

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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WHO declares virus outbreak global emergency

Associated Press

BEIJING — The U.S. advised against all travel to China as the number of cases of a worrying new virus spiked more than ten-fold in a week, including the highest death toll in a 24-hour period reported Friday.

The virus has infected almost 10,000 people globally in just two months, a troublesome sign of its spread that prompted the World Health Organization to declare the outbreak a global emergency.

The State Department's level 4 "Do Not Travel" advisory, the highest grade of warning, told Americans in China to consider departing using commercial means. "Travelers should be prepared for travel restrictions to be put into effect with little or no advance notice," the advisory said.

Hours later, Delta Air Lines and American Airlines announced they were suspending all flights between the U.S. and China, joining several international carriers that have stopped flying to China as the virus outbreak continues to spread.

China as of Friday morning counted 9,692 confirmed cases with a death toll of 213, including 43 new fatalities. The vast majority of the cases have been in Hubei province and its provincial capital, Wuhan, where the first illnesses were detected in December. No deaths have been reported outside China.

The National Health Commission reported 171 cases have been "cured and discharged from hospital." WHO has said most people who got the illness had milder cases, though 20% experienced severe symptoms. Symptoms of the new coronavirus include fever and cough and in severe cases, shortness of breath and pneumonia.

China was arranging special flights to help Wuhan residents return home from holidays abroad. Some waiting for a flight leaving Bangkok said they wanted to return to take care of their loved ones.

China has placed more than 50 million people in the region under virtual quarantine, while foreign countries, companies and airlines have cut back severely on travel to China and quarantined those who recently passed through Wuhan. Infected people don't show symptoms immediately and may be able to pass on the virus before they appear sick.

Final impeachment verdict likely pushed to next week

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The final verdict in President Donald Trump's Senate impeachment trial could be extended to as late as Wednesday — after the Iowa caucuses and State of the Union address — officials said Friday, as senators heard debate on whether the trial should include witnesses.

Democrats have been pushing to call former national security adviser John Bolton and other officials who declined to participate in the House proceedings that led to Trump's impeachment. Sen. Mitt Romney, R-Utah, will vote to hear witnesses, an aide said Friday. But most GOP senators, led by Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., have rallied to the president's defense and said he should not be removed from office.

Trump faces charges of abuse of power and obstruction of Congress. The crux of the case for his impeachment is the allegation that he withheld military aid and a White House meeting to pressure Ukraine to investigate Joe Biden and his son. Hunter Biden served on the board of Burisma, a Ukrainian energy company, while his father was vice president.

Trump on Friday denied a new contention by Bolton, relayed in a New York Times report, that Trump asked him to help with his pressure campaign to extract damaging information on Democrats from Ukrainian officials two months before Trump's July call with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy. According to an unpublished book manuscript cited by the Times, Bolton alleged that Trump directed him to call Zelenskiy, who had recently won election as president of Ukraine, to ensure he would meet with Trump personal lawyer Rudy Giuliani, who was planning a trip to Ukraine to discuss the investigations that the president sought.

"I never instructed John Bolton to set up a meeting for Rudy Giuliani, one of the greatest corruption fighters in America and by far the greatest mayor in the history of N.Y.C., to meet with President Zelenskiy," Trump said in a statement. "That meeting never happened."

Bolton wrote that he never made the call, according to the Times.

The Times report was published an hour before senators were to hear debate on whether the trial should include witnesses. While many Republicans have expressed hopes that the expected failure of a vote to call new witnesses would mean a rapid end to Trump's impeachment trial, officials are warning that might not be the case.

A longer schedule could mean the trial stretches beyond Monday's Iowa caucuses, further complicating the campaign schedules of the four senators seeking the Democratic nomination.

A senior administration official and two congressional officials said Friday that it was unlikely that senators would rush immediately to a verdict if the witness vote fails. They requested anonymity to speak candidly about internal discussions.

The administration official and a congressional official raised the possibility that the Senate could take up a new procedural resolution laying out rules for the trial's endgame — which could include time for closing arguments, private deliberations and public speeches by senators.

The Senate passed such a supplemental resolution in the middle of the 1999 impeachment trial of President Bill Clinton.

Even passing that resolution could be a lengthy process: When senators debated the initial rules resolution last week, it took more than 12 hours of floor time to process debate on Democratic amendments to the GOP proposal, which ultimately passed unamended just before 2 a.m. on Jan. 22.

Should the Senate embark on this process, the senior administration official said, a final verdict could be delayed as late as Wednesday.

Senate Minority Whip Dick Durbin, D-Ill., said Friday that he was "disappointed, but not really surprised" by the decision of Sen. Lamar Alexander, R-Tenn., to vote against calling witnesses.

"I was certainly hoping he would have a Howard Baker moment, you know, but it appears he will not," Durbin said, referring to the Tennessee Republican senator who played a key role in ending Richard Nixon's presidency during Watergate.

UK officer takes over unit amid allies' hesitation

The Washington Post

MANAMA, Bahrain — A British naval commander Thursday took over an international task force established in response to Iranian aggression, providing a coalition that had been U.S.-led with a new face as it attempts to recruit other countries that have hesitated to join amid hostilities between Washington and Tehran.

