurgents, and Petty Officer 2nd Class Michael Monsoor, who was awarded the Medal of Honor after falling on a grenade to save two teammates in Ramadi.

Another teammate, Petty

Officer 2nd Class Ryan Job, died after leaving the Navy as a result of wounds sustained in combat, Kim said.

"They were phenomenal human beings," he said of his fallen comrades. "I promised to live a life of service to make up for the people they were leaving behind."

After coming home from his second deployment with more than 100 combat operations under his belt, Kim was accepted for commissioning and earned a bachelor's degree in math from the University of San Diego before heading off to Harvard in 2012 and graduating in 2016.

He was selected along with 11 others out of 18,000 applicants for his NASA class.

Now married with young children, Kim is also keen to set an example for the next generation.

"NASA inspires kids like me who aren't the most confident in their ability to dream," he said.

Kim feels that his SEAL training has prepared him well for work in space, he said.

"We have this creed," he said. "We never leave anyone behind. We never give up. Our bond to our brothers and sisters can never break."

The prospect of launching from U.S. soil in one of several new spacecraft is exciting, he said.

"It's a great time to be an astronaut," he said.

USAF fitness policy to let practice tests count

BY BRIAN FERGUSON
Stars and Stripes

Airmen soon will have several chances to pass their fitness assessment, a draft Air Force policy stated, days after one of the service's largest commands said it would allow favorable practice tests to count.

The draft policy said that airmen can take up to three diagnostic fitness assessments conducted under official conditions. If they're happy with the scores, they can count them as official.

Airmen taking diagnostic assessments may end them at any point without any of the consequences of failing an official test, the policy said.

A "no fail" fitness test policy was first floated in August by Chief Master Sgt. of the Air Force Kaleth Wright.

Part of the policy appeared on the Air Force amn/nco/snco Facebook page Tuesday and was confirmed by the Pentagon as "screen shots of the executive summary, which is still in draft and may change."

"The goal is to publish it this Spring," Air Force spokeswoman Capt. Carrie Volpe said in an email.

Diagnostic assessments must be taken at least 15 days prior to the expiration of an airman's current fitness test, the policy stated.

Only after an airman "elects to count the diagnostic assessment as official" will the

results be recorded in the Air Force fitness management system. An Air Reserve Component member must take a diagnostic assessment during Guard or Reserve duty to make it official.

Commanders and supervisors can't require a diagnostic test to count, nor can they prevent airmen from taking such tests under official conditions, the draft policy stated. Command-directed assessments will not count toward the three-attempt limit.

The policy details come days after Air Force Materiel Command, which includes about 80,000 combined military and civilian personnel, said they would beta-test a similar program beginning Monday.

USS America trains with Japan for first time

BY CHRISTIAN LOPEZ
Stars and Stripes

Still a relative newcomer to its homeport in Japan, the amphibious assault ship USS America joined up in the East China Sea with the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force for training exercises Monday, according to the U.S. Navy.

The 844-foot America, homeported at Sasebo Naval Base, and the amphibious transport dock ship JS Kunisaki, homeported at Kure Naval Base in Hiroshima, exchanged personnel, maneuvered together and held communication drills and

flight demonstrations, according to a Navy news release. The daylong exercise was the first for the America, the flagship of an expeditionary strike group, since it arrived Dec. 6 at Sasebo.

"We are extremely pleased with this first opportunity for USS America to operate side-by-side with our JMSDF allies," Rear Adm. Fred Kacher, commander of Expeditionary Strike Group 7, said in a Navy statement. "This exercise allows us to build on our already strong relationship and helps to underscore our commitment to this incredibly important part-

nership and region."

The western Pacific has become an arena for global competition as China seeks to control the seas that border its shores. The U.S. has partnered with its regional allies in similar exercises to demonstrate their resolve to resist Chinese expansion.

The East China Sea, encompassed by China, Taiwan, Japan and South Korea, is one setting for those demonstrations. Japan and China, for example, have competing claims to a barren group of small islands, the Senkakus, called the Diaoyu by China, that lie over

potential gas and oil deposits.

During the exercise, JMSDF Rear Adm. Shirane Tsutomu, commander of the Mine Warfare Force, came aboard the America to meet the strike group leaders and acquaint himself with the ship's capabilities, according to the Navy.

"There is no better partner than the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force. Our sailors and Marines enjoyed the opportunity to work with this first-rate team of professionals," Capt. Luke Frost, USS America's commanding officer, said in the statement.

Marines' sergeant major talks readiness, lethality

BY MATTHEW M. BURKE
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — Sgt. Maj. of the Marine Corps Troy Black is on Okinawa this week to host the Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps Force Level Summit, which brings together sergeant majors from three- and four-star commands across the service to address readiness and the Corps' ability to inflict lethal force, Marine officials said.

