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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Navy offering bonuses to retain pilots

BY TYLER HLAVAC

Stars and Stripes

The Navy is offering aviators as much as \$175,000 to stay in uniform as it struggles with a pilot shortage.

Pilots selected for promotion to lieutenant commander could get that much for agreeing to stay in the service for five years under a 2018 retention bonus program, according to a Navy administrative message released this week.

Three-year commitments

could net pilots bonuses of up to \$90,000, depending on which aircraft they fly. The bonus program also offers senior pilots \$100,000 for a commitment to serve three more years, including a tour as an installation commander, according to the message.

Naval officers with the rank of commander are the top leaders and flag officers of tomorrow, Navy personnel chief Vice Adm. Robert Burke said in the message.

"Their skills and leadership

experience are essential to the success of the Navy," he said. "Our return on investment is the retention for continued Navy service of our aviation warfighters, with their invaluable, irreplaceable skill sets and leadership."

The Navy is facing acute shortages of strike fighter, electronic attack and helicopter mine countermeasure pilots, said Burke, who testified to the Senate Armed Services Committee on military readiness last month.

"Each did not retain sufficient numbers of O-4 (lieutenant commander) pilots to meet all operational department head requirements in our aviation squadrons," he said in his testimony. "Navy is applying a combination of monetary and nonmonetary incentives focused on meeting aviator career expectations and quality of life/service."

The Navy said the bonuses are needed to stem pilot losses to the civilian sector.

S. Korea evacuation drill set during war games

BY KIM GAMEL

Stars and Stripes

SEOUL, South Korea — Next month the military plans to practice one of its worst nightmare scenarios in South Korea — a mass evacuation — this time adding plans to fly some volunteers to the U.S.

The semiannual rehearsal, known as Focused Passage, is scheduled for April 16-20. That will make April a busy month on the divided peninsula since the noncombatant evacuation operation, or NEO, exercise will occur at the same time as joint war games with the South.

The military holds evacuation exercises every spring and fall, involving mostly family members and civilian contractors. The plan to fly some participants to the U.S. is believed to be a first for the drills.

This spring's NEO will take place at a sensitive time. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un is expected to hold historic summits with South Korean President Moon Jae-in in late April and with President Donald Trump in May.

Heightened tensions over Pyongyang's nuclear weapons

program have served as a wake-up call for NEO organizers as the possibility of conflict rose last year with several missile tests by the North and threats of military action by both sides.

The situation has calmed after North Korea's participation in last month's Winter Olympics led to a series of diplomatic breakthroughs. But U.S. officials and experts said there's a new awareness about the need to be ready for the worst-case scenario.

Adm. Harry Harris, the head of the Hawaii-based Pacific Command, said during a House Armed Services Committee hearing last month that Army Pacific at Fort Shafter has been tasked with updating the evacuation plan for South Korea.

Harris was responding to a question by Rep. Anthony Brown, D-Md., who expressed concern about flaws in the current plan.

"I don't get the sense that the rehearsals, the walkthroughs, the soup to nuts had been thought through logistically," Brown, a retired Army Reserve colonel, said. He noted the evacuation would likely be happening at the same time additional

troops were flowing onto the peninsula.

Harris acknowledged that "there is work to be done."

"If conflict breaks out on the Korean Peninsula then we're going to have to get Americans off of there. The numbers are staggering," he said, giving estimates of 200,000-plus American civilians in addition to more than 1 million Chinese and 60,000 Japanese who would also be looking for a way out.

"Our friends, allies, partners and others also have a vested interest in the evacuation of non-combatants should war break out on the peninsula," Harris told lawmakers at the Feb. 14 hearing without elaborating.

The State Department has the overall responsibility for noncombatant evacuation operations, but the military would carry them out. That means carrying out exercises on a routine basis to examine everything from the tactical level, such as assembly points, to operational and strategic aspects, Army Pacific spokesman Col. Christopher Garver said.

"The plans needed an update because the scope and scale of the situation continues to grow

and because the war plans themselves have evolved over time," he said Thursday in an email. The issue has taken on urgency as North Korea demonstrated rapid progress toward its goal of developing a nuclear weapon that could reach the U.S. mainland.

In December, Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., said it was getting too dangerous to keep noncombatants in South Korea and even suggested making the country an unaccompanied post, meaning servicemembers could not bring family with them.

The U.S. military quickly said it has no plans to initiate evacuations, while saying the safety and welfare of troops, civilian staff and loved ones are top priorities and contingency plans are in place.

The semiannual drills, Focused Passage in the spring and Courageous Channel in the fall, are mainly aimed at testing plans and making sure family members of troops and civilians working for the military are ready to go at a moment's notice.

Military doctors treat Iraqis as ISIS fights on

BY CHAD GARLAND
Stars and Stripes

A U.S.-led medical task force in Iraq has treated hundreds of patients during the past five months, including about 300 wounded Iraqi security personnel, as coalition forces have shifted from offensive operations to holding ground retaken from Islamic State.

Though ISIS has lost all of the territory it once controlled in Iraq, remnants of the group continue to launch attacks, killing and wounding security forces and civilians.

The volume of patients and the rate of Iraqi wounded being treated have surprised U.S. officials at times.

