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As shelling in eastern Ukraine raises fears, Russia extends troop drills inside Belarus

By Lori Hinnant and Jim Heintz

Associated Press

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SEE APPEALS ON PAGE 4
January home sales rise as rate hikes expected

Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Sales of previously occupied homes rose in January as a surge in buyers with cash and others eager to avoid higher mortgage rates snapped up properties, leaving the number of available houses on the market at a record low.

Existing home sales rose 6.7% last month from December to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 6.5 million, the National Association of Realtors said Friday. That’s more than the roughly 6.08 million sales that economists had been expecting, according to FactSet.

Sales slipped 2.3% from January 2021 as the median home price jumped 15.4% from last year at this time, to $350,300.

Those prices are being driven higher with so many potential buyers hunting for a shrinking number of properties still on the market. The number of homes for sale at the end of January totaled just 860,000 — the fewest since the NAR began tracking it in 1999, and there are few signs that pressure will let up soon.

The inventory of unsold homes fell 2.3% from December and 16.5% from a year ago. At the current sales pace, that amounts to a record low 1.6 months’ supply, the NAR said.

While it’s normal for fewer homes to go on sale in the months leading up to the annual spring homebuying season, the ultra-low level of properties on the market continues to give sellers a big edge on buyers.

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Weather Outlook

MONDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST

MONDAY IN EUROPE

TUESDAY IN THE PACIFIC

EXCHANGE RATES

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MILITARY RATES

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The weather is provided by the American Forces Network Weather Center, 2nd Weather Squadron at Offutt Air Force Base, Neb.

Round-the-world news for America’s military.

Stripes.com supplies constant updates, on news of interest — including reports from our overseas military bases in Europe, Pacific, Southwest Asia and the Mideast, and coverage of the Pentagon and Capitol Hill.

Also available on mobile apps for Android and iOS.
Thrill Savings Plan to offer more services

By Jonathan Snyder
Stars and Stripes

The federal government’s Thrift Savings Plan is catching up with services already provided by similar firms in the civilian sector: a mobile app, online chat assistance and electronic funds transfer.

Starting this summer, the savings plan — the equivalent of a 401(k) retirement account for military members and civilian workers — will also offer mutual funds for the first time in addition to its stable of index funds.

The changes, announced by the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board on Jan. 26, come in response to requests for these services by plan members seeking greater investment flexibility, board spokeswoman Kim Weaver told Stars and Stripes by email on Thursday.

Mutual funds invest in a changing list of securities chosen by an investment manager and will try to outperform the stock market. By contrast, index funds track specific securities in stock market indexes, such as the Standard & Poor’s 500, Dow Jones and Nasdaq, that are seeking market-average returns, according to NerdWallet.com.

“The mobile app will allow participants to do all the transactions they can do on the website,” Weaver said. “Including having access to a chat feature that can then connect the participant to a live contact center representative.”

To invest in mutual funds through the thrift plan, account holders must hold a $40,000 minimum balance and make a minimum investment of $10,000 into mutual funds.

“The initial investment of $10,000 is intended to ensure that TSP participants are moving enough money into the mutual fund window to reduce the effect of the account, transaction and mutual fund fees charged by the mutual fund window and the funds,” Weaver said.

The Thrift Savings Plan became available to uniformed service members in 2001, and since December the average account balance is around $40,000.

Federal employees had access to the thrift plan starting in 1987; the average account balance in the Federal Employees Retirement System is around $181,000, according to the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment Board website.

Participants in the Thrift Savings Plan will pay a $55 annual access fee and a $95 service fee to participate in mutual funds. A baseline, per-trade fee of $28.75 will vary depending on the fund.

“The number of mutual funds offered in the mutual fund window will be in the thousands,” Weaver said. “The TSP is requiring that the mutual fund window offer the lowest-cost share class of each mutual fund to its participants. The number of funds will fluctuate as mutual funds join or leave the mutual fund window platform.”

The current administration fees for the index and Lifecycle funds average at 0.043 cents per $1,000 invested, according to Weaver.

“The mutual funds offered through the mutual fund window will have their own costs associated with them,” she said. “They are not controlled by the TSP, but rather by the mutual fund owner.”

Thrift Savings Plan members should do research before moving money over to the mutual funds, or at least wait until a year has passed to review fund performances, says financial counselor Felix De Jesus at Marine Corps Air Station Iwakuni, Japan.

“As of now with the current way we do in mutual funds, if they really answer to most people’s desires in building wealth, because they are moderate plans,” De Jesus told Stars and Stripes by phone Thursday. “Now mutual funds, depending what mutual fund it’s focused on, in what industry in the stock market, it can fluctuate in volatility and earnings.”

Okinawa-based Marine sentenced to 2 years for cannabis smuggling

By Matthew M. Burke
Stars and Stripes

CAMP FOSTER, Okinawa — An Okinawa-based Marine was sentenced to two years in a Japanese prison Friday for attempting to smuggle cannabis products into the country and two others pleaded guilty to similar charges in an unrelated case.

Cpl. Nicholas Garner received two years in prison with hard labor and a $4,344 fine in Naha District Court, a court spokeswoman told Stars and Stripes by phone Friday. It’s customary in Japan for officials to speak to the media on condition of anonymity.

Garner pleaded guilty Jan. 28 to two counts of violating Japan’s Cannabis Control and Customs Act, the Okinawa Times reported at the time.

He was indicted on Nov. 25 after 2 liters, or a half-gallon, of cannabis liquid and nearly a quarter-pound of marijuana and about 4½ grams of cannabis liquid inside, the spokeswoman said.

The package was sent by an unnamed individual in California.

Fox admitted Thursday in court to contacting drug dealers in the U.S. to import marijuana and selling it to service members. Johnson admitted to pitching in money and selling marijuana to service members. They attributed their decisions to financial difficulties and apostasy.

Fox said he was facing financial hardship due to a divorce and the subsequent cut in pay. Johnson said he was trying to support his mother back in the U.S. who had lost her job due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I should have sought financial help,” Fox said.

Johnson said he was desperate and thought selling marijuana was his “only option.”

“I am deeply sorry for what I've done,” he said.

The case of two attorneys requested suspended sentences for both. They are scheduled for sentencing March 8, Judge Katsuki Kimijima said Thursday.

Fox and Johnson were charged Nov. 9 after customs officials intercepted a package April 21 at the Camp Kinser post office with just over a quarter-pound of marijuana and about 4½ grams of cannabis liquid inside, the spokeswoman said.

The package was sent by unnamed individuals in California.
Calm prevails at Poland-Ukraine border

BY VANESSA GERA
Associated Press

MEDYKA, Poland — As tensions soar in Ukraine’s east and Western leaders issue dire warnings that a wider war could be coming, calm persists along Ukraine’s western border with European Union nations.

At the nearby Olympic rings in a small Polish community directly on the border stands ready to house Ukrainian refugees. For now, the center in Medyka is empty. At the nearby border crossing, there is no sign of Ukrainians fleeing.

Many Ukrainians do just the opposite: cross the border back into Ukraine after working or shopping in Poland, some defiantly vowing to defend their country in case of a Russian invasion.

“Russia expected everyone to panic and flee to Europe, to just buy buckwheat and pasta, food, but we all bought machine guns and weapons and cartridges,” Volodymyr Halyk, 29, said. “No one is afraid, no one will abandon their homes, no one will flee.”

Halyk and a friend, Volodymyr Yermakov, described themselves as veterans of the war against Russia-backed separatists that began in eastern Ukraine in 2014. Yermakov, 34, said he was prepared to take up arms again should Russian President Vladimir Putin launch an invasion.

“Putin is an aggressor and does not allow anyone to live a normal life,” he said. “They want to take our territory, and that’s the truth.”

Russia has denied plans to invade Ukraine, but Western officials have said that with an estimated 150,000 troops and equipment surrounding the country on three sides, an attack could happen at any time.