Black chose Okinawa as the site for the quarterly conference — usually held in Washington — because of the importance

placed on the Indo-Pacific region by Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger's Planning Guidance and the National Defense Strategy.

Black said the Corps remains focused on developing a force to meet "peer" threats in and around the region.

"Being able to bring these senior leaders from across the Marine Corps to here and have this conference, sort of gives them the opportunity to kind of feel what really is going on here close to the threat," Black said. "That's why we're here right now."

The Indo-Pacific remains a focus for the

U.S. military, Black said.

Discussions thus far have revolved around dissecting higher retention rates on Okinawa and around III Marine Expeditionary Force and how these factors can be applied across the Corps.

"In a younger group of individuals that's because we're actually doing something," Black said. "We're not just sitting back, going to training yet again. We're actually engaged."

Black said expanding educational opportunities will also help the service retain its enlisted Marines.

10 lawmakers: Russia, China would fill gap if GIs left Africa

By JOHN VANDIVER
Stars and Stripes

A group of bipartisan lawmakers has cautioned the Pentagon against large troop reductions in Africa, arguing that Russia and China would fill the vacuum that would be created by a smaller U.S. presence on the continent.

Ten lawmakers from the Democratic and Republican parties argued in a letter sent Tuesday to Defense Secretary Mark Esper that scaling back U.S. troop numbers also would undermine counterterrorism operations at a time when Islamic militants are gaining ground in parts of Africa.

"The execution of stability operations in Africa and meeting China and Russia in great power competition are not mutually exclusive," the lawmakers wrote.

The Pentagon is reviewing the U.S. Africa Command mission and force levels on the con-

continent. There are roughly 6,000 military personnel in Africa at any given time, but the military is considering redeploying some of those troops to missions in other places, such as the Pacific.

In their letter, the lawmakers requested immediate notification if any decision is made to significantly alter the force posture in Africa. Great power competition is playing out not only in the Pacific or Middle East, but also in Africa, they argued.

"China and Russia have made aggressive, targeted investments in African countries as both powers look to expand their influence in the region," the lawmakers said in a statement.

China has invested heavily in Africa for more than a decade and is now the continent's largest trading partner and lender. In addition to pouring billions of dollars into massive infrastructure projects, China opened its

first overseas base in Djibouti in 2017, neighboring the U.S.' Camp Lemonnier in the Horn of Africa country.

In recent years, Russia has sought to reestablish the influence it had in Africa during the Soviet era. Last year, a dozen African leaders attended the first Russia-Africa summit in Moscow, described in the Guardian newspaper as a multimillion-dollar effort "to charm African leaders with the prospect of arms deals, and investments in mining, nuclear energy and other spheres."

Over the past five years, Moscow has signed more than 20 bilateral military cooperation agreements with African states, the lawmakers said.

A large U.S. pullout could leave a vacuum in Africa that would be filled by competitors, according to the lawmakers, who cited Syria as an example of what happens when the U.S. steps aside.

Border funding plan faces dual criticism

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers from both major parties criticized White House plans to take an additional \$7.2 billion this year from Pentagon funds to pay for President Donald Trump's border wall project, as more congressionally approved renovation and construction plans for U.S. military installations risked losing their funding.

For the second year in a row, the White House is planning to obtain the majority of the funding it wants for Trump's barrier project by defunding construction and maintenance projects on military bases at home and abroad and taking money from elsewhere in the Pentagon's budget by funneling it through the counternarcotics program.

Senior Republicans grumbled about the plan but mostly put the blame on Democrats, who agreed to provide \$1.4 billion in border barrier funding this year — far less than the \$5 billion Trump requested.

"I wish they'd get the money somewhere else instead of defense," said Sen. Richard Shelby, R-Ala., chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee. "But I do support building the wall."

The White House shifted \$2.5 billion using counternarcotics authorities last year, but this year, Trump plans to boost that to \$3.5 billion. Trump administration officials also are planning to take \$3.7 billion in military construction funding, slightly more than the \$3.6 billion diverted in 2019.

Despite launching his run for the presidency on a promise to make Mexico pay for the cost of a "border wall," Trump has struggled to convince lawmakers that the project is necessary and useful. If his administration diverts \$7.2 billion again this year, it will bring to \$18.4 billion the total amount of funds budgeted for Trump's wall.

Marine sentenced for trying to bring illegal firearms onto Air Force base

By WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

MARINE CORPS BASE HAWAII — A Marine Corps private arrested in May after attempting to bring illegal firearms onto an Air Force base in Nebraska was sentenced to three years in prison under a plea agreement finalized Tuesday in Hawaii.