Because Iraq often lacks sufficient medical capabilities to treat the casualties of the ISIS battle, now in its third year, coalition medical units are filling the gaps for now and are working to train local medical staff for the future.

The U.S.-led coalition mostly has aided severely wounded Iraqi troops, but occasionally civilians as well when life, limb or eyesight otherwise would be lost.

Based out of Joint Base Lewis-McCord, Wash., the 47th Combat Support Hospital deployed to Iraq in early October, after much of the heavy fighting had ended and just a few months before Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi declared victory over the terrorists.

Nevertheless, the hospital has seen patients on nearly every day of its more than five months in country.

Pentagon data show 16 Americans killed and five wounded in action while supporting the anti-ISIS fight in that period. Nearly half of the hospital's patients have been Iraqi troops — a “significant rate,” said Col. Robert Howe, commander of the task force, known as TF Med.

Woman to lead Citadel students

BY WYATT OLSON
Stars and Stripes

A woman will become regimental commander of cadets at The Citadel in South Carolina for the first time in the military college's 175-year history.

Sarah Zorn will lead the South Carolina Corps of Cadets as regimental commander, the highest-ranking cadet officer, who commands the entire 2,350-student corps, the Military College of South Carolina said Tuesday.

“My attention will be fully committed to leading the South Carolina Corps of Cadets according to our core values of honor, duty, and respect,” Zorn said in the college's announcement. “It is my goal to empower our officers to become the best servant-leaders they can be.”

The announcement, made by the Office of the Commandant, came on the day of The Citadel's 175th anniversary.

The Corps of Cadets was all-male until Shannon Faulkner was admitted in 1995 after successfully suing the school in court. She faced a daunting matriculation, escorted on the campus at first by U.S. Marshals. She dropped out within

the first week after suffering from heat exhaustion during initial training.

Male cadets on campus openly celebrated her departure, The Washington Post reported at the time.

In August 1996, four more women were admitted to The Citadel, but two dropped out after completing one semester, alleging they'd been hazed. Families of the two women reached settlements with the college several years later, according to the college's website.

More than 80 women entered as Citadel freshmen in 2016, the website said.

Zorn will serve as regimental commander during the 2018-19 academic year.

Zorn, a junior from Warrenton, S.C., is majoring in business administration and attending The Citadel on an Army scholarship, the college said. She is a member of the regimental staff, serving as regimental sergeant major.

About a third of the school's cadet graduates are commissioned as officers in the military, according to the college.

Marine commandant orders new probe of harassment claims at Quantico

BY TOM VANDEN BROOK
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Marine Corps Commandant Robert Neller has ordered a new investigation into allegations of sexual harassment brought by two civilian employees against a Marine officer, according to a Marines statement.

The allegations, first reported by USA Today last month, include sexually explicit overtures to the women dating to 2013 at their office on the base at Quantico, known as the “Crossroads of the Marine Corps.” The women maintain the Marine Corps had minimized their concerns.

The new investigation was ordered March 9, two days after the paper reported on complaints of a toxic work environment at the Marine and Family Program Division, where the women work.

The new probe will focus on the complaints of Sherry Yetter and Traci Sharpe. They

allege that Maj. David Cheek arranged to meet them privately on several occasions on the base and showed them his erection through his clothing. Cheek has denied that the incidents took place.

“An investigating officer was appointed to re-investigate the sexual harassment allegations previously made by Ms. Yetter and Ms. Sharpe,” Maj. Garron Garn, a Marine Corps spokesman, said in a statement. “The investigating officer may examine any evidence related to the allegations. For privacy considerations, no additional details regarding the investigation are available for release at this time.”

The complaints of Yetter and Sharpe, along with others about discrimination and bad bosses, spurred the Marine Corps to launch an inspector general's investigation in 2015 into the climate at the Marine and Family Program Division.

Among its findings was that Marine Col. Ernest Ackiss,

who had investigated a sexual harassment claim made by Sharpe, was later counseled himself for harassing the wife of the unit's chaplain, referring to her as “eye candy.” The report also showed that one civilian official was paid to leave quietly after complaints that she had created a hostile work environment. The Marines then rehired that official as a contractor to work in the same office less than two years later.

“The Marines should reinvestigate these allegations, but that is step one of 100,” said Rep. Jackie Speier, D-Calif., a member of the Armed Services Committee. “The Marines have a problem with this case, with the way they staff and run the Marine and Family Program Division in at least one location, and with a broader culture of rot that fosters an environment rife with sexual harassment and violence. I look forward to being briefed by Marine leadership on the next 99 steps.”

Pacific storm brings record rain to S. California

Los Angeles Times

MONTECITO, Calif. — A powerful storm moved into Southern California on Wednesday, drenching fire-ravaged neighborhoods and setting several new rainfall records for the day but so far not causing the damage and destruction some officials feared.

The storm marked a direct hit by an “atmospheric river” system but has proved to be less powerful than forecasters initially predicted. Still, they warned the heaviest downpour is yet to come on Thursday and urged residents to stay vigilant.

A flash-flood warning remained in effect for recent burn areas despite scaled-back total rainfall projections. Forecasters are now expecting 2 to 4 inches of rain on the coasts and in the valleys of Santa Barbara and western Ventura counties, and 4 to 8 inches in the foothills and mountains across the region, Joe Sirard, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Oxnard, Calif., said.