Commodore James Parkin took over for U.S. Navy Rear Adm. Alvin Holsey in a ceremony here at the U.S. Navy base and said his mission is “entirely divorced” from the Trump administration’s campaign to force Iran to renegotiate a new nuclear deal. The comments match how some U.S. officials describe the task force, but Parkin said his role as a British officer placed in command is a new “demonstration of that.”

“The U.K. position on the maximum-pressure campaign is a matter of record,” Parkin said. “We, as a nation, do not support it.”

The comments came about six months after the United States launched Operation Sentinel to protect shipping in the region, and about two months after a coalition known formally as the International Maritime Security Construct was established in November. Australia, Albania, Kuwait, Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates have joined, but U.S. allies including France, Germany and Japan have rebuffed requests for help

due to concerns about conflict between the U.S. and Iran.

Holsey, standing alongside Parkin, talking to reporters, endorsed Parkin taking charge.

“It sends a clear signal that we’re looking for leaders,” Holsey said. “We’re looking for folks to come in and take it to the next level, and I expect him to do that.”

At the Pentagon, Defense Secretary Mark Esper also highlighted the transition in a news conference.

“We welcome Commodore Parkin to this vital endeavor, which represents an international solution to an international problem,” he said.

Attacks that prompted the formation of the coalition include the mining of ships at sea last year and the seizure of a commercial vessel by Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps.

In a ceremony marking Parkin’s arrival and Holsey’s departure, the officers joined Vice Adm. James Malloy, the Navy’s top officer in the Middle East, in praising how they have stitched together a network of ships, aircraft and people to collaborate with shipping companies and provide stability.

“Each nation has brought a depth of knowledge to IMSC,” Holsey said. “Years of knowledge gathered from real-world experiences that is shaping the way we stand the watch, and it directly enhances our mission to protect the vital commerce that drives our nations’ economies and livelihoods.”

Reports of sex assaults at academies up 33%

BY CAITLIN M. KENNEY

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Reports of sexual assaults at military academies were up 33% last year, reinforcing a trend at the elite institutions for the past few years.

The annual Department of Defense report, released Thursday, said the schools received 149 reports of sexual assault during the 2018-2019 academic year, up from 117 reports last year.

The Pentagon report includes a baseline assessment of the academies’ prevention efforts, the number of reported cases of sexual assault and feedback from focus groups.

Overall, the academies are good at responding to sexual assault reports and providing services to survivors, according to Nate Galbreath, acting director for the Pentagon’s Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office.

“That being said, we look forward to the efforts that the academies are putting into building up their prevention programs so that this crime does not occur,” he told reporters Thursday.

The Military Academy at West Point in New York had the most sexual assault reports for a second year in a row with 62, an increase of 6; the Air Force Academy at Colorado

Springs, Colo., had 46 reports, an increase of 17; and the Naval Academy at Annapolis, Md., had 41 reports, an increase of nine. Of those, 122 were from cadets and midshipmen during their time in the military. Additional reports were from other active-duty service members or civilians about incidents that happened at the academy or involved a student there within the last four years. Included in the total are reports from students of incidents that happened before they joined the military.

“This report is a reflection of what we already know,” retired Air Force Col. Don Christensen, the former chief prosecutor of the Air Force and president of Protect Our Defenders, said in a statement Thursday. “The Pentagon has repeatedly failed to address the sexual assault crisis gripping its ranks and, as a result, the problem continues to grow.”

“Year after year, military leadership has lauded a focus on prevention despite zero evidence that preventative measures are working. In fact, the opposite is true,” he said.

Academy students described an alcohol-tinged culture of harassing behavior. The report says there is a “stereotypical male culture” that requires women to “fit in” with the “boys club.”

DOD again ups number of mild brain injuries from strike

BY STEVE BEYNON

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon announced Thursday that 64 American troops sustained mild traumatic brain injuries as a result of the Iranian missile strikes on two military bases in Iraq, once again revisiting how many service members were hurt in the Jan. 8 attack.

Of the 64 troops diagnosed with TBI, 39 troops were treated and returned to duty.

The number of troops injured has fluctuated since the attack, which came in retaliation for the U.S. drone strike Jan. 3 in Iraq that killed Qasem Soleimani, Iran’s top military general. Earlier this week, the Pentagon said 50 service members have been diagnosed

with TBI, a significant increase from the 34 reported last week and the 11 reported on Jan. 17.

The total could still rise, Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told reporters at the Pentagon. Such injuries sometimes take time to manifest.

The injuries undercut President Donald Trump’s initial statement hours after Iran’s

missile barrage that no Americans were harmed in the attack. But Defense Secretary Mark Esper on Thursday defended Trump’s original assertion.

“The reporting [of no injuries] was accurate, at that time,” Esper said at the Pentagon news briefing. “I think we did our best to report the casualties.”

Iraq, coalition resume anti-ISIS efforts

The Washington Post

BEIRUT — Iraq said Thursday that its military has resumed operations with the U.S.-led coalition against the Islamic State after their joint mission was suspended amid calls for foreign troops to leave.

A statement from the office of Prime Minister Adel Abdul Mahdi said the missions have resumed in an attempt to maximize progress against the regrouping jihadists ahead

of a new U.S.-Iraqi agreement that could lead to a significant reduction of the U.S.-led coalition's troops.