People in Poland, which was conquered by Russia during the Cold War, are following the news of Russia’s military buildup with concern. The Polish government last year became embroiled in a migration dispute with another eastern neighbor, Russian ally Belarus. Poland and the European Union accused Belarus of assisting people from the Middle East to cross the border into Poland. The Polish government called the migration part of an effort of hybrid war aimed at destabilizing central Europe and the EU.

Spirits in Medyka, said Yermakov, described himself as a soldier of the war against Russia. “We know how to fight and defend our territory, and that’s the truth.”

Kremlin statement mentioned a “pumping modern weapons and ammunition” into Ukraine. The Kremlin statement mentioned a cease-fire only in passing and made no mention of Zelensky’s offer to meet by Sunday. It was Belarus — not Russia — that announced the extension of the drills.

NATO has estimated there are 30,000 Russian troops in Belarus. After a call with French President Emmanuel Macron, Putin blamed Ukraine for the escalation at the contact line and NATO for “pumping modern weapons and ammunition” into Ukraine. The Kremlin statement mentioned a cease-fire only in passing and made no mention of Zelensky’s call for a meeting.

In Kyiv, life continued seemingly as usual on a mild winter Sunday, with brunches and church services in full swing. Katerina Spanchak, who fled the separatist-occupied Lugansk region years ago, said she prayed for peace.

“We are people, we all love life, and we are all united by our love of life. We should appreciate it every day. That’s why I think everything will be fine,” Spanchak said outside services at St. Michael’s monastery.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba flew into Europe earlier this week to speak with foreign ministers and leaders about the Russia-Ukraine crisis. In a statement from Brussels, Kuleba’s office said Putin and his allies are “using false pretexts to invade. They are trying to hide their real goal — to conquer Ukraine and use it as a base to attack Europe.”

The U.S. deployed nearly 5,000 more troops to Poland in recent weeks. They come in addition to 4,000 rotational troops the U.S. began sending after Russian actions against Ukraine in 2014. The job of the American soldiers is to reassure NATO ally Poland and to be in place to evacuate U.S. citizens and Ukrainians should that be necessary.

Local residents stand ready to help Ukrainians if the tensions with Russia escalate into a broader conflict, according to Gumienny. But he says people also worry that a large number of arrivals could overwhelm the town or that a prolonged war in Ukraine might cause wider instability.

“Nothing is new. You can’t see the refugees having pets, drinking beer, having parties. They are here for one thing: to help the people,” Gumienny said.

“If we want to support them, we have to support them. We cannot help them if we are afraid of them,” he added.

Appeals: Leaders continue to push for talks with Russia to avert attack

FROM PAGE 1

and has ongoing naval drills off the coast in the Black Sea.

The United States and many European countries have charged for months that Russia is trying to create pretexts to invade. They have threatened massive, immediate sanctions if it does.

“We’re talking about the potential for war in Europe,” U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris said Sunday at a security conference in Munich, Germany. “It’s been over 70 years, and through those 70 years… there has been peace and security.”

A top European Union official, Charles Michel, said: “The big question remains: does the Kremlin want dialogue or war?”

A U.S. military official said an offer of a live broadcast while Russia conducts missile tests and continues to amass troops,” said Michel, the president of the European Council.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky was called Saturday on Russian President Vladimir Putin to choose a place where the two leaders could meet to try to resolve the crisis and on Sunday appealed for a cease-fire on Twitter. Russia has denied plans to invade, but the Kremlin had not responded to Zelensky’s offer to meet by Sunday. It was Belarus — not Russia — that announced the extension of the drills.

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‘No panic in the city’

BY ROBYN DENNIS
AND MARY ILYUSHINA

The Washington Post

EUROPE

MOSCOW — The manufactured war scare mounted by Moscow-backed separatist rebels in eastern Ukraine — using potentially 700,000 people as props — unraveled quickly.

Its centerpiece was a staged mass evacuation of women, children and elderly residents of breakaway regions, touching off long lines at ATMs and gas stations on Friday. Russian state TV went all out on the fake war, airing film of buses leaving, arrests of alleged spies and grainy video of “saboteurs,” playing off President Vladimir Putin’s claim on Tuesday that “genocide” was unfolding.

So far, however, the false-flag effort appeared neither particularly sophisticated — nor very convincing. Residents of the separatist republics were as skeptical as anyone about the claims that Ukrainian forces were ready to attack and try to reclaim the territory in the eight-year war with Russia.

“Everything is fine,” said one woman from the Donetsk separatist region, which calls itself the Donetsk People’s Republic, who crossed via a checkpoint into Russia on Saturday. “There were not many people at the checkpoint,” the woman, said who spoke on the condition of anonymity to avoid possible repercussions from separatist officials.

The evacuation story — and separatists’ claims that Ukraine was planning to attack — sparked fears that Russia will use this as a pretext to invade Ukraine. Russian officials deny staging attacks or having any plans to do so. Instead, they report that separatist forces have stepped up shelling into Ukraine, possibly hoping to provoke Ukrainian retaliation.

A Russian official claimed that 35,000 people had evacuated to Russia by noon Saturday, a number that would have required more than 1,000 bus journeys.

But the woman said about 20 buses with a capacity of 22 seats entering Russia when she was crossing into Russia’s southern Rostov region Saturday morning. There were no long bus queues. And traffic apps showed light traffic on the roads from the separatist regions to Rostov.

RBK media, an independent Russian outlet, reported 3,384 people leaving the separatist zones by midday Saturday.

The woman said many people had no plans to evacuate after orders came Friday. “Some people panicked, but mostly people are taking it easy and do not want to go anywhere,” she said, interviewed via Telegram. Like others, she spoke on the condition of anonymity because of fears of reprisals from local separatist authorities.

Many others painted the same picture, contradicting the official version such as Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova’s claim that Ukraine was committing “crimes against humanity” and Russia’s Investigative Committee report of “massive shelling” by Ukraine of civilian villages. All has been denied by Ukrainian officials, and journalists in Ukraine have witnessed no major offensive actions by Ukrainian forces.

“I honestly do not have the feeling that someone is attacking someone,” the woman from the separatist region said, “neither Ukraine nor Russia. No one is preparing to attack.”

Others who were in the separatist areas Saturday said the situation was calm with few signs of a major evacuation. Several people interviewed said that those who left were motivated by a 10,000-ruble payment on arrival in Russia, about $130, that the Russian government announced Friday.

A 55-year-old tradesman from the Donetsk People’s Republic, who crossed via a checkpoint into Russia on Saturday, said, “not active. There is no panic in the city. People do not want to leave the territory. And I don’t want to go anywhere. Yesterday there were small queues at the gas station, but now they are gone. There are also no queues in stores. It’s calm outside.”

A 37-year-old small-business owner from Donetsk added by phone: “Everything is normal. From what I see, people are not afraid and are not going to leave.”

Nikolai, a Donetsk resident interviewed via Telegram, said the same thing: “You know that we have been living through this for the past eight years? Some people rushed to the ATMs last night and to the grocery stores, but today everything is back to normal.”

A man from the city of Makeyevka in Donetsk dismissed claims of attacks or planned attacks. “All this ‘action’ is just deception” he said in a Telegram interview.

As Russian and separatist claims of major attacks came thick and fast, creating a cascade of alarming events on state TV, officials offered no evidence of genocide, crimes against humanity or terrorism. Western officials warned that Russia appeared to be manufacturing a false-flag scenario, to use as a pretext to attack Ukraine in coming days.

“The evacuation of people was staged,” said Bellingcat, a British investigative think tank, in a report Tuesday. “The manufac­turing of a false-flag script was part of a wider effort to create panic and a demand for a military response from the international community.”

Western officials said they had found that metadata on both videos was coordinated and that the videos were filmed in the same area, suggesting that both were staged.