The heaviest rainfall was expected Thursday morning, when there was a slight chance of thunderstorms over charred mountains that could drop up to an inch of rain an hour, the weather service said. In Los Angeles County and eastern Ventura County, the storm is expected to dump 1 to 2 inches of rain on the coasts and in the valleys, and 3 to 5 inches in the mountains, Sirard said.

Officials said that several areas set new rainfall records for this date, including Oxnard, Santa Barbara and Palmdale.

Troopers to patrol at Fla. school in wake of massacre

Associated Press

PARKLAND, Fla. — Already heightened security was being bolstered Thursday at the Florida high school that became the scene of a massacre last month, with Gov. Rick Scott ordering eight highway patrol troopers to help secure the grounds. The move came after the shooting suspect's brother was arrested on campus, two students were caught carrying knives and another made online threats.

Also, Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School students will be given clear backpacks they'll be required to use when they return from spring break on April 2. Broward County school district Superintendent Robert Runcie told parents in a two-page letter that metal detectors also could be installed soon, and he outlined other security upgrades including student ID badges and a district-wide effort to require all school visitors to enter through a single door.

The troopers will be stationed at the school indefinitely along with Broward County deputies, leaving an armed guard at every campus entrance point, Scott said in a statement.

Before the shooting, the school was patrolled by one armed deputy and unarmed guards. An unspecified number of deputies, some armed with rifles, were added after the school reopened.

“Parents, students and teachers have recently endured one of the worst tragedies in Florida history,” Scott said. “They must be assured that every necessary step is being taken to increase safety and ensure no unauthorized people are allowed on campus.”

The strengthened security comes three days after suspect Nikolas Cruz's younger brother, Zachary Cruz, was arrested on trespassing charges while riding his skateboard on campus.

Zachary Cruz, 18, is being held on \$500,000 bond and Broward County Judge Kim Theresa Mollica has approved a search of his home for weapons. The Broward Sheriff's Office wants him barred from possessing firearms and also involuntarily hospitalized for a mental health evaluation under a state law passed after the Feb. 14 shooting spree that killed 17.

Zachary and Nikolas, 19, both attended Stoneman Douglas. They shared the same biological mother but had different fathers. Both were adopted at very young ages by Roger and Lynda Cruz. Lynda Cruz died in November and their father died some years earlier.

Nickolas Cruz's attorney has said he will plead guilty to 17 counts of murder and 17 counts of attempted murder if prosecutors will waive the death penalty, which they have refused to do.

Experts: Uber SUV should have seen woman

Associated Press

TEMPE, Ariz. — Two experts say video of a deadly crash involving a self-driving Uber vehicle shows the sport utility vehicle's laser and radar sensors should have spotted a pedestrian, and computers should have braked to avoid the crash.

Authorities investigating the crash in a Phoenix suburb released the video of Uber's Volvo striking a woman as she walked from a darkened area onto a street.

Experts who viewed the video told The Associated Press that the SUV's sensors should have seen the woman pushing a bicycle and should have braked before the impact.

Also, Uber's human backup driver appears on the video to be looking down before crash and appears startled about the time of the impact.

“The victim did not come out of no-

where. She's moving on a dark road, but it's an open road, so Lidar (laser) and radar should have detected and classified her” as a human, said Bryant Walker Smith, a University of South Carolina law professor who studies autonomous vehicles.

Sam Abuelsmaid, an analyst for Navigant Research who also follows autonomous vehicles, said laser and radar systems can see in the dark much better than humans or cameras and that the pedestrian was well within the system's range.

“It absolutely should have been able to pick her up,” he said. “From what I see in the video, it sure looks like the car is at fault, not the pedestrian.”

The video could have a broad impact on autonomous vehicle research, which has been billed as the answer to cutting the 40,000 traffic deaths that occur annually in the U.S. in human-driven vehicles.

Proponents say that human error is responsible for 94 percent of crashes, and that self-driving vehicles would be better because they see more and don't get drunk, distracted or drowsy.

But the experts said it appears from the video that there was some sort of flaw in Uber's self-driving system.

The video, Smith said, may not show the complete picture, but “this is strongly suggestive of multiple failures of Uber and its system, its automated system, and its safety driver.”

Tempe police, as well as the National Transportation Safety Board and the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration are investigating the Sunday night crash, which occurred outside a crosswalk on a darkened boulevard.

The crash was the first death involving a fully autonomous test vehicle.

House passes \$1.3 trillion spending bill

The Washington Post

WASHINGTON — The House on Thursday passed a sweeping \$1.3 trillion spending bill that makes good on President Donald Trump's promises to increase military funding while blocking most of his proposed cuts to domestic programs and placing obstacles to his immigration agenda.

The 2,232-page bill, which was released just before 8 p.m. Wednesday, would keep government agencies operating through September. Congressional leaders muscled the bill through the chamber, tossing aside rules to ensure careful deliberation of legislation to meet a Friday night government shutdown deadline.