Pfc. Ali Al-kazahg, stationed at Marine Corps Base Hawaii, was arrested May 31 after being stopped by gate guards at Offutt Air Force Base near Omaha.

Al-kazahg pleaded guilty to possessing unlawful firearms modifications in the form of devices designed to make a semi-automatic weapon function like a machine gun. Security personnel searching his car found a bump stock for a rifle and another similar device, dubbed a "switch," used to render semi-automatic Glock pistols into fully automatic weapons.

Prosecutors Tuesday described another item found as a "probable" silencer, although the defense objected that it was a purely cosmetic device that did not suppress the sound of gunfire.

Al-kazahg also pleaded guilty to making false official statements to his sergeant in Hawaii and the gate guard at Offutt, along with fraudulent enlistment, in which he did not disclose to the recruiter he had once been arrested and rejected from enlistment into another service.

Under the agreement, the charges of carrying a concealed weapon, communicating threats, unauthorized absence, violation of a lawful general regulation and dereliction of duty were dropped.

In a pre-sentencing statement Tuesday, Al-kazahg said he was going into Offutt AFB to first work out at the gym and then to meet a woman on base he had chatted with online. He said he lied to the guard about not having guns because he wanted to avoid any hassle.

At debate, Warren sticks to her guns on Sanders' take

Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa — Elizabeth Warren made a forceful case for a female president and stood behind her accusation suggesting sexism by progressive rival Bernie Sanders in a Democratic debate that raised gender as a key issue in the sprint to Iowa's presidential caucuses.

Sanders vehemently denied Warren's accusation, which threatened to split the Democratic Party's left flank — as well as the senators' longtime liberal alliance — at a critical moment less than three weeks before voting begins.

"Look at the men on this stage. Collectively they have lost 10 elections," Warren exclaimed on Tuesday night. "The only people on this stage who have won every single election that they've been in are the women."

There was a final moment of tension between Sanders and Warren after the debate ended. Having shaken the hands of her other competitors, Warren was shown in video declining to shake Sanders' extended hand.

With the Democratic field tightly bunched among four

leading candidates, the debate offered an opportunity for separation. But none of the six candidates on stage had the kind of moment likely to reshape the race in the final weeks before voting starts. Instead, the debate was generally marked by a focus on weighty issues of foreign policy, climate change and how to provide health care for all Americans.

The debate stage drama was far from the explosion some Democrats feared. Candidates moved with ease through a variety of topics, disagreeing with each other but generally avoiding personal attacks.

Several candidates condemned President Donald Trump's recent move to kill Iran's top general and his decision to keep U.S. troops in the region.

"We have to get combat troops out," declared Warren, who also called for reducing the military budget.

Others, including Buttigieg, Biden and Klobuchar, said they favored maintaining a small military presence in the Middle East.

Iran warns Europe's soldiers of 'danger' after nuke rebuke

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran's president warned Wednesday that European soldiers in the Mideast "could be in danger" after three nations challenged Tehran over breaking the limits of its nuclear deal. Tehran's top diplomat, meanwhile, acknowledged that Iranians "were lied to" for days following the Islamic Republic's accidental shoot-down of a Ukrainian jetliner that killed 176 people.

President Hassan Rouhani's remarks in a televised Cabinet meeting represent the first direct threat he's made to Europe.

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif's admission, which came at a summit in New Delhi on Wednesday, represents the first time an Iranian official referred to earlier claims from Tehran that a technical malfunction downed the Ukraine International Airlines flight as a lie.

The shoot-down — and subsequent days of denials that a missile had downed it — sparked days of angry protests in the country.

Speaking before his Cabinet, Rouhani showed a rarely seen level of anger in his wide-ranging remarks on Wednesday.

"Today, the American sol-

dier is in danger, tomorrow the European soldier could be in danger," Rouhani said. "We want you to leave this region, but not with war. We want you to go wisely. It is to your own benefit."

Rouhani did not elaborate.

European forces have been deployed alongside Americans in Iraq and Afghanistan. France also maintains a naval base in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the United Arab Emirates, while Britain has opened a base in the island nation of Bahrain.

Rouhani separately criticized Europe's "baseless" words regarding the nuclear deal. Iran had been holding out for Europe to offer a means by which Tehran could sell its oil abroad despite U.S. sanctions. A hoped-for trading mechanism for other goods hasn't taken hold, however, and a French-pitched line of credit also hasn't materialized.

Zarif, speaking in New Delhi at the Raisina Dialogue, blamed U.S. "ignorance" and "arrogance" for "fueling mayhem" in the Middle East. He also, however, acknowledged the anger Iranians felt over the plane shoot-down.