The video showed men lined up, addressed by a militia figure, who asked Ukraine “taught by its American teachers” was massing forces to attack Donetsk, a pro-Russian young republic with its flag.

“Each and every one of you will honorably complete your duty to the motherland.”

Even separatist Ukraine questions an ‘evacuation’ crisis on Russian TV

People wait for relatives arriving from the self-proclaimed Luhansk republic as Ukrainian soldiers check documents at the checkpoint between government-controlled Ukraine and the separatist-held Luhansk territory in Stanitsa Luhanska, Ukraine, on Saturday.

PHOTOS BY SALVATORE DiNICE/THE WASHINGTON POST

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“Each and every one of you will honorably complete your duty to the motherland.”

Almost as soon as the evacuation announcement was made, the narrative of a massive Ukrainian attack began to fray. First, there was no sighting of a major attack from Ukraine, despite a massive force reportedly present in the country. Journalists from The Washington Post and other media organizations on the line of contact reported shelling from the separatist side.

The video announcements ordering the evacuations from the two insurgent leaders were quickly unmasked by several analysts, including the Netherlands-based Bellingcat investigative group. It found that metadata on both videos indicated they were recorded two days before Friday’s supposedly “urgent” evacuation of 700,000 people.

Donetsk separatist leader Denis Pushilin’s video said, “Today, on Friday the 18th ...” suggesting that the videos were coordinated ahead of time and that the timing was staged.

The separatist claim of a Ukrainian attack on a kindergarten on Thursday also fell apart quickly — when it turned out the kindergarten was on the government-controlled side of the front line. The shelled wall faced separatist territory — but that did not stop an online disinformation campaign by pro-Moscow figures who circulated images of the kindergarten with construction machinery added digitally to suggest the machine punched the hole.

According to Bellingcat, another grainy video that aired on Russian television Saturday, purported to show Ukrainian “saboteurs” attempting to blow up a chlorine cylinder at the Stiro chemical plant in Horlivka in separatist territory at dawn Saturday, was actually filmed in early February, based on an analysis of the metadata.

Men aged from 15 to 55 in the separatist areas were called up to fight. Call-up announcements were made on Telegram channels and loudspeakers in the streets.

One group assembled at one local school in Donetsk, according to video sent by a local journalist who gave his name as “Vlad.” The journalist provided the video on the condition of anonymity because of concerns of drawing the attention of local authorities.

Tv the video shows men lined up, addressed by a militia figure, who asked Ukraine “taught by its American teachers” was massing forces to attack Donetsk, a pro-Russian young republic with its flag.

“Each and every one of you will honorably complete your duty to the motherland.”

EUROPE

Monday, February 21, 2022

• STARS AND STRIPES •
Last Afghan refugees leave NJ base after chaotic evacuation

Associated Press
WASHINGTON — The last of thousands of Afghan refugees who awaited resettlement at eight U.S. military installations departed Saturday from a base in New Jersey, completing a journey that started with the chaotic evacuation from Kabul in August.

With assistance from refugee resettlement organizations, Afghans evacuated after their country fell to the Taliban have been gradually leaving the military bases in recent months and starting new lives in communities throughout the United States.

The U.S. admitted 76,000 Afghans as part of Operation Allies Welcome, the largest resettlement effort under President Donald Trump and the sheer number of refugees.

Most of the refugees have settled in established Afghan communities in northern Virginia and the surrounding Washington area, as well as Northern California and Texas.

DHS has previously said about 40 percent of the Afghans will qualify for the special immigrant visa for people who worked as military interpreters or for the U.S. government in some other capacity during America’s longest war.
By Joseph Ditzler

TOKYO — Japan announced changes to its long-standing pandemic border controls Friday, including reduced quarantine periods for people vaccinated and boosted against COVID-19 and, starting March 1, an increase to 5,000 people allowed into the country each day.

Japan will still require a basic, seven-day quarantine at home by all travelers, according to a media briefing by government officials Friday. However, a negative test on the third day will be enough to end that quarantine.

Estimates of the backlog in students and business people awaiting entry to Japan are in the tens of thousands. The daily limit on entry has been 3,500 since November.

Under relaxed requirements, new entrants must apply online to a system still in development and come “under the supervision of a receiving organization,” according to information provided to reporters by the Foreign Ministry. Tourists are not eligible for entry.

“For those who have received a third vaccine shot, a different treatment will apply,” a government spokesman said at the briefing.

Boosted travelers arriving from countries designated higher risks for COVID-19 may spend three days at home rather than a designated facility. The list of those countries is still being compiled, a spokesman said.

Travelers from the U.S. have consistently been subject to denser entry procedures during the pandemic, thus far, according to the Foreign Ministry website.

Boosted travelers from designated countries need not quarantine at all, although a test is apparently still required after three days, according to a briefing sheet provided by the Foreign Ministry.

Government spokespeople in Japan typically speak to the media on condition of anonymity.

A U.S. Forces Japan spokesman had no direct comment Friday on the border control changes. Members of the U.S. military population have routinely exited and entered Japan during the nearly 2-year-old pandemic.

“USFJ continues to monitor and adjust COVID-19 mitigation measures in coordination with (government of Japan) counterparts as we have done for the past 24 months,” Air Force Maj. Thomas Barger said in an email to Stars and Stripes.

Meanwhile, omicron persisted Friday in infecting tens of thousands across Japan. Tokyo reported 16,129 people tested positive for the coronavirus, and 26 people died, a record number on a Friday, according to public broadcaster NHK.

Japan on Thursday confirmed another 95,115 people infected with the virus, and 271 related deaths, according to the Johns Hopkins Coronavirus Resource Center.

USFJ reported 90 cases at 13 installations and two awaiting confirmation since the command’s Thursday update. None are hospitalized or considered serious. USFJ reported 401 new cases between Tuesday and Friday.

Kadena Air Base on Okinawa accounted for 26 new cases in the latest USFJ update. The air base on its website reported 100 active cases on Friday, the highest case-load there since 113 on Feb. 11.

Four Marine Corps camps, an Army installation and a Navy base on Okinawa together reported 13 new cases, according to USFJ.

Yokosuka Naval Base, the headquarters for Naval Forces Japan south of Tokyo, reported 24 new cases, according to USFJ. Yokota Air Base in western Tokyo, where USFJ is headquartered, reported 13. Yokota on its website Friday said 27 people tested positive there between Tuesday and Thursday.

Okinawa prefecture reported 681 people tested positive Friday, and another 50 in the U.S. military population, according to the prefectural Department of Public Health and Medical Care. New cases in the island prefecture have topped 600 for four days for a total 2,764, and another 111 U.S. cases.

To ease the pressure, construction crews from mainland China will build isolation units for 10,000 people after crowding at hospitals forced patients to wait outdoors in winter cold.

Also Sunday, the government said Environment Secretary Wong Kam-sing would work from home after his driver received a preliminary positive virus test result. Wong tested negative but he and his driver will undergo additional testing.

Hong Kong says anti-virus controls might be tightened

Associated Press

HONG KONG — Stringent anti-virus controls that ban public gatherings in Hong Kong of more than two households might be tightened to stop a surge in infections, the territory’s top health official said Sunday, as 14 deaths and more than 6,000 new cases were reported.

Health Secretary Sophia Chan, speaking on a radio program, gave no details of possible new restrictions and called on the public to stay at home.

Hong Kong already is operating under the strictest curbs on travel, business and public activity since the pandemic began. In place since Feb. 10, they also prohibit gatherings of more than two households. Restaurants, hair salons and religious sites were ordered closed.

The territory had 6,067 confirmed cases in the previous 24 hours. That was close to Tuesday’s 6,116 cases, its highest daily total yet.

Chief Executive Carrie Lam said last week the rapid spread of the omicron variant was overwhelming Hong Kong hospitals. The government said Thursday that 90% of hospital beds were filled.

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Stars and Stripes reporter Mari Higa contributed to this report.