The bill includes dozens of miscellaneous provisions, ranging from crucial fixes to the recent GOP tax bill to a measure on employee tips to language codifying that minor-league baseball players are exempt from federal labor laws. The spending bill is widely expected to be the last major legislation that Congress will pass before the November midterm elections, which has increased pressure to jam the bill full of odds and ends.

The bill passed on a 256-167 vote after leaders of both parties hailed the compromise. At the White House, Office of Management and Budget Director Mick Mulvaney said Trump would sign the bill.

House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis., said it fulfilled Trump's governing agenda, in-

cluding by increasing military spending and funding a wall along the U.S.-Mexico border.

"This bill starts construction on the wall," he told reporters. "It funds our war on opioids. It invests in infrastructure. It funds school safety and mental health. But what this bill is ultimately about, what we've fought for for so long, is finally giving our military the tools and the resources it needs to do the job."

House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., called the bill "a tremendous victory for the American people," one that keeps domestic agencies robustly funded while turning away Trump's push for more border wall and immigration enforcement money.

"If you want to think you're getting a wall, just think it and sign the bill," she said.

But there were plenty of grumbles in all corners of Capitol Hill about the rapid process that has left lawmakers and aides poring through text to see exactly what the bill will do. House GOP leaders waived their own rules requiring any bill coming to the floor to be posted for at least three days, and none of the more than a dozen lawmakers surveyed Thursday said they had read the entire bill.

"There's no way humanly possible to read 2,232 pages," said Rep. Thomas Massie, R-Ky., who is opposed to the bill. "Sometimes they jam you, but they pretend to give you three days to read it. All the veneer is off

now."

Even Democrats who planned to support the compromise railed about the speed of the bill's consideration.

"No matter what you think about the bill, this process is something we have to stand up and say is unacceptable," Rep. Jim McGovern, R-Mass., said on the House floor.

House Rules Committee Chairman Pete Sessions, R-Texas, acknowledged the circumstances were not ideal.

"There was a good, hard work put into this, and the answer is we are going to move forward and take care of funding our military properly and the rest of the government," he said. "I, like you, see the frailties in what we do, and they're enormous and they're gaping holes, but we had to do what we had to do."

Besides the looming deadline, one consideration prompting the quick vote, congressional aides said, was the Friday funeral for the late Rep. Louise Slaughter, D-N.Y. Dozens of members are planning to fly to Rochester, N.Y., for the service.

Other lawmakers are set to leave on official delegations abroad as soon as Friday, aides said, taking advantage of the two-week congressional break for Easter and Passover.

Attention now turns to the Senate, where unanimous consent from all members would be needed to waive procedural rules to set up votes before the Friday midnight deadline.

Military budget hike calls for raises, new ships, planes

BY CLAUDIA GRISALES

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — With a partial government shutdown looming, lawmakers on Capitol Hill were racing against the clock Thursday to approve a massive spending bill for fiscal 2018 that includes more than \$650 billion in national defense spending.

The fifth temporary funding measure for fiscal 2018 runs out late Friday and would trigger the third federal shutdown this year. On Wednesday evening, Congress unveiled a \$1.3 trillion, 2,232-page bill that, if approved, would avert the shutdown. The House approved the plan Thursday afternoon.

The military portion of the spending bill includes a significant increase in the Pentagon

budget that would include a 2.4 percent pay raise for servicemembers, would fund new ships and aircraft and would direct new spending on missile defense.

"After years of neglect, this body is taking the important step of reshaping and rebuilding the United States military," Rep. Pete Sessions, R-Texas, said Thursday in introducing the measure on the House floor. "It's far more than just national defense. It is also trying to give better protection to the men and women who protect us, the men and women who today are in cold, lonely, hot, dangerous places around the globe."

The defense budget closely follows the 2018 National Defense Authorization Act, or NDAA, which was passed last year and authorizes spending

but doesn't actually appropriate the money. Since the fiscal year began Oct. 1, the government has been operating from a series of temporary funding measures.

The Department of Defense budget gained momentum last month when congressional members reached a two-year deal to bust budgetary caps that limited military spending this year to \$549 million.

The spending bill, which funds the overall government including the military, directs \$23.8 billion for 14 new ships, \$10.2 billion for 90 Joint Strike Fighters and nearly \$1.8 billion for 24 F/A-18 Super Hornets.

The plan also directs for \$11.5 billion in spending for the Missile Defense Agency, \$1.6 billion for 30 Apache helicopters, \$1.1 billion for 56 Black

Hawk helicopters and \$34.4 billion in defense health and military family programs.

"It makes a down payment on the buildup that has been advertised by defense hawks and the president," said Mark Cancian, a senior adviser at Center for Strategic and International Studies, a Washington think tank. "They are putting their money where their mouth is."

The plan also directs spending increases in research and development, and reflects alignment with the National Defense Strategy to prepare the country for a potential fight against Russia and China.

The House passed the plan by a vote of 256-167, sending the measure to the Senate for approval. The spending bill then would go to the president to sign.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

School bus driver let strangers on board

IN LEBANON — A central Indiana school bus driver was fired for allowing two strangers to board her bus and scold a student for making lewd gestures through the back window.

Lebanon Community School Corp. Superintendent Dr. Robert Taylor said the substitute driver was fired last week for violating safety protocols. The woman's name hasn't been released.