"In view of the continued activity of ISIS terrorist gangs in many regions of Iraq and for the purpose of exploiting the remaining time for the international alliance," Abdul Mahdi's office said, "it was decided to undertake joint actions that provide facilities for our forces."

The joint operations and training missions were sus-

pended after President Donald Trump ordered the killing in Baghdad of a renowned Iranian military commander, Maj. Gen. Qassem Soleimani, and Iraqi militia leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis. Unilateral and unannounced, the U.S. drone strike inflamed anti-American sentiment in Iraq, empowering Shiite political factions in parliament to urge the troops' expulsion.

Although Thursday's announcement did not come as a surprise, it underscored grow-

ing sensitivities surrounding the mostly U.S. troop presence. While U.S. and Iraqi officials have admitted in private that the resumption started weeks ago, in public, they have either denied it or remained tight-lipped.

Baghdad and Washington have tussled openly on the matter, and Abdul Mahdi's request that U.S. diplomats provide a timetable for a full departure was dismissed out of hand by the Trump administration.

DOD seeks Iraqi permission to deploy missile defenses

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The United States has asked Iraq for permission to put Patriot missile systems at bases hosting U.S. troops to improve defenses against attacks like the Jan. 8 Iranian missile strike that caused brain injuries to more than 50 U.S. troops, Pentagon officials said Thursday.

"That is one of the matters we have to work on and work through" with the Baghdad government, Defense Secretary Mark Esper told a Pentagon news conference. He and Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, made clear that they want Patriots in Iraq as part of an effort to improve protection of U.S. forces there.

The commander responsible for U.S. forces in Iraq "feels he needs" the Patriot defenses, Esper said, and "we support the commander." He did not say what reasons the Iraqi government may have given for not approving the U.S. request thus far.

The United States has about 5,000 troops in Iraq to train and advise Iraqi security forces in their fight against extremist groups like the Islamic State. The relationship is especially rocky in the aftermath of the American airstrike Jan. 3

that killed Qassem Soleimani, Iran's most powerful general, at Baghdad's international airport. The Iraqi government has indicated it could expel all foreign forces, although it has not yet taken action against the U.S. presence.

There were no Patriots or other air defenses in Iraq capable of shooting down ballistic missiles at the time of the Iranian strike that hit al-Asad Air Base in western Iraq. Milley said the missiles were armed with 1,000-pound and 2,000-pound high-explosive warheads. He said it was fortunate that the attack caused no American loss of life or limb.

Milley said that in addition to securing Iraqi government permission, the U.S. military needs to work through mechanical and logistical issues to move a Patriot battalion to Iraq. There was not already one there because U.S. commanders judged that Iraq was a less-likely target for an Iranian ballistic missile attack than other Persian Gulf countries.

Asked whether the Iranian missiles could have been shot down before reaching their target if Patriots had been deployed at Ain al-Asad, Milley said, "That's what they're designed to do. Can't say for certain, obviously" that they would have succeeded.

Troop cuts possible at Guantanamo Bay prison

McClatchy Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The number of U.S. service members deployed to the Guantanamo Bay prison may be cut as part of the Pentagon's worldwide look at where it can reallocate forces, U.S. Southern Command commander Navy Adm. Craig Faller said Thursday.

Faller told the Senate Armed Services Committee that Southern Command is looking at the detention facility to determine if there's "a more efficient way to conduct that mission set."

Faller said there are currently about 1,800 U.S. National Guard forces serving at the military prison at Naval Base Guantanamo Bay in Cuba. The detention facility opened in 2002 to hold prisoners affiliated with al-Qaida and the Taliban caught during the almost two-decade-long war on terrorism.

About 780 prisoners have been held at the facility since it opened, but only 40 remain now, including detainees charged in connection with the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the October 2000 strike on the destroyer USS Cole.

In the Senate hearing, Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., questioned whether it was time to move the remaining prisoners to a maximum security facility in the United States to save money.

"It's costing \$13 million per inmate. \$13 million. What type of efficiencies do you think you can do to cut into that?" he said. "How can we better operate and don't you think it is time we look at re-positioning these prisoners that would be more cost effective to the American taxpayers?"

In an exclusive interview with McClatchy after the hearing, Faller said the review would look at the base size and the number of personnel serving there.

"The footprint of Guantanamo is spread out; there's a lot of camps, a lot of infrastructure that was designed for a different time and a different population," Faller told McClatchy. "What's the best combination that is most efficient, with the right level of guards and the right funding, while respecting that we have an important mission to do?"

Faller said any decisions would be mindful of the continued legal proceedings against the remaining detainees.

"It's essential that the commission process move forward in a way that respects all aspects of the proceedings and gets to justice," Faller said. "We want to look at this carefully, what are the right conditions, the right time, and move forward."

Dating apps face inquiry over underage, sex offender users

Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — A House subcommittee is investigating popular dating services such as Tinder and Bumble for allegedly allowing minors and sex offenders to use their services.

Bumble, Grindr, The Meet Group and the Match Group, which owns such popular services as Tinder, Match.com and OkCupid, are the current targets of the investigation by the U.S. House Oversight and Reform subcommittee on economic and consumer policy.