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Canada’s rallies settle, but may echo in politics

Associated Press

TORONTO — The streets around the Canadian Parliament are quiet now. The Ottawa protesters who vowed never to give up are largely gone, chased away by policemen in riot gear. The relentless blare of truckers’ horns has gone silent.

But the trucker protest, which grew until it closed a handful of Canada-U.S. border posts and shut down key parts of the capital city for weeks, could echo for years in Canadian politics and perhaps southern of the border.

The protest, which was first aimed at a COVID-19 vaccine mandate for cross-border truckers but also encompassed fury over the range of COVID-19 restrictions and hatred of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, reflected the spread of disinformation in Canada and simmering populist and right-wing anger.

“This is going to be a very big division in our country,” he said. “I don’t believe this is the end.”

While most analysts doubt the protests will mark a historic watershed in Canadian politics, it has shaken both of Canada’s two major parties.

“The protest has given both the Liberals and the Conservatives a black eye,” said Daniel Béland, a political science professor at McGill University in Montreal.

The self-styled Freedom Convoy shook Canada’s reputation for law and order, and almost two-thirds have had at least two vaccine doses.

“Think of us having set something here,” said Mark Suitor, 33, a protestor from Hamilton, Ontario, speaking as police retook control of the streets around Parliament. Protesters had essentially occupied those streets for more than three weeks, embarrassing Trudeau and energizing Canada’s far right. Suitor believes the protests will divide the country, something he welcomes.

Protesters give high fives and wave to several truckers driving away as police work to clear the streets in front of Parliament Hill to put an end to a protest in Ottawa, Ontario, on Saturday.

BY JILL LAWLESS

British government: People with COVID won’t need to self-isolate

Associated Press

LONDON — People with COVID-19 won’t be legally required to self-isolate in England starting in the coming week, the U.K. government has announced as part of a plan for “living with COVID” that is also likely to see testing for the coronavirus scaled back.

Prime Minister Boris Johnson said ending all of the legal restrictions brought in to curb the spread of the virus will let people in the U.K. “protect ourselves without restricting our freedoms.” He is expected to lay out details of the plan in Parliament on Monday.

“My government believes that we should throw caution to the wind, but now is the moment for everybody to get their confidence back,” Johnson told the BBC in an interview broadcast Sunday.

“We’ve reached a stage where we think you can shift the balance away from state mandation, away from the current state of restriction,” Johnson said.

The legal requirement to isolate for at least five days after a positive COVID-19 test will be replaced with advisory measures, and the coronavirus will be treated more like the flu as it becomes endemic.

The new plan foresees vaccines and treatments keeping the virus in check, though the government said “surveillance systems and contingency measures will be retained” if needed.

“The COVID will not suddenly disappear, and we need to live with this virus and continue to protect ourselves without restricting our freedoms,” Johnson said.

The announcement will please many Conservative Party lawmakers, who argue that the restrictions were inefficient and disproportionate.

But scientists stressed that much remains unknown about the virus, and future variants that may be more severe than the currently dominant omicron strain.
California bill would have citizens enforce weapons ban

**Associated Press**

DEL MAR, Calif. — California Gov. Gavin Newsom proposed Friday letting private citizens in his state sue gun makers to stop them from selling assault weapons just as Texas lets its residents sue abortion providers to stop the procedures, then essentially dared the U.S. Supreme Court to treat both issues the same.

At a news conference in the coastal town of Del Mar, north of San Diego, Newsom said he thought the Texas law was wrong and battle. “The ruling incensed us. They set the tone, tenor, the rules. And either we can be on the defense complaining about it or we can play by those rules. We are going to play by those rules,” Newsom said. He later added: “We’ll see how principled the U.S. Supreme Court is.”

The unique Texas law, approved last year, bans all abortions once a fetal heartbeat is detected, usually around the sixth week of pregnancy. The law does not let the government enforce it. Instead, private citizens can sue abortion providers or anyone who “aids and abets” the procedure.

The theory is that because the government can’t enforce the law, then abortion advocates can’t sue the state to block it. That makes it much harder to challenge in court. A bill in the California Legislature unveiled Friday would do the same thing. But instead of abortion providers, it would let people sue gun-makers and others who sell, make or distribute assault-style guns in the state.

California has banned the sale and manufacture of many assault-style guns for decades. But last year, U.S. District Judge Roger Benitez overturned that law, ruling it was unconstitutional while comparing an AR-15 rifle to a Swiss Army knife as “good for both home and battle.” The ruling incensed Newsom and he vowed to fight back.

California’s proposed legislation is exactly what gun rights groups feared would happen if the Supreme Court allowed the Texas law to stay in effect. That’s why the Firearms Policy Coalition opposed that law at the high court. The group said Friday it would go to court if necessary to block the California proposal.

California law defines assault weapons as semi-automatic rifles or pistols that have a variety of features. The bill would let people seek a court order to stop the spread of these weapons and recover a minimum of $10,000 in damages for each weapon, plus attorney’s fees.

Newsom’s bill, authored by Democratic state Sen. Bob Hertzberg, is not yet available on the state’s website. But a fact sheet provided by Hertzberg’s office said the bill would apply to those who manufacture, distribute, transport, import into California, or sell assault weapons, .50 BMG rifles or “ghost guns” — untraceable weapons that can be bought online and assembled at home.

Bird flu confirmed in backyard flock in NY

**Associated Press**

NEW YORK — A highly pathogenic avian influenza has been detected in a non-commercial backyard flock of birds on Long Island in New York, federal authorities confirmed Saturday.

Samples from the flock were tested at the Cornell University Animal Health Diagnostic Center and confirmed at the USDA’s Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service laboratories in Ames, Iowa.

New York state officials have quarantined the site in Suffolk County and birds on the affected properties “will be depopulated to prevent the spread of disease,” said the USDA in a statement, noting that birds from the flock will not enter the food system.

The virus has been detected at commercial turkey farms in southern Indiana, a flock of commercial broiler chickens in Kentucky and a backyard flock of mixed species birds in northern Virginia.

State officials in Indiana confirmed Saturday the virus has been detected in a fourth commercial poultry flock in that state. Officials have begun euthanizing the 15,200 birds at the latest farm to prevent the spread of the disease.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control says the recent detections of the bird flu do not present an immediate public health concern. No human cases of these viruses have been detected in the U.S., according to the USDA.

In all, the vast majority of Virginians have at least some immunity, said Bryan Lewis, a computational epidemiologist who leads Virginia’s COVID-19 modeling team.

“At the most pessimistic case, we certainly can ease back on some of these restrictions,” Lewis said. “If we do get to very low case rates, we certainly can ease back on some of these restrictions.”

While the population is between 73% and 80% immune, many individuals are not. Even by the most optimistic estimates for population immunity, 80 million or so Americans are still vulnerable.
Fed members back steady rate hikes

**By Stan Choe and Christopher Rugaber**
Associated Press

NEW YORK — The Federal Reserve should start raising interest rates next month to help rein in too-high inflation, Federal Reserve Bank of New York President John Williams said Friday. But he added that the rate hikes may not have to begin with as big a bang as some have suggested.

With inflation at its highest level in two generations, the Fed is widely expected to seek to cool the economy by raising its benchmark short-term interest rate from its record low of nearly zero, where it’s been throughout the pandemic. The only question has been how big and how quickly it will move, because an overly aggressive approach could choke the economy while too much caution could let inflation spiral further.

“Personally, I don’t see any compelling argument to take a big step at the beginning,” Williams said following an event at New Jersey City University to discuss the economy and interest rates.

Williams, who is vice chair of the committee that sets the Fed’s interest-rate policy, said he sees a March increase as the beginning of a “steadily moving” process to get interest rates closer to a level where they are no longer stimulating the economy. He also said he expects inflation to fall from its current level due to a confluence of factors, including the Fed’s moves and hoped-for improvements in supply-chain bottlenecks. Last month, inflation hit 7.5% in January compared with a year ago.