Taylor said nine middle school and high school students were aboard when two people in a Hummer motioned for the driver to pull over along Interstate 65.

Walmart ousts 3 men carrying weapons

MS COLUMBUS — The states of Georgia and Mississippi have open-carry laws, meaning licensed gun owners can go around in public displaying their weapons. But businesses still have the right to prohibit weapons on their property.

That's what happened in a Mississippi Walmart recently after three Georgia men went shopping while openly carrying an M-4 assault rifle, a handgun and a machete.

The Commercial Dispatch reported that a Walmart employee called police and then managers asked the men to leave once officers arrived.

Historic bridge to be preserved as symbol

MD SILVER SPRING — Officials agreed to preserve part of a historic Maryland bridge that served as a lifeline to blacks during segregation.

Montgomery County officials said the Maryland Transit Administration agreed to save the steel girders from the Talbot Avenue bridge when it's torn down to make way for a light-rail line and recreation trail.

The Washington Post reported that residents of Lyttonsville, founded in 1853 by a free black laborer, have worked for years to preserve the bridge, which was closed last year after failing inspection. The bridge enabled blacks to reach restaurants and stores that would serve them in areas where they were allowed to work but not live.

Tests show why female lion sprouted a mane

OK OKLAHOMA CITY — Lab results have revealed the answer to a mystery at an Oklahoma zoo: just what caused a female lion to sprout a mane.

The Oklahoma City Zoo said in its March newsletter that testing at the University of Tennessee found the African lioness named Bridget has an elevated level of androstenedione, a hormone that can contribute to developing male features.

The zoo said the results likely mean the 18-year-old lioness has a benign tumor that's producing the hormones, but that her health is excellent.

7 children bitten when pit bull enters school

NC CHARLOTTE — Police said seven children were bitten and scratched by a pit bull that got inside a North Carolina elementary school.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg police told local media the dog entered the playground at Lansdowne Elementary School as children were playing. Staff members led the children into

the school, but the dog managed to get inside.

Charlotte-Mecklenburg Animal Care and Control said the over-stimulated dog jumped on some of the children before a teacher confined the 10-month-old animal.

2 historic ships found at construction site

VA ALEXANDRIA — The remains of two ships, potentially from the late 1700s or early 1800s, were found at a construction site in Old Town Alexandria.

City officials said the ships were found near where a previous ship was found in late 2015 at a different construction site.

The city said it will oversee an analysis of the ships before determining what to do with them.

3 people plead guilty in theft of lingerie

UT SALT LAKE CITY — Utah court records show three people pleaded guilty to charges related to the theft of more than \$500,000 in underwear and other merchandise from Victoria's Secret stores in Las Vegas.

Records show William Orlando Pinzon Galindo, 41, and Francisco Ugarte Garcia, 22, pleaded guilty to receiving stolen property, while Omaira Reina-Martinez, 24, pleaded guilty to that charge and having a fake ID.

The Deseret News in Salt Lake City reported that the three were pulled over for speeding on a Utah highway in January.

Investigators found a large amount of lingerie and other items in the car with price tags and theft prevention devices attached.

Police: Man stole car in attempt to warm up

MA HINGHAM — Police in Massachusetts said a homeless man stole an idling car to warm up but couldn't figure out how to turn on the heat.

Hingham police told The Patriot Ledger that John Hastings, 59, was hospitalized after his arrest for prolonged exposure to the cold. He was then jailed on charges including larceny of a motor vehicle.

Investigators said the car was taken from the parking lot of a restaurant. An employee who was about to leave work had left the car idling to warm it up.

Hastings was arrested after he was seen driving the vehicle into Weymouth. Police said the car's air conditioning was running.

Police say woman left child alone to buy pot

FL DAVENPORT — Authorities said a Florida elementary school teacher left a 4-year-old child alone while she went to buy marijuana.

A Polk County Sheriff's Office news release said Marsha Dolce, 26, was arrested and charged with child neglect and marijuana possession.

Deputies responded to a Davenport apartment complex and found a 4-year-old child crying outside. Dolce, who teaches fourth grade at Laurel Elementary in Poinciana, eventually returned home and told deputies she had left to help a friend with car troubles.

Deputies reported finding marijuana in Dolce's home, and text messages on her phone indicated that she had gone to nearby Winter Haven hours earlier to buy the drug.

From wire reports

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Duke's Allen making most of final dance

Associated Press

DURHAM, N.C. — Grayson Allen wants to make the most of his final run through the NCAA Tournament.

It hasn't exactly been a smooth four years for the Duke senior who won a national title in 2015 before becoming one of the sport's most polarizing figures amid a series of tripping incidents.

But he's evolved into the elder statesman on a team full of freshmen, and he has No. 2 seed Duke (28-7) preparing for a rematch with 11th-seeded Syracuse (23-13) on Friday night in Omaha, Neb., in the Midwest Regional semifinals.

"There's obviously no way I'm going to hold any words back or anything like that," Allen said Tuesday. "And I think it really helps with this team."

"It speaks to the maturity level of our team, and everyone's secure in their role on the team," he added. "Me, by being that secure leader and telling these guys and them either following or becoming a leader in their own right. ... Everyone is speaking up right now and it helps with our togetherness."