In separate letters Thursday to the companies, the subcommittee is seeking information on users' ages, procedures for verifying ages, and any complaints about assaults, rape or the use of the services by minors. It is also asking for the

services' privacy policies and details on what users see when they review and agree to the policies. It also seeks information on what data is collected on people, including sexual orientation, drug use and political views.

Although the minimum age for using internet services is typically 13 in the U.S., dating services generally require users to be at least 18 because of concerns about sexual predators.

"Our concern about the underage use of dating apps is heightened by reports that many popular free dating apps permit registered sex offenders to use them, while the paid versions of these same apps screen out registered sex offenders," Rep. Raja Krishnamoorthi, the Illinois Democrat who heads

the subcommittee, said in a statement. "Protection from sexual predators should not be a luxury confined to paying customers."

Match Group said it uses "every tool possible" to keep minors and bad actors off its services and continues to invest in technology to keep users safe. In an emailed statement, the company said the problem was broader and requires other parties, including app stores that know who their users are, "to do their part as well."

Match added that the national sex offender registry needs to be updated so that perpetrators' digital footprints can be tracked and blocked by social media and dating services.

Grindr and The Meet Group did not respond to messages for comment on Thursday. Bumble had no immediate comment.

Va.'s House OKs bill on gun control, on to Senate

Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. — The Virginia House of Delegates has passed several pieces of gun-control legislation, but some of the measures face an uncertain future in the more conservative Senate.

The Democrat-led House approved seven gun measures Thursday, largely along party lines. The legislation will now go to the Senate for a vote, which has already passed its version of some of the measures but has shown signs that others may not survive. Both chambers are controlled by Democrats, but the Senate is the more conservative of the two chambers on gun issues.

Virginia has become ground zero in the nation's raging debate over gun control and mass shootings as a new Democratic majority has pledged to put strict new limits in place.

"For too many years this body has put the convenience of gun owners above all else," said Democratic Del. Patrick Hope.

The new majority's agenda has sparked an immense backlash. Last week, tens of thousands of guns-rights activists from around the country flooded the Capitol and surrounding area in protest, some donning tactical gear and military rifles.

Republicans said Democrats are rushing legislation without thinking through unintended consequences, and law-abiding gun owners will be unfairly penalized.

Both chambers will hash out any differences between their respective gun-control measures in coming weeks. The proposed bills include limiting handgun purchases to once a month; universal background checks on gun purchases; and a red flag bill that would allow authorities to temporarily take guns away from anyone deemed to be dangerous to themselves or others.

Weinstein defends hiring a private spy agency, says he did it 'for days like this'

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Harvey Weinstein is defending his use of a private spy agency that allegedly dug up dirt on his accusers, saying Thursday he did it "for days like this."

The unscripted remark came as the former Hollywood producer left his New York City trial, where the woman he's charged with raping was set to testify on Friday.

Weinstein, who's been more apt to engage with reporters in recent days, was responding to a question asking why his private lawyers hired Black Cube, a firm founded by former analysts from Israeli intelligence agencies.

Thursday's court session ended with brief testimony about Weinstein's contract with Black Cube. His relationship with the firm was explored in

Ronan Farrow's book about the Weinstein saga, "Catch and Kill."

Prosecutors say Black Cube investigators working on Weinstein's behalf used fake identities to gather information on his accusers, with the ultimate goal of thwarting the publication of stories about the film producer's alleged sex offenses.

Jurors on Thursday also saw an email from Weinstein to someone at Black Cube reading: "Red flags are the ones of interest" — what prosecutors say was a reference to a list of names marked in red to identify accusers.

As prosecutors start to wind up their case, they are turning to the woman whose rape allegation is at the heart of some of the more serious charges against Weinstein, who insists any sexual encounters were

consensual.

At the same time, Weinstein's lawyers are preparing to grill her with warm emails she sent him after the alleged assaults that they say belie any victimization.

The woman's emails continued for several years after the alleged rapes, Weinstein's lawyers said. They've said they collected roughly 400 messages between the two — none in which she accuses Weinstein of harming her.

Prosecutor Meghan Hast sought to prepare jurors for that evidence in her opening statement last week, saying that the accuser scheduled to take the witness stand Friday had "buried her trauma" and was trying to navigate Weinstein's once-powerful grip on her by saying nice things and pretending she wanted to see him.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man arrested after car rams into home

KS WICHITA — Authorities have arrested a man who is suspected of driving into a Wichita home with three children and three adults inside during a domestic disturbance.

Samuel Higgins, 36, of Wichita, is jailed on suspicion of multiple charges, including aggravated assault, battery of a law enforcement officer, criminal damage to property and driving while under the influence. Police said in a news release that he also tried to run over a couple of relatives, rammed into another vehicle and attempted to injure a police officer. Police said a relative also fired at Higgins' vehicle during the melee.

Driver, 8, crashes into another vehicle

WA RENTON — Police were called to a Walmart in Renton following a vehicle crash in the store's parking lot in which one of the drivers was 8 years old, authorities said.

When officers arrived, they found an 8-year-old boy behind the wheel of a vehicle that had crashed into another vehicle that was transporting a woman and 2-month-old baby.

Police said the boy and his father were leaving the store when the boy ran ahead and entered the vehicle before starting it and reversing, striking another passing vehicle in the parking lot.