"In the last few nights, we've had people in the streets of Tehran demonstrating against the fact that they were lied to for a couple of days," Zarif said.

Putin makes big changes to Russia's government

Bloomberg

Russian Prime Minister Dmitry Medvedev resigned and said President Vladimir Putin will choose a new government hours after the Kremlin leader called for a series of constitutional changes in his annual address.

Medvedev, who became premier in 2012 after stepping down as president to make way for Putin's return to the Kremlin, will take up a new post as deputy chairman of the security council, the Kremlin said. He answers to Putin, who chairs the body as president.

The surprise announcement came just hours after Putin, 67, made his annual state-of-the-nation address, pledging again to boost living standards and economic growth. Russia has struggled to improve performance on those areas in recent years amid low oil prices and western sanctions. Medvedev's government has long been criticized for inefficiency, and his popularity ratings lag behind those of the president.

The two men appeared on state television to tell ministers of Medvedev's departure and the resignation of the government. The reforms set out by Putin will mean "fundamental changes" to the constitution, Med-

vedev said.

"In these circumstances, I think it would be right for the government to resign," Medvedev said.

Medvedev served four years as president from 2008 when Putin left the Kremlin to comply with constitutional term limits. Initially seen as a standard-bearer for liberal reforms, he surrendered the presidency back to Putin at the end of his first term after they disclosed at a September 2011 congress of the ruling United Russia party that they had agreed on the job swap years earlier.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Officials: Man mailed meth to inmate

GA MACON — A man sent some illegal holiday cheer to a woman in jail and he ended up getting arrested himself, officials in a Georgia county said.

News outlets reported Timothy Lee Snow, 40, sent the woman a Christmas card filled with drugs.

Bibb County Jail inmate Mary Beth Odum, 40, had told Snow over the phone how to put meth and other drugs into a card to send to her in jail, county sheriff's officials said.

Deputies intercepted a contraband-filled card filled with methamphetamine and Suboxone and began investigating Snow.

School bus ignites on highway; no injuries

MN MAPLEWOOD — No one was hurt when a school bus carrying students to a basketball game caught fire on a Twin Cities highway.

Richfield Middle School said the bus was transporting seventh-grade students to a basketball game.

The Richfield School District sent another bus to pick up the 18 students and their coach. KSTP-TV reported the middle school said the bus engine caught on fire. The Minnesota State Patrol says no one was hurt and the fire remains under investigation.

Police arrest driver who was missing a tire

IN INDIANAPOLIS — A man who drove his pickup for several miles along Interstate 70 without one of its front tires was arrested after

another motorist called 911 to report a shower of sparks coming from the truck.

The motorist who spotted the pickup with bare metal grinding into the pavement followed it until state troopers caught up with the truck, State Police Sgt. John Perrine told The Indianapolis Star.

The driver was arrested for operating a vehicle while intoxicated with endangerment and operating without a license, Perrine said.

World's largest jet lands for medical issue

ME BANGOR — One of the world's largest passenger jets made an unscheduled landing at Maine's Bangor International Airport because of a medical emergency involving a passenger, officials said.

The fire department needed to use its aerial ladder to retrieve the patient from the second level of the double-decker A380 because the airport's steps wouldn't reach the airplane's upper doors, said spokeswoman Aimee Thibodeau.

The Emirates Airbus A380 from Dubai continued its flight to New York's John F. Kennedy Airport.

Death of man hanging from tree 'suspicious'

CA SACRAMENTO — The California Highway Patrol is investigating the death of a man whose body was found hanging from a tree near a highway in Northern California as suspicious.

The CHP North Sacramento said an anonymous 911 caller reported the dead man, the Sacramento Bee reported.

Authorities "located a deceased male in the trees, up the embankment, approximately 30

feet from the traffic lane," the CHP said in a news release.

"The male subject, who has not been identified at this time, had a rope tied around his neck and was hanging from a tree branch," it said.

Volunteer troopers nab sleeping car thief

FL OAK HILL — Two volunteer troopers helped catch a suspected carjacker who was sleeping in a car that had been stolen the night before, officials said.

The auxiliary Florida Highway Patrol troopers were patrolling along Interstate 95 in Volusia County when they spotted a 2019 Chevy Malibu on the side of the road, Lt. Kim Montes said in a news release. Troopers Casper Johnson and Bernard Martin saw a sleeping man in the backseat.

They ran the tag and discovered the car had been stolen from a Delray Beach convenience store.

Volusia County Sheriff's deputies came to the troopers' aid and arrested Samuel Choisie, 20. He was charged with possession of a stolen vehicle.