Williams’ comments were echoed by other Fed officials, who spoke at a policy conference in New York. This support for a steady approach to rate hikes contrasted with previous statements by Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis President James Bullard, who said the Fed should consider a half-point rate hike in one of its upcoming meetings, twice its normal increase. His comments shook Wall Street, which had been expecting a slower lift-off of rates.

Lael Brainard, a member of the Federal Reserve’s Board of Governors, said that she expected the Fed would, at its next meeting in March, “initiate a series of rate increases.”

Brainard is close to Fed Chair Jerome Powell and has been nominated for vice chair, the Fed’s No. 2 position.

Krishna Guha, an analyst at investment bank Evercore ISI, said that Brainard “bravely endorsed Wall Street’s expectations that the Fed will hike rates six times this year.

She also said the Fed would soon turn to reducing its huge, $9 trillion balance sheet, which has more than doubled during the pandemic because of the Fed’s bond purchases. She said they would likely do so more quickly than from 2017-19, when they allowed about $50 billion in bonds to mature without replacing them.

Charles Evans, president of the Chicago Fed, said Friday that the Fed needed to adjust its low-interest-rate policies, which he called “wrong-footed.” But he also suggested that the central bank may not have to sharply raise rates this year.

Evans also said that high prices have mostly been caused by disruptions to supply chains and other factors stemming from the pandemic, and will likely fade partly on their own.

And given the economy’s current strength, the Fed’s moves shouldn’t slow hiring as much as interest rate hikes have in the past, Evans added.

Higher rates can corral inflation by slowing the economy. But they can also cause a recession if they go too high, and they put downward pressure on all kinds of investments from stock prices to cryptocurrencies.

Wall Street has been fixated on almost every word from Fed officials recently, hoping to divine how quickly and by how much the Fed will move.

The mix of aggressive and moderate comments has left traders’ expectations in flux. Traders were pricing in only a 21% probability of such a half-point move on Friday afternoon, down from 49% a week earlier, according to CME Group.

Income-tax phaseout up for discussion in long-poor Mississippi

**By Emily Wagster Pettus**
Associated Press

JACKSON, Miss. — Mississippi is accustomed to being first in worsts. It’s one of the poorest, unhealthiest states in the nation, with public schools that are chronically underfunded. Some Republican leaders say a good way to boost the state’s fortunes would be to phase out its income tax.

There is no downside to putting money back into the pockets of Mississippians,” said Republican House Speaker Philip Gunn, one of the main sponsors of a tax cut bill advancing in the Legislature.

Opponents say erasing the income tax is a terrible idea because it would mean even less money for schools, health care, roads and other services, especially hurting poor and working-class residents. The Mississippi income tax accounts for 34% of state revenue. Wealthy people would see the biggest financial boost from eliminating the income tax, because they’re the ones paying the most now.

Democratic state Sen. Hob Bryan said people don’t choose to live where to live because of tax policy but because of family ties and quality of life. He says only the rich live in high-tax New York, for example, because the city offers opportunities.

The notion that if the people in Mississippi only found out that Mississippi did not have an income tax, they’d all... get on a bus, Bryan said. “On first hearing about it — oh, great, we’d have more money,” he said. “On the other hand, we’re such a poor state. How would it affect those who are less fortunate?”

A single person with no dependents in Mississippi currently pays no tax on the first $12,300 of income, and because of tax cuts approved earlier this year the gross-free amount will increase to $13,300 after this year. The state has a 4% tax on the next $5,000 of income and a 5% tax on income above that.

Nine states don’t have an income tax and one more, New Hampshire, only taxes interest and dividends, according to the National Conference of State Legislatures. Opponents of repealing the Mississippi income tax point to Republican-led Kansas, which enacted big tax cuts in 2012 and 2013 but repealed many of them in 2017 after large and persistent budget shortfalls.

Mississippi Republican Gov. Tate Reeves is wholeheartedly behind the income-tax elimination.

“We can throw out the welcome mat for the dreamers and the visionaries,” Reeves said. “We can have more money circulating in our economy. And it can lead to more wealth for all Mississippians.”

Republicans control the Mississippi House and Senate by wide margins, but the income tax elimination is not guaranteed. A proposal died in 2021 because of Senate leaders’ concerns that it would undermine funding for schools and other services.

“People expect us to educate our children. That’s the future of Mississippi,” said Republican Lt. Gov. Delbert Hosemann, who presides over the Senate, where he and other leaders are proposing a separate plan that would reduce the income tax but not eliminate it.

Mississippi is burdened by a history of racism that still shows up in disparities between thriving and struggling school districts. Legislators consistently short-change the state’s school funding formula by hundreds of millions of dollars.

LaShauna Fortenberry, a former public school teacher, said eliminating the state income tax and increasing the sales tax are bad ideas.

Fortenberry, who is Black, said schools already have aging buildings and textbooks. She said a brother who is 18 years younger than her is using one of the very same textbooks she had. How does she know? Her signature appears inside it.

Fortenberry now works for an agency that provides in-home care for older people in Columbia, Miss. She said when she taught from 2005 to 2013, she routinely used her own money to buy classroom supplies “trying to make sure that the kids had everything that they needed to be able to learn.” She said teachers still do that.

“We need more money, if anything, in the schools,” Fortenberry said.
Woman turning 100 adds another milestone tattoo

MI ST. JOSEPH — A Michi-igan woman soon will celebrate a milestone birthday. How old? Look at her decorative upper arm.

Gloria Weberg has “NY NY 1922” tattooed on her left arm, the year and place of her birth.

Weberg is turning 100 on March 2, not a typical age to visit a tattoo artist. But that’s what she has done every 10 years since turning 80, The Herald-Palladium reported.

Her birth year and New York is under a goddess representing Mother Earth — added at age 80 — and among seven stars representing her children, which she added at age 90.

She performs aerobics while watching TV news and regularly enjoys a glass of red wine.

A tattoo at 110?

“Probably something like, ‘Are you still here?’ or ‘I’m still here,’” Weberg said.

Reward offered in $100K heist from gold mine

GA DAHLONEGA — A re-ward is being offered in hopes of finding a man who storm-ed into a north Georgia gold mine and made off with about $100,000 worth of gold, cellphones, money and jewelry from the mine’s retail shop.

The man — dressed in black and armed with a gun — forced em-ployees to turn over the loot at the Crisson Gold Mine in Dahlonega, WS-B-TV reported.

People donated money for the $10,000 reward, he said.

Police: Teenager killed during gunplay with friend

AL BESSEMER — A 15-year-old girl was fatally shot in Alabama while she and a friend were playing with a gun, au-thorities said.

The Jefferson County Coroner’s Office identified the victim as Ja-niya Simmons, AL.com reported.

Lt. Christian Clemons from the Bessemer Police Department told the news outlet that the shooting happened inside the home of the suspect’s family member.

Simmons and the suspect, an 18-year-old man, were friends, Clems-ons said. It appeared they were playing with the gun when it dis-charged and hit Simmons in the chest. The high school freshman from Birmingham was pronounced dead at a hospital less than an hour later.

Police said Raemakee Cunningham has been charged with man-slaughter.

Man accused of trying to open door during flight

OR PORTLAND — A Por-tland, Ore., man who authorities said tried to open an emergency exit door during a commercial flight from Salt Lake City to Portland made his first ap-ppearance in court.

The 31-year-old man has been charged with interfering with a flight crew and attendants for his actions on the Delta Airlines flight, The Oregonian/OregonLive reported.

FBI agent Adam T. Hoover wrote in an affidavit in support of a criminal complaint that the man was seen removing the plastic cov-ering on an emergency exit handle and pulled on the handle with his full body weight before a flight at-tendant intervened.

Once the plane landed in Portland, Port of Portland police ar-rested him.