Motorcyclist cited for upside down license

NJ TRENTON — A motorcyclist cited for turning his license plate upside down because he thought "it was cool"

has lost another bid to rescind a traffic ticket he received.

A state appellate court determined that the ticket and the \$139 penalty Scott DiRoma received in municipal court were both justified.

DiRoma was driving his motorcycle in Warren Township in June 2018 when he was stopped by a police officer who noticed his license plate was mounted upside down. DiRoma told the officer he liked the way the plate looked and "wanted to be different," authorities have said.

Inmate captured less than hour after escape

NE MCCOOK — An inmate was caught less than an hour after escaping from the state Work Ethic Camp in McCook, officials said.

Ryan Lykens left the camp just before 9:30 a.m., the Nebraska Correctional Services Department said in a news release. Staffers had noticed that razor wire along the fence line had been pushed aside, and they followed tracks in the snow to a nearby canyon. Lykens refused several orders to stop and surrender after he was spotted, the department said, so staffers used pepper spray on him.

Dog and goat vie for honorary mayor title

VT FAIR HAVEN — It's Lincoln the goat versus Sammy the dog in the race for honorary mayor of one Vermont town.

The Nubian goat had won the post in Fair Haven last year after the town manager came up with the pet mayor election to raise money to rehabilitate a community playground and to get kids civically involved.

Resident Cheryl Daviau said the race has gotten children involved in the election process.

To up the ante, the police chief nominated K-9 Sammy, a German Shepherd, who visits local schools daily with a resource officer, attends concerts in the park and is beloved around town.

School district warns of online 'penny challenge'

WA TACOMA — A Washington state school district warned parents about a potentially dangerous "penny challenge" spreading on social media.

The Tacoma School District said a middle school student in the district took part in the online trend last week, KOMO-TV reported.

The school district provided a photo of a burned electrical wall outlet resulting from the penny challenge. No injuries were reported.

Social media users are challenged to record a video of themselves sliding a penny between a partially plugged-in cellphone charger and a wall outlet, officials said.

Suspect in custody in fast-food robbery, death

PA EDINBORO — A suspect is behind bars in the shooting death of an employee during an attempted robbery of a fast-food restaurant Saturday in northwestern Pennsylvania, state police said.

Officers were called to a Wendy's in Washington Township and found an employee shot in the leg and abdomen, police in Erie County said. Troopers said Alexander Cavanah, 22, was pronounced dead shortly afterward at UPMC Hamot.

Markese Lampley, 20, is charged with first- and second-degree murder, robbery, aggravated assault, reckless endangerment and other offenses.

Man charged for dead, malnourished cows

SC ANDERSON — A South Carolina man has been accused of having a dozen malnourished cows and improperly burying several cows that had recently died.

David Howard Walker, 81, turned himself in to the Anderson County Sheriff's Office, news outlets reported.

Animal control officials received information about potentially malnourished cows and searched a property, Anderson County Sheriff's Office spokesman J.T. Foster told news outlets. A search warrant led officials to take 12 cows from the property to a clinic, he said. The officials also found six cows that had recently died had not been properly buried, news outlets reported.

Man who posed as agent, sold fakes gets 11 years

NJ CAMDEN — A New Jersey man who posed as a federal agent to sell counterfeit precious metal coins and bars has been sentenced to nearly 11 years in prison.

Jonathan Kirschner, 35, of Moorestown, must also pay \$14,600 in restitution and forfeit the counterfeit goods, federal prosecutors said.

Kirschner admitted selling fake gold bars to a coin collector for \$11,000 while wearing a badge purporting to identify himself as an agent with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. He also claimed to be an ATF agent in written correspondence and in person with the victim.

Federal prosecutors said Kirschner also sold 49 counterfeit Morgan dollar coins in 2017 while posing as an ATF agent. They said he faked being an agent to put his victims at ease.

From wire reports

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History, excitement mix for big game

Associated Press

MIAMI — Few Super Bowls in recent memory have appeared as competitive as the San Francisco 49ers against the Kansas City Chiefs.

No wonder there's a little more buzz about this one.

History and excitement are a nice combination for any championship game.

The history stems from the Chiefs seeking their first title since 1970, when they won the fourth Super Bowl in the final matchup of AFL-NFL. The full merger took place the next season — and Kansas City hasn't been back to the Super Bowl for which its founder, Lamar Hunt, provided the name.

"I think he would be amazed," said his son, Clark Hunt, who now oversees the Chiefs. "He and my mother actually talked about that at one of the last Super Bowls they attended together about 15 years ago. He said, 'I always knew it was going to be big, but I didn't know it was going to be this big.'"

Then there's Andy Reid, whose NFL head coaching résumé goes back to 1999 in Philadelphia. He has a Super Bowl ring from work as an assistant coach in Green Bay, but Reid is 0-1 in the big game.

"Just getting him here isn't the goal," star tight end Travis Kelce said. "Winning this thing for him is."

San Francisco is seeking its sixth Vince Lombardi Trophy, which would equal the

record held by Pittsburgh and New England. The 49ers also are looking to be only the second team to go from 4-12 the previous season to the top of the heap.

"It's been quite a journey," said half-back Raheem Mostert, who was cut by six teams and was a special-teamer for the 49ers before getting a chance — and taking off running with it. Mostert rushed for 220 yards and four touchdowns in the NFC title game.