Parents take ill newborn from hospital

LA MANY — Authorities said the parents of a seriously ill baby girl were arrested in Alabama, hours after leaving a Louisiana hospital with the newborn.

The baby and the mother both had intravenous drip feeds connected to them when they left the medical center in the Louisiana city of Many, state police said.

Charges were pending against Shaun Levy, 39, and Brittany Parrie, 28.

The nature of the child's illness was not disclosed.

JFK memorabilia hits auction block

MA BOSTON — One of the most comprehensive private collections of John F. Kennedy memorabilia, one that chronicles his life from childhood to the White House, is for sale.

Hundreds of items associated with the former Democratic president are being offered as a single lot by Boston's RR Auction for a minimum of \$1.5 million, although RR Executive Vice President Robert Livingston said it could get much more.

The collection shows Kennedy's intelligence, compassion and sense of humor, said Ronnie Paloger, a retired garment industry sales rep who spent years accumulating the collection.

He's selling now because he's 70.

"I ran out of money," said the Marina del Rey, Calif., resident who also once owned a massive trove of Muhammad Ali memorabilia. "This is my retirement fund."

Group: 2 cats found alive in plastic bags

PA DILLSBURG — An animal welfare group says two "terrified" cats were found in plastic bags along the side of a road in Pennsylvania.

Speranza Animal Rescue said in a Facebook post that a volunteer spotted a box near a motel along Route 15 in Dillsburg in York County and stopped to check it out.

She reported finding the cats inside in separate plastic bags that were tied shut. She said she took the "cold and terrified" animals to a vet for treatment.

From wire reports

Your objective source for military news
updated 24/7 from bases
around the world.
Now online at www.stripes.com.

STARS AND STRIPES®

Red Sox fire Cora in wake of scandal

Associated Press

BOSTON — Alex Cora has already been identified as a ringleader in an illegal system of sign stealing when he was with the Houston Astros.

The Red Sox didn't wait to see what punishment Major League Baseball might give him for possibly bringing a similar scheme with him to Boston.

Cora was fired by the team he led to the 2018 World Series title on Tuesday night, one day after baseball Commissioner Rob Manfred said he was "an active participant" in the Astros' cheating when he was a bench coach in Houston.

Manfred mentioned Cora by name 11 times in a nine-page report, saying he "originated and executed" the scheme in which Houston used a center-field camera to decode catchers' signals to pitchers, then banged on a trash can to relay the signs to batters so they would know what type of pitch was coming.

The Astros fired manager AJ Hinch and general manager Jeff Luhnow, making that announcement an hour after Manfred suspended them for the 2020 season for their roles

in the cheating scheme. Cora met Tuesday with Boston management and they issued a release saying they had "mutually agreed to part ways."

"Given the findings and the commissioner's ruling, we collectively decided that it would not be possible for Alex to effectively lead the club going forward," the team said in a statement attributed to owner John Henry, chairman Tom Werner, CEO Sam Kennedy and Cora.

The team called a news conference for Wednesday afternoon to address the scandal, which leaves it without a manager less than a month before pitchers and catchers are due to report to spring training.

Bench coach Ron Roenicke, who spent five years managing the Milwaukee Brewers, is the most experienced member of the current coaching staff; former Red Sox catcher Jason Varitek has also been mentioned as a possible replacement.

In suspending Luhnow and Hinch, Manfred said he was withholding Cora's punishment until completing a separate investigation of accusations the Red Sox stole signs in 2018. That investigation will continue; Cora and the Red Sox could

both face additional penalties.

"We agreed today that parting ways was the best thing for the organization," Cora said in a statement released by the team. "I do not want to be a distraction to the Red Sox as they move forward."

New Mets manager and former Astros player Carlos Beltran also was implicated by Manfred in his report Monday — the only player mentioned. Manfred decided that no players would be disciplined for breaking rules prohibiting the use of electronics to steal catchers' signs in 2017 after levying penalties against Boston and the New York Yankees.

The Mets declined comment on Beltran's status.

The Los Angeles Dodgers lost the 2017 World Series to the Astros and again in 2018 to the Red Sox.

"All clubs have been asked by Major League Baseball not to comment on today's punishment of the Houston Astros as it's inappropriate to comment on discipline imposed on another club," Los Angeles said in a statement Monday night. "The Dodgers have also been asked not to comment on any wrongdoing during the 2017 World Series and will have no further

comment at this time."

A member of Boston's 2007 championship club, Cora was hired in November 2017 to take over a Red Sox team that won back-to-back AL East titles in 2016-17 but failed to advance in the postseason under John Farrell.