According to the affidavit, the man told police he tried to push the emergency exit handle so passen-gers would videotape him and he’d have “the opportunity to share his thoughts on COVID-19 vaccines.”

Police said they initially sus-ppected she had been abducted by her noncustodial parents.

Officers executing a search warrant found the girl hidden with her noncustodial mother in a cold, wet, makeshift enclosure under a basement staircase.

She was turned over to her legal guardian and reunited with her ol-der sister.

The noncustodial parents and a third person were arraigned on charges of custodial interference and endangering the welfare of a child.

Young girl missing since 2019 found under stairs

NY SAUGERTIES — A young girl reported missing in 2019 was found hidden under a staircase by officers search-ing a home in New York’s Hudson Valley, police said.

The child was found in good health in a Saugerties home about 130 miles east of Cayuga Heights, where she was reported missing in July 2019, when she was 4 years old, according to Saugerties po-lice.

Heading to the top

People pull sleds up a hill at Wyandotte County Lake on Friday, in Kansas City, Kan., after a winter storm dumped 4-8 inches of snow on the region Thursday.

Census

The weight in tons of decorative wooden arches that col-lapsed along a pedestrian walkway in Hickory, N.C. No one was hurt after the arches fell around midnight, although a nearby bridge was damaged, city officials told the Hickory Daily Record. A possible cause has not been given as an investigation is underway. There had been some issues when the second arch was being installed last year after part of the wood had splin-tered, city officials said.

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Restaurant subject of probe after patrons fall ill

NE WAHOO — Saunders County authorities and area farmers are teaming up to try and stop thieves from stealing cop- per from center pivot irrigation systems.

Sheriff Kevin Stukenholtz said Crime Stoppers and several farm-ers are offering cash rewards of up to $1,500 for information that leads to arrests, the Omaha World-Herald reported.

Stukenholtz said several farm-ers near Yutan have reported damage to their irrigation systems but the thefts are occurring across the county.

“The is very frustrating, because some farmers have been victi-mized more than once,” Stuken-holtz said. “We’re just hopeful that some of these (theives) have asso-ciates who may be inclined to give us some leads for cash rewards.”

From The Associated Press

Lawmakers designate mastodon as state fossil

INDIANAPOLIS — Indi-ana lawmakers have desig-nated the American mastodon as the state’s first official fossil, ad-vancing the proposal to the gover-nor’s desk for final approval.

The Indiana Senate voted 39-6 to name the mastodon Indiana’s state fossil. The bill, authored by Republican Rep. Randy Frye, of Greensburg, previously passed unanimously out of the House.

The Ice Age mammal is related to modern day elephants and is al-ready the state fossil of Michigan.

Mastodons roamed Indiana starting about 2.5 million years ago, and they became extinct about 10,500 years ago, retired Ha-nover College geology professor Stanley Totten told the House Nat-ural Resources Committee earlier this month. They’re now the most common Ice Age fossil found in In-diana.

Farmers offer rewards to stop copper thefts

Farmers offer rewards to stop copper thefts

Lawmakers designate mastodon as state fossil
Sandy Hook families zero in on gun marketing

By Dave Collins
Associated Press
HARTFORD, Conn. — After agreeing to a $73 million lawsuit settlement with gun-maker Remington, the families of nine Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting victims say they are shifting their focus to ending firearms advertising with macho, military themes that exploit young men’s insecurities, all in the hopes of preventing more mass shootings.

The families say Remington used those kinds of ads to promote its AR-15-style rifles like the one used to kill 20 young children and six educators inside the Newtown, Conn., school on Dec. 14, 2012.

Remington’s marketing strategies are expected to be unveiled when the families’ lawyers publicly release thousands of internal company documents obtained during the lawsuit. Lawyers for Remington and its insurers agreed to the disclosure as part of the settlement announced Tuesday.

“This is a case about creating change,” Nicole Hockley, whose 6-year-old son, Dylan, was killed in the shooting, said in an interview after the settlement was announced. “Right now, I’m only talking about the settlement. It’s not clear when the families’ lawyers will release the documents. A lawyer for the families, Joshua Koskoff, said the records could provide one of the most thorough looks ever into how gun companies market products to law enforcement.”

Hockley, a plaintiff in the lawsuit, has been working with other victims’ relatives to stem gun violence through the Sandy Hook Promise organization.

The records could provide one of the most thorough looks ever into how gun companies market products to law enforcement.

“By late Friday, all of the newly indicted officers had been placed on administrative leave, said Saul Gray, a department spokesman.

Garza said the indictments were not politically driven and that “our community is safer when our community trusts law enforcement.” Community activists who have long criticized the city’s handling of the protests, which included officers firing beanbag rounds into the crowd, called the indictments overdue and said Garza deserves credit.

But even allies on Friday were frustrated by the lack of details, which Garza has said he is unable to release yet. Garza announced during a news conference Thursday that grand jury indictments were expected, but he gave no specifics. And more than 24 hours later, the officers’ names and the reasons they were charged hadn’t been publicly released.

Texas law requires that an indictment remain secret until an officer has been arrested.

Police Chief Joseph Chacon expressed disappointment over the charges and the head of the police union, Ken Casaday, blasted Garza, saying he was trying “to fulfill a campaign promise” to indict officers. Garza brushed off that criticism and emphasized that his office also prosecuted 33 non-officers involved in the 2020 protests.
Iran wants guarantee US won’t leave new nuke deal

Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran — Iranian lawmakers have urged President Ebrahim Raisi to obtain guarantees from the U.S. and three European countries that they won’t withdraw from the nuclear agreement being renegotiated in Vienna, an Iranian news agency reported Sunday.

Meanwhile, Israel’s prime minister said the emerging deal is less stringent than the previous agreement.

Negotiators from Iran and the remaining parties to the agreement — Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China — are working to restore life to the 2015 accord, which granted Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear program.

The United States has participated indirectly in the talks because it withdrew from the deal in 2018 under then-President Donald Trump. President Joe Biden has signaled that he wants to rejoin the deal.

The Iranian parliament’s news agency, ICANA, reported that 250 lawmakers in a statement urged Raisi and his negotiating team to obtain guarantees from the U.S. and the three other European countries that they won’t withdraw from the deal after it is renegotiated.

Iran’s foreign minister said that it’s up to Western countries to show flexibility and “the ball is now in their court.”

Survivor rescued, body found in burning ferry off Greek island; 10 others missing

Associated Press

ATHENS, Greece — Greek emergency workers rescued a Belarusian truck driver Sunday from a burning ferry off the island of Corfu and found the body of another man as they combed the wreckage for missing passengers. The discoveries left 10 still unaccounted for.

The truck driver, in his 20s, was able to make his way up to the left rear deck on his own, and told rescue workers he heard other voices below. There were no further details identifying the victim, the first body recovered from the ship.

“The fact that this man succeeded, despite adverse conditions, to exit into the deck and alert the coast guard ... gives us hope that there may be other (survivors),” coast guard spokesman Nikos Alexiou told state broadcaster ERT.

The Italian-owned Euroferry Olympia, which was carrying more than 290 passengers and crew as well as 153 trucks and 32 cars, caught fire Friday, three hours after it left the northwestern Greek port of Igoumenitsa bound for the Italian city of Brindisi. The Greek coast guard and other boats evacuated about 280 people to Corfu.

The ferry has been towed to the port of Kassiopi, in northeastern Corfu. Firefighters were still battling the blaze in spots Sunday and a thick smoke still blanketed the ship.

Alexiou said his understanding was that the truck driver hadn’t heard any voices just before reaching the deck but added “the situation is evolving.” The survivor was taken to a hospital. Two passengers were rescued Saturday.

A Greek prosecutor on Corfu has ordered an investigation into the cause of the fire. The Italy-based company that operates the ferry said the fire started in a hold where vehicles were parked.
Troy Kotsur, nominated for an Oscar for best supporting actor for “CODA,” poses for a photo Jan. 28 at Red Rock Park in Mesa, Ariz.