Part of his willingness to speak up, of course, is because this is his last shot at a national championship. But it's also a re-

flection of how he has grown more comfortable in leading through not just action but by words.

"He's just grown into being a leader," coach Mike Krzyzewski said. "He's not a vocal guy, so just learning about that and still playing his game, it's an evolution. He's a much better player now than he's ever been because he's learned all these things."

He can certainly draw upon plenty of the experiences — good and bad — of his previous three years.

His hustle plays against Wisconsin in the 2015 national championship game sparked Duke to its most recent NCAA title. During the following two seasons, though, his name became synonymous with three separate tripping incidents that earned him a flagrant foul, a reprimand from the Atlantic Coast Conference and a one-game suspension.

Aside from his hip-check foul on North Carolina's Garrison Brooks two weeks ago in the ACC Tournament — an incident later laughed off by the Tar Heels — Allen's senior season has been generally devoid of any controversy.

Instead, the focus has been on his production on the court and his leadership off

it. Allen is the team's second-leading scorer at 15.6 points per game.

And though leadership skills are tougher to quantify, Krzyzewski offered an anecdote: He said he and Allen were among the last people out of the locker room following the second-round victory over Rhode Island, and the Hall of Fame coach told him that he noticed the rest of the Blue Devils listening to him.

"And he smiled. 'Your team is really listening to you,'" Krzyzewski told Allen. "'Keep saying what you think you should say.' And you could see he was proud of it. ... He's telling people what to do, and it was really neat to see where he's at right now."

Allen said his teammates are developing leadership habits of their own, and the cumulative effect has been a group sense of ownership of the team. Duke has won nine of 11 games and beat Iona and Rhode Island by 20 points apiece.

"I think it's clear to anybody who's seen us play ... that we've really come together, and so they're not only listening to me, they're listening to each other," Allen said. "There's a lot of back and forth going on between guys, and we're really embracing the group, team mentality and it's a really cool thing."

Duke, Kentucky freshmen unafraid of big stage

Associated Press

DURHAM, N.C. — Duke and Kentucky are viewed as the masters of the one-and-done era, winning championships with remarkably young rosters.

Both programs have a chance to do it again.

After several potential one-and-done phenoms were bounced from the NCAA Tournament in the opening weekend, the Blue Devils and Wildcats are the teams still playing that have rosters stacked with high-profile freshmen.

Duke, the No. 2 seed in the Midwest Regional, starts four freshmen — led by Wooden Award finalist Marvin Bagley III — while Kentucky, the South's No. 5 seed, features Kevin Knox as its centerpiece.

The Wildcats (26-10), arguably the biggest beneficiary of a run of upsets in the South, played ninth-seeded Kansas

State on Thursday in Atlanta. Duke (28-7) faces 11th-seeded Syracuse in Omaha, Neb., on Friday.

Hall of Fame Duke coach Mike Krzyzewski said his freshmen are "not afraid of the moment. It's how much preparation do they have for the moment?"

"We're trying to condense about four years into eight months," he said. "I don't know how it's going to turn out. You just kind of live it."

Among the star freshmen who didn't make it to the tournament's second weekend were Arizona's Deandre Ayton, Oklahoma's Trae Young, Missouri's Michael Porter Jr., Michigan State's Jaren Jackson, Alabama's Collin Sexton and Texas' Mohamed Bamba.

Ayton, Young and Bamba have already declared for the NBA Draft.

Both the Blue Devils and

Wildcats have had predominantly young teams cut down the nets at past Final Fours. Kentucky won a national title in 2012 behind top-two draft picks Anthony Davis and Michael Kidd-Gilchrist, while Duke's most recent title in 2015 was with three one-and-done freshmen — Jahlil Okafor, Justise Winslow and Tyus Jones.

This Duke team has looked capable of joining that squad, with four freshmen averaging double figures in two tournament games, led by Bagley's 22.0. Another of those freshmen, Wendell Carter Jr., believes the Blue Devils are "reaching our peak at the right time" and have "developed into a team that can crush another team, our opponent."

"I try not to look ahead about this being my last year or anything," Carter said. "I'm just living in the moment."

The Blue Devils have three players — Bagley, Wendell Carter Jr. and point guard Trevon Duval — in the top seven members of the 2017 recruiting class, according to 247Sports. The fourth freshman, Gary Trent Jr., was rated No. 17 by the service.

The highest-rated members of Kentucky's class — Hamidou Diallo, Knox and Jarred Vanderbilt — were ranked 10th-12th by 247Sports. No other top-20 ranked players are still playing.

Calipari has said his group "needed to fail as a team" to figure out how to win. In January the Wildcats dropped out of the Top 25 for the first time since 2014, then in February lost four in a row. But Kentucky enters the Sweet 16 on a five-game winning streak and is the highest remaining seed in the South.

UConn hires Hurley

Associated Press

STORRS, Conn. — Rhode Island's Dan Hurley agreed to become UConn's coach, joining a team that is under NCAA investigation and fired Kevin Ollie this month after another losing season.

"It's official! Dan Hurley named Head Coach of (UConn mens basketball)," UConn said on Twitter on Thursday.

The school said details of the agreement would be released later. A news conference is expected Friday.