Cora guided the team to a franchise-record 108 regular-season victories in 2018 and its fourth World Series title in 15 years. The Red Sox beat a pair of 100-win teams in the Yankees and Astros in the AL playoffs, then defeated the Dodgers in a five-game World Series to make Cora the first Puerto Rican manager to win a championship and the fifth manager to guide a team to a title in his first season.

He was rewarded by president of baseball operations Dave Dombrowski with a new contract adding an extra guaranteed season in 2021, a deal that included a club option for 2022.

Dombrowski was fired in September after the Red Sox stumbled toward an 84-78 record and missed the playoffs for the first time since 2015.

Sign-stealing solution: Fight technology with technology

Associated Press

PHOENIX — If Major League Baseball really wants to stop its teams from electronically stealing signs, it might consider fighting technology with more technology.

In a sport that's increasingly driven by analytics and advancements, the majority of signs between players and coaches are still transmitted by low-tech hand signals that have been used for decades. Those hand signals are easily captured by the loads of video equipment around MLB stadiums that are used for television, replays and all kinds of stat tracking.

All that technology can be

— and obviously has been — used for cheating. The Houston Astros were hit with stiff punishment Monday after an MLB investigation found the team used electronics to steal signs during the franchise's run to the 2017 World Series title and again in the 2018 season. Manager AJ Hinch and general manager Jeff Luhnow were suspended for a season and then fired by Astros owner Jim Crane.

Boston manager Alex Cora was fired on Tuesday for his involvement with the Astros' scheme and a separate ongoing investigation that involves the Red Sox.

Considering those developments, it might be wise to

save players and coaches from themselves.

A partial model is already in place: The NCAA's Southeastern Conference has used electronic communication between coaches and catchers during league games for the past two seasons, which allows the coach to talk strategy with the catcher through an earpiece.

"I don't know why everyone isn't doing it — it's fantastic," LSU coach Paul Mainieri said. "It allows the coach to speak directly to the catcher and speeds up the game."

In the SEC's system, the catcher still has to relay signs to the pitcher the old-fashioned way with hand signals, but Mainieri said there's no reason

why pitchers couldn't eventually be included in the conversation. It's more common for coaches to call pitches in college, while catchers usually handle those responsibilities in the big leagues.

MLB expects to show players some prototypes of pitcher-catcher communication devices at spring training camps this year, but there are no plans to put any of them in place.

It would be unrealistic for a big league catcher to talk with the pitcher with a batter standing right next to him. Ole Miss coach Mike Bianco said there could be ways to work around that problem, suggesting that a clicker could be employed.

College basketball roundup

Clemson knocks off third-ranked Duke

Associated Press

CLEMSON, S.C. — What a wild ride the past four days have been for Clemson fans.

The Tigers beat No. 3 Duke 79-72 on Tuesday night to sandwich wins over the Atlantic Coast Conference's basketball blue bloods around Monday's loss in the College Football Playoff title game.

Tuesday night's win over the Blue Devils was the highest-profile upset for the Tigers (9-7, 3-3 ACC) since they beat No. 1 North Carolina on their home court in February 2001. And just like that day, students rushed the court at Littlejohn Coliseum.

On Saturday, Clemson beat North Carolina in Chapel Hill for the first time in program history, ending a 59-game losing streak on the Tar Heels' home court and setting off a locker room celebration that

looked like the aftermath of an NCAA Tournament win. The Tigers have won three in a row since falling below .500 in a Dec. 31 loss to Miami.

"2020 is starting to feel like our year," said Aamir Simms, who led Clemson with a career-high 25 points.

The Blue Devils (15-2, 5-1) came into the game as 10½-point favorites and were leading the nation with an average margin of victory of 21.5 points. Duke had not lost since a stunning home defeat to Stephen F. Austin in November.

Clemson fans, stung by the football Tigers' first loss in 30 games — a 42-25 defeat against LSU on Monday night in New Orleans — stopped moping less than 24 hours later. Duke never had a bigger lead than 4-0.

Simms and Tevin Mack, who scored 22 points, kept dragging Duke's big men around the perimeter.

No. 6 Kansas 66, Oklahoma 52: Isaiah Moss scored 20 points to help the visiting Jayhawks beat the Sooners.

No. 7 San Diego State 64, Fresno State 55: Malachi Flynn scored 20 points, Yanni Wetzell added 17 and the visiting Aztecs remained undefeated.

No. 11 Louisville 73, Pittsburgh 68 (OT): Panthers forward Terrell Brown thought he had a game-tying tip-in with 21 seconds to play, but he was called for a foul on the play, allowing the visiting Cardinals to escape with a victory.

No. 12 West Virginia 81, TCU 49: Derek Culver scored 17 points, West Virginia's bench provided a huge lift on the offensive end and the host Mountaineers stomped the Horned Frogs.