Troy Kotsur is going for it

‘CODA’ actor hopes his Academy Award nomination resonates with deaf community

By Jake Coyle
Associated Press

I n his Oscar-nominated performance in “CODA,” Troy Kotsur has one spoken line, but it’s a good one. Urging his daughter, played by Emilia Jones, to pursue her dreams of singing and attending college, he says aloud: “Go!”

For Kotsur, that one line meant lots of rehearsals plus the courage to, on a film set, speak dialogue he couldn’t himself hear. But Kotsur had also done it before. Years before, as Stanley Kowalski in a Deaf West Theatre production of “A Streetcar Named Desire,” he exclaimed “Stella!” night after night.

“Sometimes I’ll ask hearing audience members what my voice sounds like,” signs Kotsur. “I want those kids to not feel limited.”

Kotsur hopes his achievement resonates with his deaf classmates on the bus. His father Jerry “and would animatedly retell them to me,” Kotsur remembered in an interview of a Lesser God.

As Kotsur proudly recalls the film’s back-and-forth with the MPAA after “CODA” nearly received an R-rating. But to Kotsur, Frank is a little randy and a little victimized. The Rossis of “CODA” may be double the length of Season 3, as well as being “the most intense season so far” — featuring “new locations, new characters, and the biggest threat yet.”

‘Atlanta’ to end with Season 4

There won’t be a long wait for the fourth season of FX’s “Atlanta,” but it will be its last. The Emmy-winning series created by Donald Glover, which begins its third season March 24, will be back in the fall to wrap up the story of Glover’s music manager Earn, rapper Paper Boi (Brian Tyree Henry) and their circle.

There was a big gap between Season 2, which concluded in May 2018, and this season because of scheduling conflicts that delayed production, FX said previously. But the final two seasons have both been shot.

The upcoming 10-episode season is set largely in Europe, with Earn, Alfred aka Paper Boi (Darius (LaKeith Stanfield) and Van (Zazie Beetz) on tour. Episodes will be available on Hulu after debuting on FX.

Other news

Teen pop sensation Olivia Rodrigo is returning to her Disney+ roots for a new documentary about making of her acclaimed debut album, “Sour.” The streaming giant released a teaser clip last week for “Olivia Rodrigo: Driving Home 2 U,” a behind-the-scenes look at the 18-year-old hitmaker’s rise from “High School Musical: The Musical: The Series” star to chart-topping, Grammy-nominated musician. Premiering March 25, “Olivia Rodrigo: Driving Home 2 U” will arrive just in time for the 2022 Grammy Awards, where the “ Drivers License” singer is nominated for seven awards.

“Fargo,” the critically acclaimed FX series based on the Coen brothers’ movie, will return for a fifth season. A press release teases that new episodes, which will go into production later this year, will be set in 2019 and revolve around a kidnapping.
Wokeism has peaked, but its influence will still be felt

BY TYLER COWEN

Wokeism is likely to evolve into a subculture of a larger culture, but its influence will likely still be felt. Wokeism has not made masks an issue, in my view. The status quo for hiring practices, for better or worse, is now a permanent feature of the culture. It is not going to disappear. Wokeism is likely to evolve into a subculture of a larger culture.

Another trend is how relatively few immigrants are now coming to the U.S. at all. Wokeism has not made masks an issue, in my view. The status quo for hiring practices, for better or worse, is now a permanent feature of the culture. It is not going to disappear. Wokeism is likely to evolve into a subculture of a larger culture.
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Saturday's men's scores


EAST

New Jersey Devils — Reassigned G Akil Thomas to Milwaukee (AHL) on a two-year contract


STARS AND STRIPES


COLLEGE BASEBALL


TENNIS


The Genesis Invitational

PGA Tour at Riviera Country Club

Saturday, March 5, 2022


Saturday's transactions


Football


College basketball


Cleveland Cavaliers — Waived G Kevin Porter Jr. to make room for F Victor Oladipo


The Miami Herald

Monday, February 21, 2022


DEALS


SOCCER


GOLF


CHICAGO FIRE FC — Acquired F Ismael Matar from Bologna (Italy)


"Deals" is a collection of transactions in various sports. It is not a comprehensive list and may not include all transactions that occurred over a specific period. The information is updated regularly, so the details might vary.
Appleby takes over, Florida slips past No. 2 Auburn

Associated Press
GAINESVILLE, Fla. — Tyree Appleby scored 20 of his 26 points in the second half, Colin Castleton added 19 and Florida rallied to beat No. 2 Auburn 63-62 on Saturday to extend its home dominance in the series.

The Tigers (24-3, 12-2 Southeastern Conference) lost their second straight on the road and dropped their first game in regulation. They previously lost to UConn and Arkansas in overtime.

Appleby had everything to do with this, which was Florida’s 14th straight win over Auburn in Gainesville. The senior made 6-for-9 shots in the second half, including 4-for-6 from three-point range, and was perfect from the free-throw line.

Still, the Tigers had a chance in the final seconds. Wendell Green Jr. got the ball with 7.1 seconds to play and was dribbling at the top of the key when he tried to pass to Walker Kessler down low. The Ga-tors (17-10, 7-7) knocked it away, and the clock ran out.

No. 23 Gonzaga 81, No. 16 Arkansas 58

Gonzaga (23-2, 12-0), which won in overtime, beat No. 2 Auburn 63-62 on Saturday in Gainesville, Fla.

The Zags are the current front-runner for the top seed in the NCAA Tournament.

No. 3 Arizona 64, Oregon 81

Benedict Mathurin scored 24 points, Kerr Kriisa hit a crucial three-pointer and the host Wildcats got past the Ducks.

The game featured 16 lead changes in front of a sold-out crowd at the McKale Center. Kriisa’s long three with the shot clock winding down and 1:26 remaining pushed Arizona’s lead to 79-76.

No. 4 Kentucky 90, No. 25 Alabama 81

Kellan Grady made seven threes for a season-high 25 points and Oscar Tshiebwe added 21 points and 14 rebounds for the host Wildcats, who had to rally twice.

Short-handed because of inju-ries to starting guards TyTy Wash-ington Jr. and Salvir Wheeler, Kentucky (22-5, 11-3 Southeastern Conference) trailed 46-34 with 3 1/2 minutes remaining before halftime before closing with 13 straight points for their first lead.

Grady’s three-pointer capped the run that drew a thunderous roar in Rupp Arena.

No. 6 Kansas 71, West Virginia 58

Ochai Agbaji scored 23 points, and David McCormack had 19 minutes remaining before halftime. Grady’s three-pointer capped the run that drew a thunderous roar in Rupp Arena.

No. 9 Duke 88, Florida State 70

Freshman Paolo Banchero scored 17 points as the Blue Devils avenged last month’s one-point overtime loss to the Seminoles and took sole possession of first place in the Atlantic Coast Conference.

Reserve Joey Baker provided a big lift for Duke (23-3, 13-3 ACC).

No. 10 Villanova 74, Georgetown 66

Justin Moore scored 15 of his 19 points in the second half to lead the host Wildcats to their fifth straight win.

No. 11 Texas Tech 61, No. 20 Texas 55

Bryson Williams scored 17 points as the Red Raiders held off a late charge by the host Longhorns to earn a sweep of the regular-season series in the heated rivalry.

No. 12 Illinois 79, No. 19 Michigan State 74

Kofi Cockburn scored 27 points and Jacob Grandison had a season-high 24 as the visiting Fighting Illini moved into a first-place tie with No. 5 Purdue in the Big Ten.

No. 13 UCLA 76, Washington 50

Jaylen Clark and David Sin-leton posted career highs in scor-ing as the host Bruins shook off a slow start to defeat the Huskies.