Hurley was 113-82 in six seasons with the Rams, who went 26-8 this year before losing in the second round of the NCAA Tournament to Duke. It was the second straight trip to the tournament for the Rams, who won their first regular-season Atlantic-10 championship.

The 45-year-old Hurley played at Seton Hall during its Big East rivalry with UConn in the 1990s. He is the son of Hall of Fame high school coach Bob Hurley Sr. and the brother of Arizona State coach Bob Hurley.

Before taking over at Rhode Island, Hurley coached for two seasons at Wagner and led the school to 25 wins in 2011-12. He also was considered a leading candidate for the vacant coaching job at of Pittsburgh.

UConn won its fourth national championship in 2014 but has fallen on hard times recently. The Huskies went 14-18 this year and 16-17 in 2016-17 after going 30 years without a losing season.

The program also is under an NCAA investigating amid allegations of recruiting violations and reports that team members may have participated in impermissible workouts before the season.

NFL wants to clarify catches

Associated Press

WEST PALM BEACH, Fla. — The NFL's catch rule would get less complicated if team owners approve recommendations from the powerful competition committee.

One of the first orders of business when the league's annual meetings begin Monday in Orlando, Fla., will be a proposal by the committee to clarify what is a catch. Commissioner Roger Goodell said during the week of the Super Bowl he would urge simplification of the rules.

"Catch/no catch is at the top of everyone's minds," Troy Vincent, the NFL's football operations chief, said Wednesday before outlining the committee's recommendations.

The owners will be asked to vote on clarifications that eliminate parts of the rule involving a receiver going to the ground, and that also eliminate negating a catch for slight movement of the ball while it is

in the receiver's possession. No calls in the last few years — not even pass interference — have caused more consternation than overturned catches in key situations, including those by Dez Bryant, Jesse James and Austin Seferian-Jenkins.

"We were at the point as far as players and particularly coaches who asked, 'Why is that not a catch?'" Vincent said. "We talked to fans, coaches and players and we asked the groups, 'Would you like this to be a catch?' It was 100 percent yes.

"Then we began writing rules that actually apply to making these situations catches."

Here's what would constitute a catch if the owners approve the competition committee's alterations:

- control of the ball;
 - getting two feet down;
 - performing a football act or;
 - performing a third step.
- The stipulation that slight

movement of the ball while the receiver still has control no longer would result in an incompleteness. Vincent pointed to the touchdown catch by the Philadelphia Eagles' Corey Clement in the Super Bowl as an example of a player never losing possession of the ball despite slight movement.

"That's what the fans, coaches and players want," Vincent said. "They are the magical moments people are looking for, and that includes all of those [plays]. It's the biggest [proposed change]. Why we want this is this is one call shaping results across the sport."

Competition committee members are chairman Rich McKay, president of the Falcons; Broncos general manager John Elway; Cowboys COO Stephen Jones; Giants owner John Mara; Packers President Mark Murphy; Ravens GM Ozzie Newsome; Saints coach Sean Payton and Steelers coach Mike Tomlin.

NFL briefs

Giants trade JPP to Bucs for draft picks

Associated Press

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. — The New York Giants traded defensive end Jason Pierre-Paul to the Tampa Bay Buccaneers for draft picks Thursday, another step by a team rebuilding after a 3-13 season.

Pierre-Paul is a former first-round draft choice whose career was interrupted by a fireworks accident in 2015 that severely damaged his right hand. He helped the Giants win a Super Bowl in the 2011 season. He signed a four-year, \$62 million contract a year ago.

"We appreciate everything Jason has done for the Giants," new general manager Dave Gettleman said. "He was a fine player for us."

The Giants will get Tampa Bay's third-round draft pick (69th overall) this season. The

teams will swap fourth-round picks, with the Bucs moving up to the 102nd pick and the Giants selecting 108th.

The Bucs had 22 sacks last season and they have been shoring up their line. Defensive end Vinny Curry was signed after being released by the Super Bowl champion Eagles and defensive tackles Beau Allen and Mitch Unrein were also signed.

Pierre-Paul had 68 tackles, 8½ sacks and two forced fumbles last season.

In other NFL news:

■ The Atlanta Falcons have added depth at tight end by agreeing to terms on a one-year deal with seven-year veteran Logan Paulsen.

Atlanta was thin at the position after releasing Levine Toilolo.

The 31-year-old Paulsen played in 14 games, including one start, with San Francisco in 2017. He did not have a reception. He started 12 of 16 games with Chicago in 2016.

Paulsen set a career high with 28 catches for 267 yards and three touchdowns with Washington in 2013. He spent five seasons with the Redskins.

■ The Dallas Cowboys have made their first acquisition since NFL free agency opened a week ago.

Free-agent linebacker Joe Thomas has reached a two-year deal with the Cowboys, a person familiar with the deal told The Associated Press on Wednesday night. The person spoke to the AP on condition of anonymity because the deal hadn't been signed, and there was no announcement from the team.

NBA roundup

LeBron's 35 lead Cavs past Raptors

Associated Press

CLEVELAND — The standings show the Eastern Conference's top team plays in Canada.

The best player remains in Ohio. LeBron James reminded Toronto he's king.