"This franchise has a lot of history and accomplishments," he said. "Of course, we want to add to that."

Mostert is one of a field full of players who will push the thrill throttle to the floor and keep it there. So is Kelce.

But Kelce might not be the best tight end in the game. It's close, but 49ers All-Pro George Kittle is just as capable of breaking open this Super Bowl with something spectacular.

Both teams have wideouts capable of swinging momentum in their team's favor. For the Chiefs it's perhaps the speediest group the NFL has seen, featuring Tyreek Hill, Sammy Watkins and rookie Mecole Hardman.

The 49ers counter with clutch veteran receiver Emmanuel Sanders, Deebo Samuel, a rookie with no fear of going anywhere on the field — or above it — to make a catch, and emerging talent Kendrick Bourne. Just like with Kansas City, they're capable of making a difference.

So is San Francisco's defense, and it will need to be at optimal precision to deal with perhaps the most electrifying player of them all in this Super Bowl: Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes.

"We believe in each other," 49ers cornerback Richard Sherman said. "We believe in the scheme."

For Kansas City, whose defense performed particularly well down the stretch of the regular season but hasn't been so stingy in spots during the postseason, how it goes Sunday very possibly will depend on how successful Mahomes is. The 49ers don't need their QB, Jimmy Garoppolo, to be extra special; he's more of a caretaker behind that monstrous running game and defense in the two postseason victories.

Make no mistake about Mahomes: Kansas City needs him to be, well, vintage Mahomes.

Which means big plays with his arm, thrown from angles we didn't know existed. Howitzer throws, maybe even the tight-rope kind of run down the sideline that still has NFL folks shaking their heads.

"It's where you want to be when you start training camp in St. Joe, Missouri," Mahomes said this week. "For me, to be in this moment, I'm just enjoying it as much as possible."

Chances are, Mahomes and his teammates, along with the 49ers, will produce one of those enjoyable, memorable, perhaps even classic Super Bowls.

Super Bowl site is long way from South Beach glamour

Associated Press

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. — Rashad Fenton used to work at Hard Rock Stadium.

He'll work there again Sunday, in a very different capacity than his last job.

Fenton is a rookie cornerback for the Kansas City Chiefs, with a most unusual story. He worked at Hard Rock on Sundays when he was in high school, helping with the concession operations during Miami Dolphins games. He'd walk to the stadium, do his job for a few hours, then walk back home.

"I never would have thought I'd be going to the Super Bowl," said Fenton, who grew up in Miami Gardens — where the stadium is — a long way from famed South Beach.

Roughly one in four residents of Miami Gardens, the suburb where Super Bowl 54 between the Chiefs and the San Francisco 49ers will be played Sunday, live below the poverty line. An overwhelming majority of those residents don't have college degrees, according to U.S. Census statistics. And the median household annual income is somewhere around \$43,000.

So if the typical household spent the entirety of its income for the year on Super Bowl tickets, it could buy ... not very many. Most tickets to Sunday's game were sold for more than \$5,000 apiece; some late Thursday were available for more than \$14,000 a pop. Several suites at the stadium, local officials said, were sold for more

than \$300,000.

Put another way, a suite can cost what the typical Miami Gardens household makes in seven years.

As with any big event, especially in a major city where all aspects of the socioeconomic spectrum are represented, the Super Bowl is simply unaffordable for most people who live there. The NFL knows that and offers countless free and relatively low-priced events so people can experience some elements of Super Bowl week, but tickets for most are a pipe dream.

There will be about 65,000 people in the stadium Sunday, and money to some of them will be no object when it comes to arranging black car service, high-end spirits and fine dining

— creating a wild dichotomy when compared to the reality of everyday life for most people.

Go a mile in any direction from the stadium, where people will be spending wildly on food, drink, tickets and whatever else, and you'll find something that shows how tough things are for residents.

A run-down field. A closed business. A horse track that used to bustle and now is barely used.

"It's a hard-hat community in a hard-hat area with hard-hat high school teams," Hill said. "These kids, their parents or grandparents got up to work every day and worked a hard job. They transfer that work ethic going forward. And there's a lot of pride in that."

Australian Open

Thiem outlasts Zverev in men's semis

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia — Locked in an even-as-can-be Australian Open semifinal, Dominic Thiem looked up at his guest box, patted his belly and stuck out his tongue, as if to indicate he was feeling sick. He shook his head. He winced.

Whatever might have been going on, Thiem turned out to be just fine — well enough to play, well enough to win.

The 26-year-old Austrian reached his third Grand Slam final overall and first at Melbourne Park by using his baseline bullying and big-moment bravado to beat Alexander Zverev 3-6, 6-4, 7-6 (3), 7-6 (4) on Friday night.

"I was feeling nerves, I think. I was putting so much energy, so much effort in, so my stomach was not ready for that. I think it was rebelling a little bit," Thiem said, laughing

about what happened. "But all good. I sometimes have it when I have tough matches."

The key to Thiem's victory over No. 7 Zverev was the same as the key to his previous win, over No. 1 Rafael Nadal in the quarterfinals: coming through in the clutch. Thiem went a combined 5-for-5 in tiebreakers in those matches.

"I was going for it. Could have also missed them," he said about some of his shots Friday. "I was brave, but also lucky that I made these."