No. 13 Dayton 79, VCU 65: Obi Toppin scored 24 points on a tender ankle and led a 22-point run in the second half as

the host Flyers pulled away, ending a streak of four straight losses to the Rams.

No. 14 Villanova 79, DePaul 75: Collin Gillespie made four straight free throws in overtime and scored 21 points, and the host Wildcats survived a scare to beat the Blue Demons for the 19th straight time.

Wisconsin 56, No. 17 Maryland 54: Brad Davison hit a three-pointer with 11 seconds left after getting a steal and the host Badgers picked up their third straight victory against a ranked opponent.

No. 21 Ohio State 80, Nebraska 68: C.J. Walker scored 18 points to help the host Buckeyes beat the Cornhuskers and snap a four-game skid.

No. 23 Texas Tech 77, Kansas State 63: Kyler Edwards scored a career-high 24 points, Davide Moretti had 14 and the visiting Red Raiders used a late push to beat the Wildcats.

Briefly

Panthers LB Kuechly announces retirement at 28

Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. — Carolina Panthers linebacker Luke Kuechly is retiring from the NFL after eight seasons.

The 28-year-old Kuechly made the surprising announcement Tuesday night in a video posted on the team's website. He said, "I think now is the right chance to move on."

Kuechly was selected to seven Pro Bowls and was a first-team All-Pro five times. However, he suffered three concussions during his career, which may have led to his decision.

Kuechly fought back tears at times during his announcement. He did not specifically mention concussions but referenced the ongoing toll of the game on his body.

"It makes me sad because I love playing this game," Kuechly said. "I've played it since I

was a kid. It's my favorite thing to do in the world. The memories I have from this place and this organization and being on the field with these guys, they will never go away. ... At this point, I don't know if I am able to do that anymore, and that's the part that is the most difficult."

Kuechly finishes his career with 1,092 tackles, which is the most by any player since coming into the league in 2012 as a first-round pick out of Boston College.

In other NFL news:

■ Former NFL Commissioner Paul Tagliabue has made the Pro Football Hall of Fame in his fifth attempt.

Tagliabue and former New York Giants general manager George Young made it to the hall in Canton, Ohio, as contributors, it was announced Wednesday. The class of 10

senior candidates, three contributors and two coaches are part of the hall's celebration of the NFL's 100th season.

Ex-Dallas Cowboys safety Cliff Harris and former Cleveland receiver Mac Speedie were announced with Tagliabue.

Earlier Wednesday, another member of the Steel Curtain, safety Donnie Shell, made it, as did fellow safety Bobby Dillon and defensive tackle Alex Karas. Shell is the 10th man from the Pittsburgh dynasty of the 1970s to be elected.

Also, Duke Slater, one of the NFL's first black players, defensive standout Ed Sprinkle and NFL Films pioneer Steve Sabol were announced. So were wide receiver Harold Carmichael and offensive tackles Winston Hill and Jim Covert.

Over the weekend, the election of Bill Cowher and Jimmy Johnson was revealed.

Twins sign Donaldson

MINNEAPOLIS — The Minnesota Twins and 2015 AL MVP Josh Donaldson have agreed to a \$92 million, four-year contract, according to a person familiar with the deal.

The person spoke on condition of anonymity Tuesday night because the deal had not been announced. The contract includes a club option for a fifth season that would bring the total value to \$100 million.

The 34-year-old third baseman returned after an injury-spoiled 2018 split between Toronto and Cleveland to bat .259 with 37 homers, 94 RBIs and a .900 OPS for Atlanta last year. He earned \$23 million on a one-year deal with the Braves, his lone season in the NL in a decade-long major league career.

NHL roundup

Crosby returns, Penguins hammer Wild

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Elvis Merzlikins recorded his second consecutive shutout and the Columbus Blue Jackets beat the Atlantic Division-leading Boston Bruins 3-0 for their fourth win in five games.

Alexander Wennberg, Kevin Stenlund and Riley Nash scored for Columbus.

Merzlikins won for the sixth time in his last eight starts and turned aside all 34 shots he faced. His five wins since Dec. 31 tie him for the NHL lead with Tampa Bay's Andrei Vasilevskiy.

Sabres 4, Golden Knights 2: Jack Eichel scored the go-ahead goal on an end-to-end rush 7:57 into the third period in host Buffalo's win over slumping Vegas.

The goal was Eichel's career-high-matching 28th of the season and came in a game in which he added an assist to become the first Sabres player in 27 years to reach the 60-point mark in 46 or fewer games.

Islanders 8, Red Wings 2: Brock Nelson scored twice and host New York routed Detroit.

The Islanders scored three

times in the first eight minutes. The league-worst Red Wings were out of it early, and Thomas Greiss made 34 saves to back the Islanders.