Playing without five teammates and his coach, James scored 35 points and added 17 assists, his last setting up a late a 3-pointer by Kevin Love, as the undermanned Cavaliers rallied to beat the Raptors 132-129 on Wednesday night.

The Cavs were down five rotational players and coach Tyronn Lue, who missed his second straight game for health reasons.

But they still had James, who earlier in the day said, "I'll be available, so we got a chance."

The three-time champion delivered another virtuoso performance, adding seven rebounds without committing a turnover in nearly 40 minutes.

"I've never seen anything like it," said associate coach Larry Drew, filling in for Lue. "It's just amazing what he does, night in and night out. How he sustains it is just mind-boggling."

James made three free throws in the final 7.8 seconds, but missed one with 3.9 seconds to go, giving Toronto a final shot.

DeMar DeRozan got a decent look on a 3-pointer — contested by James — at the horn but missed. DeRozan and Toronto coaches complained the All-Star was fouled to no avail.

The win felt like a statement by the Cavs, but James insisted there were no intended messages.

"It's a good win for us because of how depleted we are on our roster and everything that's been going on," he said. "It's a good win for us against a very good opponent."

"But I don't need to remind anybody about what my teams are capable of doing."

Love, playing his second game after missing 21 games with a broken left hand, finished with 23 points and 12 rebounds and George Hill had 22 on 10-of-11 shooting for the Cavs, who were blown out by 34 points against Toronto in January.

Hornets 111, Nets 105: Dwight Howard had 32 points and a franchise-record 30 rebounds, becoming the first player with a 30-30 game against Brooklyn since Kareem Abdul-Jabbar in 1978.

Clippers 127, Bucks 120: DeAndre Jordan had 25 points and 22 rebounds to lead Los Angeles past host Milwaukee.

The Bucks lost All-Star forward Giannis

Antetokounmpo to a right ankle sprain late in the first half. Antetokounmpo appeared to get hurt when he tripped over teammate Shabazz Muhammad. He stayed in the game for a brief period, but hobbled around the court while grimacing.

76ers 119, Grizzlies 105: Robert Covington, J.J. Redick and Dario Saric each had 15 points to pace all five of host Philadelphia's starters in double-figures, and the 76ers continued their push for home-court advantage in the playoffs.

Spurs 98, Wizards 90: LaMarcus Aldridge had 27 points and nine rebounds, and host San Antonio won its fifth straight game.

Pelicans 96, Pacers 92: Anthony Davis capped a 28-point, 13-rebound, five-block performance with a 15-foot baseline fade, a gritty put-back and two free throws in the final minute, and New Orleans outlasted visiting Indiana.

Nuggets 135, Bulls 102: Nikola Jokic had 21 points, seven rebounds and five assists on "Serbian Heritage Night," and Denver routed host Chicago.

Heat 119, Knicks 98: Kelly Olynyk scored 22 points and handed out a career-high 10 assists as Miami had little trouble on the way to beating visiting New York.

NHL roundup

Crosby gets highlight-reel goal, 700th assist

Associated Press

PITTSBURGH — Sidney Crosby ignited a rally with a highlight-reel goal and became the third active player with 700 career assists in the Pittsburgh Penguins' 5-3 victory over the Montreal Canadiens on Wednesday night.

Crosby picked up his 24th goal of the season when he knocked a pass from Jake Guentzel out of the air, deflected it toward the front of his stick and smacked it by Carey Price to tie it at 3 late in the second period.

Derick Brassard put the Penguins in front to stay, beating Price early in the third period as Pittsburgh avoided dropping both games of a back-to-back against also-rans Montreal and the New York Islanders.

Guentzel had a goal and two assists. His 21st goal of the season came off an assist from Crosby, the 700th of Crosby's career.

Evgeni Malkin and Patric Hornqvist also scored for the Penguins, who drew within two points of idle first-place Washington in the Metropolitan Division. Casey DeSmith finished with 27 saves.

Jonathan Drouin, Nikita Scherbak and Jacob de la Rose scored for the Canadiens, who have dropped nine of their last 10 games.

Blues 2, Bruins 1 (OT): Jaden Schwartz scored his second goal of the game 30 seconds into overtime to lift host St. Louis past Boston.

Schwartz skated up the middle and fired a shot past Anton Khudobin. The Blues won for the fifth time in six games to move within a point of the final Western Conference wild-card spot.

Jake Allen made 21 saves to improve to 24-21-2.

Coyotes 4, Sabres 1: Clayton Keller had two assists to break the franchise re-

cord for points by a rookie in visiting Arizona's victory over Buffalo in a matchup of the NHL's two worst teams.

Rookie Dylan Strome scored in his first game after being called up from the minors. Derek Stepan had a goal and assist, and Richard Panik and Max Domi, with an empty-netter, also scored. Antti Raanta stopped 29 shots to improve to 12-4-4 in his past 20 starts.

Ducks 4, Flames 0: John Gibson stopped 29 shots to lead visiting Anaheim over Calgary.

Gibson earned his fourth shutout of the season and 16th of his career. He is 12-3-1 in his last 16 starts.

Francois Beauchemin had a goal and an assist for Anaheim, and Andrew Cogliano, Ondrej Kase, Hampus Lindholm also scored for the Ducks, who've won four straight and are tied with Colorado for sixth in the Western Conference.