The No. 5-seeded Thiem's opponent in the title match Sunday will be No. 2 Novak Djokovic, the defending champion, who eliminated Roger Federer on Thursday.

Djokovic, 32, will be appearing in his record eighth Australian Open final and 26th Grand Slam final overall. While Thiem eyes his first major trophy, Djokovic is going for No. 17,

which would move him within three of Federer's record of 20. Nadal, with 19, is the only other man ahead of Djokovic.

Thiem's two previous major finals came on the red clay of the French Open, where he was the runner-up to 12-time champion Nadal each of the last two years.

Now he will face a similar challenge: Djokovic owns a record seven titles from the hard courts of the Australian Open.

Zverev's take on Thiem's form?

"He's playing the best tennis of his life," said Zverev, who was making his debut in a Slam semifinal.

Thiem never had been past the fourth round in Melbourne until now. But he's morphing into a superior hard-court player — and one in rather fine form at the moment, with three consecutive wins over top-10 opponents, including No. 1

Nadal in the quarterfinals and, now, Zverev.

He also saved 9 of 14 break points in the semifinal.

"In the important moments, I didn't play my best. He did," Zverev said. "That's where the match kind of went his way."

As Thiem began to impose himself — he went from five winners in the first set, to nine in the second and 20 in the third — Zverev seemed to find more and more things that disturbed him.

The 22-year-old German ran out of replay challenges in the third set, questioned whether the net machine was working and found an arena video board bothersome.

What bothered Zverev the most, of course, was Thiem, who now gets less than 45 hours to rest and try to figure out a way to beat Djokovic at a place no one is better.

NHL roundup

Predators rally for second straight night, edge Devils

Associated Press

NEWARK, N.J. — New coach John Hynes got more than a measure of satisfaction against his former team Thursday when the Nashville Predators beat the New Jersey Devils in a wild game.

Hynes and the Predators earned their second consecutive gut-check victory in two nights and that was just as important as the 6-5 shootout result in New Jersey that allowed Nashville to edge a little closer to a playoff spot.

"It's big win," said Hynes, who watched his Predators rally in the third period to beat Washington on Wednesday. "I think a couple of accomplishments: We wanted to win back-to-back games. That was a big effort, and to be able to find a way."

Nashville rallied twice in the third period to force overtime, with Filip Forsberg tying the game at 5 with his second goal of the game. He also scored in the shootout along with Matt Duchene to provide the margin of victory.

Forsberg has been impressed with the Predators' desire the past two games.

"We know the situation we're in and we need to string as many wins together as possible and obviously keep playing to the identity that we want and know that can be successful," he said. "I think we're doing that parts of games and could do it better."

Pekka Rinne made 27 saves and had stops on Jack Hughes and Kyle Palmieri on the Devils' final two shootout attempts to seal the win. Mattias Ekholm,

Nick Bonino and Duchene also scored for Nashville, which is 7-0-3 in its last 10 games against New Jersey.

Pavel Zacha scored twice and Nikita Gusev, Jesper Bratt and John Hayden once for the Devils. Mackenzie Blackwood stopped 25 shots, including seven in overtime.

Kings 3, Coyotes 2 (OT): Alex Iafallo scored 24 seconds into overtime, completing a hat trick that lifted visiting Los Angeles over Arizona and ended its five-game losing streak.

Iafallo tied the game with 2:54 left in regulation, then won it moments later. Jack Campbell stopped 26 shots and Anze Kopitar assisted on two goals for the Kings, who got their second win of the month.

Christian Dvorak gave the Coyotes a 2-1 lead with 56 seconds left in the second period,

and Nick Schmaltz also scored for Arizona. But the Coyotes lost their fourth straight and are 1-5-2 in their last eight games.

Canadiens 3, Sabres 1: Ilya Kovalchuk and Brendan Gallagher scored in a span of 2:16 early in the second period, and visiting Montreal beat Buffalo.

Carey Price stopped 20 shots to improve to 5-1 in his last six starts, a stretch in which he's allowed just 10 goals. For Gallagher, the goal came in his first game after missing six straight and 10 of 11 with headaches and concussion-related issues.

Tomas Tatar sealed Montreal's fifth win in seven games with an empty-net goal with 1:47 left.

Jack Eichel scored for Buffalo, becoming the team's first player in 27 years to reach 30 goals in 50 or fewer games.

NBA roundup

Young's 39 points help Hawks top 76ers

Associated Press

ATLANTA — All-Star guard Trae Young had 39 points and a career-high 18 assists to lead the Atlanta Hawks past Ben Simmons and Philadelphia 127-117 on Thursday night, extending the 76ers' road woes.

Simmons scored 31 points to lead Philadelphia. Shake Milton had a career-high 27 points — 14 more than his previous high — but it wasn't enough to improve the 76ers' poor road record. Philadelphia, 22-2 at home, fell to 9-16 in away games.

The 76ers, who began the night tied with Indiana for fifth place in the East, held their last lead at 21-20 against the Hawks, who are last in the conference.

Joel Embid had 21 points and 14 rebounds for Philadelphia. Hawks coach Lloyd Pierce and his assistants wore Kobe Bryant's Nike shoes during the game as tribute to the late Lak-

ers great.