Jordan Eberle, Josh Bailey and Nelson chased Detroit goalie Jimmy Howard with their three early goals. Calvin Pickard relieved and stopped 14 of 19 shots.

Lightning 4, Kings 3 (SO): Nikita Kucherov scored late to force overtime and Steven Stamkos delivered the game-deciding goal in a shootout as host Tampa Bay rallied to beat Los Angeles.

Brayden Point also beat Kings goalie Jonathan Quick in the shootout, helping the Lightning rebound from a 2-1 loss to New Jersey that stopped Tampa Bay's franchise record-tying 10-game winning streak on Sunday.

Maple Leafs 7, Devils 4: Auston Matthews had his first hat trick since scoring four times in his NHL debut and host Toronto beat New Jersey.

John Tavares scored as part of a three-point night for the Leafs and Rasmus Sandin had two assists in his first game since getting called up from the

minors to help reinforce the injury-riddled defense corps.

Blackhawks 3, Senators 2 (OT): Jonathan Toews scored 42 seconds into overtime and assisted on Chicago's two other goals in a win at Ottawa.

Dominik Kubalik added a pair of goals for the Blackhawks. Robin Lehner stopped 20 shots.

Jets 4, Canucks 0: Kyle Connor scored twice, Connor Hellebuyck made 41 saves in his fourth shutout of the season, and Winnipeg snapped a six-game home losing streak with a win over Vancouver.

It was the 18th shutout of Hellebuyck's career and gave him the franchise record for shutouts, surpassing Ondrej Pavelec.

Stars 3, Avalanche 2: Esa Lindell scored 1:54 into overtime after Jason Dickinson tied the game late in regulation and visiting Dallas put the finishing touches on a season series sweep of Colorado.

Lindell found himself all alone in the middle of the ice and sent a wrist shot past Philipp Grubauer as the Stars rallied from an early two-goal deficit.

Coyotes 6, Sharks 3: Phil Kessel and Taylor Hall each scored twice to lift host Arizona over San Jose.

Lawson Crouse and Conor Garland also scored, and Garland and Derek Stepan had three points each. The Coyotes ended a three-game skid and have won four of five home games. Adin Hill stopped 25 of 28 shots.

Oilers 4, Predators 2: Leon Draisaitl had two goals and an assist and host Edmonton beat Nashville.

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Josh Archibald also scored, and Connor McDavid picked up three assists for the Oilers, who are 5-1-1 in their last seven.

Penguins 7, Wild 3: Sidney Crosby watched Pittsburgh thrive in his absence. The long-time captain pledged he would simply focus on doing his part to keep his team rolling in his return from a two-month layoff.

Crosby held up his end of the bargain, collecting a goal and three assists in his first game back from abdominal surgery as the Penguins rolled past Minnesota.

NBA roundup

Leonard's 43 points help push Grizzlies past Rockets

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Kawhi Leonard scored a season-high 43 points in three quarters as the Los Angeles Clippers routed the Cleveland Cavaliers 128-103 Tuesday.

According to Sportradar, it was only the second time since 1996 a Clippers player scored at least 40 points in the first three quarters. Lou Williams had 40 against Golden State in a 2018 game.

Leonard played 29 minutes and was 14-for-22 from the

floor, including 6-for-10 on three-pointers. He was two points from tying his regular-season career high.

Williams added 24 points for Los Angeles, who played again without injured star Paul George. They have won five of six and had six scorers in double figures.

Collin Sexton led the Cavaliers with 25 points and Cedi Osman added 21. Rookie guard Darius Garland, the fifth overall pick in last June's draft, had 14 points and a career-high 10 assists for his first

double-double.

Jazz 118, Nets 107: Joe Ingles matched his career high with 27 points, Rudy Gobert had 22 points and 18 rebounds, and Utah ran its winning streak to 10 games by winning at Brooklyn.

Bucks 128, Knicks 102: Giannis Antetokounmpo needed only 21 minutes on the court to score 37 points and lead host Milwaukee past New York.

Mavericks 124, Warriors 97: Dwight Powell scored 21 points and was 9-for-9 from the field in Dallas' victory at Golden

State.

Hawks 123, Suns 110: Trae Young scored 21 of his 36 points in the fourth quarter and host Atlanta pulled away late to beat Phoenix.

Grizzlies 121, Rockets 110: Rookie guard Ja Morant had 26 points and eight assists, Dillon Brooks scored 24 and host Memphis won its sixth straight game by defeating Houston.

Jonas Valanciunas added 19 points and Jaren Jackson Jr. had 15 despite going 6-for-16 from the floor. Morant missed only one of his 11 shots.