Kings 124, Clippers 103: De'Aaron Fox scored a career-best 34 points and visiting Sacramento used a strong second quarter to defeat Los Angeles.

It was the first basketball game at Staples Center since Kobe Bryant, his 13-year-old daughter Gianna and seven others were killed in Sunday's helicopter crash in Southern California. Clippers star Paul George narrated a two-minute video tribute shown before the game while Bryant's retired No. 8 and No. 24 Lakers jerseys were left uncovered in the upper left corner of the arena.

Buddy Hield added 19 points and Cory Joseph had 16 for the Kings, who made a franchise-record 21 three-pointers.

Raptors 115, Cavaliers 109: Serge Ibaka scored 26 points, Kyle Lowry had 23 and Toronto held off host Cleveland for its ninth straight win.

Norman Powell scored eight consecutive points in the final minute for the Raptors after the Cavaliers cut the lead to 105-104. Powell hit a three, scored on a layup after making a steal and sank three foul shots to seal it.

Celtics 119, Warriors 104: Gordon Hayward scored 25 points and Boston earned its fifth victory in six games by beating visiting Golden State.

Marcus Smart added 21 points, 17 in the second half on a night when the Celtics became the latest team to offer a tribute to Kobe Bryant following his death in a helicopter crash.

Nuggets 106, Jazz 100: Nikola Jokic scored 28 points, including six in the final two minutes, and dished out 10 assists as short-handed host Denver rode a big second-half run to a win over Utah.

It marked the first of four meetings between the North-

west Division rivals. The Nuggets (33-15) moved a game clear of the Jazz (32-16).

Jokic carried the load for a Denver team that was missing Jamal Murray (sprained left ankle), Paul Millsap (bruised left knee), Gary Harris (personal reasons) and Mason Plumlee (right foot). Michael Porter Jr. finished with 12 points and 12 rebounds off the bench.

Utah center Rudy Gobert had 21 points and 11 rebounds after making his first All-Star team. The Jazz have dropped three straight.

Wizards 121, Hornets 107: Bradley Beal had 34 points, nine rebounds and nine assists after he was snubbed for an All-Star selection, and host Washington topped Charlotte.

Beal, chosen for the All-Star Game the previous two years, failed to make it as a reserve in results that were revealed shortly before game time.

College basketball roundup

Cowan scores 31 as No. 15 Maryland holds off Iowa

Associated Press

COLLEGE PARK, Md. — Anthony Cowan Jr. scored a career-high 31 points, Jalen Smith had 18 points and 14 rebounds, and No. 15 Maryland beat 18th-ranked Iowa 82-72 Thursday night to snap the Hawkeyes' five-game winning streak.

The Terrapins (17-4, 7-3 Big Ten) never trailed after half-time in the rematch of a Jan. 10 meeting that Iowa won 67-49 to launch its five-game run. With Cowan leading the way, Maryland won its fourth straight and improved to 12-0 at home.

Cowan moved past Walt Williams into 12th place on the Maryland scoring list with 1,716 points. The senior guard went 9-for-15 from the floor, 10-for-11 at the foul line and led the Terps with six assists.

Luka Garza scored 21 for the Hawkeyes (15-6, 6-4) and Joe Wieskamp had 17. Garza, the Big Ten's leading scorer, was in foul trouble throughout. He had two fouls in the opening five minutes and picked up his fourth with 7:55 remaining.

No. 2 Gonzaga 87, Santa Clara 72: Filip Petrushev had a career-high 31 points and nine rebounds and the visiting Bulldogs pulled away late in the second half and beat the Broncos.

Ryan Woolridge added 13 points and six assists and Drew Timme scored 11 points to help Gonzaga win its 14th straight and remain unbeaten in the West Coast Conference.

The Bulldogs (22-1, 8-0 WCC) won the game, but lost Killian Tillie to an apparent left leg injury in the first half.

No. 11 Oregon 77, California 72: Payton Pritchard scored 21 points and broke his team's all-time assists record in leading the visiting Ducks past the Golden Bears.

Chris Duarte added 19 points as Oregon (18-4, 7-2 Pac-12) remained on top of the conference standings with the victory.

Matt Bradley scored a season-high 27 points to lead Cal (9-11, 3-4).

No. 19 Illinois 59, Minnesota 51: Andres Feliz scored 17 points and Ayo Dosunmu and Kofi Cockburn added 13 each as the host Illini held on to beat the Golden Gophers.

It was the seventh consecutive win for Illinois (16-5, 8-2 Big Ten), which moved into a first-place tie with No. 14 Michigan State in the conference.

Daniel Oturu led Minnesota

(11-10, 5-6) with a game-high 20 points and Alihan Demir added eight points.

UCLA 72, No. 20 Colorado 68: Chris Smith scored a career-high 30 points and the host Bruins defeated the Buffaloes to get back to .500 in Pac-12 play.

Jaime Jaquez Jr. added 13 points and seven rebounds, and Prince Ali had 11 points for UCLA (11-10, 4-4). The Bruins led by 15 points early in the second half and held off Colorado's repeated runs that cut their lead to two points.

McKinley Wright IV scored 11 of his 14 points in the second half and Evan Battey added 14 points for the Buffaloes (16-5, 5-3), whose two-game winning streak ended. Wright scored seven of their final 11 points.