No. 23 Arkansas 58, No. 16 Tennessee 48

The host Razorbacks held the Volunteers to two field goals in the final eight minutes and used a late 11-1 run to win for the 11th time in 12 games.

No. 21 Murray State 62, UT-Martin 60

KJ Williams made a three-point play with 10 seconds left as the visiting Racers rallied for their 16th straight win.

No. 24 UConn 72, Xavier 61

R.J. Cole and Tyler Polley each scored 16 points for the host Huskies, who have won four of five.

Maldonado leads No. 22 Wyoming past Air Force

Associated Press
LARAMIE, Wyo. — Hunter Maldonado scored 29 points and Graham Ikey had 27 to lead No. 22 Wyoming to a 75-67 victory on Air Force on Saturday.

Maldonado also had eight assists and seven rebounds, and Ikey had 12 rebounds for the Cowboys (22-4, 11-2 Mountain West Conference).

Freshman Lucas Moerman scored a career-high 15 points for the Falcons (10-13, 3-11).

The last time the two teams played, on Jan. 26, it was in Colorado Springs, Colo., where Maldonado grew up. He scored 31 points and made the game-winning layup as time expired in Wyoming’s 63-61 win.

“Throughout the history I’ve played pretty well against them, but today was about bounc-ing back from New Mexico because I didn’t do very well,” said Maldonado, who had nine points and eight turnovers during the Cowboys’ loss Tuesday.

Wyoming led by as many as 13 points in the first half but ended up with a 30-26 lead at the half after being held scoreless over the final 5 minutes.

American 83, Army 67

Colin Smalls had 17 points to lead five Eagles players in double figures in a win over the visiting Black Knights.

American 93, Army 67

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American 93, Army 67

Collin Smalls had 17 points to lead five Eagles players in double figures in a win over the visiting Black Knights.
Colorado Avalanche right wing Mikko Rantanen, left, is defended by Buffalo Sabres right wing Tage Thompson. Rantanen had a goal and an assist in his team’s 5-3 win Saturday in Buffalo.

Hill wins as crash ends Xfinity opener

Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — Austin Hill won the Xfinity Series opener at Daytona International Speedway following Matt Snider’s airborne crash that shredded a chunk of catchfence directly in front of where Michael Jordan’s airborne crash was watching Saturday night.

Jordan was on the backside of the catchfence with driver Bubba Wallace, an amateur photographer who often takes pictures during NASCAR’s lower-series events. The field soared past them on the final lap when Snider was hit from behind, causing Snider to turn right into the wall.

Snider was then hit again by another car and that contact caused Snider’s car to sail up into the fence and then bounce back onto the track. The shredded carcass was stripped to a heap of battered steel and even the engine block was ripped from the car.

Snider was able to climb from his car by himself. Hill, meanwhile, had pulled alongside leader AJ Allmendinger on the final lap and was scored ahead when NAS-CAR called the caution. NASCAR had to review the finish before ruling the win for Hill, who moved up from the Truck Series this season to the Xfinity ride with Richard Childress Racing.

Hill’s win in his very first race with RCR was the first victory this day at Daytona for Ford. Ford had won two Daytona 500 qualifying races and Friday’s Truck Series opener won by Zane Smith in his first race for Front Row Motorsports.

Hill made it three consecutive nights that a new driver-team pairing went to Daytona’s victory lane. Brad Keselowski won a Thursday night qualifier with RPK Racing, the rebrand of Jack Roush’s team that Keselowki joined as a part-owner.

Hill said he used the entire race to work with spotter Derek Knee- dler to ensure that Hill was learning enough to make a plan on how to attack at the end.

“I was learning all night. I kept telling him, ‘I’m just putting that in the bank. I’m putting that in the bank. I’m putting that in the bank. I’m putting that in the bank.”

“Daytona,” an interview with a reporter in the garage, “I’m putting that in the bank.”

“I put a heck of a plan down on paper last weekend while we were in Texas, and we’ve got a heck of a plan down on paper now.”

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Hill made it three consecutive nights that a new driver-team pairing went to Dayton...
By Tom Withers  
Associated Press  
CLEVELAND — Karl-Anthony Towns gave big men everywhere something to shoot for.

Minnesota’s 7-footer became the first center to win the three-point shooting contest, defeating seven guards during the NBA’s All-Star Saturday and providing a memorable moment on a night the dunk contest barely got off the ground.

Towns, who has spent his entire career proving doubters wrong about his range, posted a 29 — the highest total in the competition — during the final round to defeat Atlanta’s Trae Young, Kennard of the Los Angeles Clippers, who tied for second with 26 each.

New York’s Obi Toppin won the four-person dunk contest, scoring a 47 out of 50 in the final round by putting the ball between his legs in the air, touching it off the backboard and redirecting it through the rim.

Golden State’s Juan Toscano-Anderson was second as the dunk contest, once a marquee event that at times trumped the All-Star Game, fell flat.

A trio of Cleveland Cavaliers, Dans Barnes and Oklahoma City’s Josh Giddey while trying to impress a panel guiding each other.

“When Cole missed those first two ones with the Timbs on, I was like no those Timbs are heavy,” Toppin said. “I just like, we was trying to boost his energy up. I was trying to get everybody on their feet.”

It worked, momentarily.

But Anthony couldn’t complete his second dunk in three tries and he was eliminated along with Houston’s Jalen Green, who also struggled while trying to impress a panel of Hall of Fame judges — Julius Erving, Isaiah Thomas, David Robinson, Clyde Drexler and Dominique Wilkins.

The hometown Cavs added another moment to their impressive season by winning the re-formatted Skills Challenge, which pitteled teams and not individual players.

“I wanted to prove I was the best shooting big man in the world, and now I got the trophy to prove it,” Towns said.

There have been other big men crowned three-point champions, but Kevin Love (2012) and Dirk Nowitzki (2006) are considered power forwards.

“I think this is a nice little thing to put on that résumé,” Towns said. “(A) big man hasn’t won in 10 years, and, of course, 10 years ago, a decade ago, who won it? The Wolves. It’s coming back home where it belongs.”

The dunk contest started with some promise and fizzled fast.

Orlando’s Cole Anthony caused a stir when he swapped his sneakers for a pair of Timberland boots and then dunked in them with an assist from his father, former NBA guard Greg Anthony.

Toppin said all the participants are great dunkers who wanted to put on a show, and they all were encouraging each other.

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Games were safe, odd global moment

By Ted Anthony

Beijing — A pile of figure-skating rubble created by Russian misbehavior. A new Chinese champion — from California. An ace American skier who faltered and went home empty-handed. The end of the Olympic line for the world’s most renowned snowboarder. All inside an anti-COVID “closed loop” enforced by China’s authoritarian government.

The two trends of a Winter Games that has been Beijing 2022 came to its end Sunday, capping an unprecedented Asian Olympic triefecta and sending the planet’s most global sporting event off to the West for the foreseeable future, with no chance of returning to this corner of the world until at least 2030.

It was weird. It was messy and, at the same time, somehow sterile. It was controlled and calibrated in ways only Xi Jinping’s China could pull off. And it was sequestered in a “bubble” that kept participants and the city around them — and, by extension, the spectators watching world — at arm’s length.

On Sunday night, Xi and International Olympic Committee President Thomas Bach stood together as Beijing handed off to Milan-Cortina, site of the 2026 Winter Games. “Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star” kicked off a notably Western-flavored show with Chinese characteristics as dancers with tiny, fiery snowflakes glided across the stadium in a ceremony that, like the opening, was headlined by Chinese director Zhang Yimou.

Unlike the first pandemic Olympics in Tokyo last summer, which featured all but empty seats at the opening and closing, a modest but energetic crowd populated the seats of the Bird’s Nest. The atmosphere was quite safe — albeit in the carefully modulated way authoritarian governments always do best. The local volunteers, as is usually the case, were delightful, helpful and engaging, and they received high-profile accolades at the closing.

When the litany of Russian doping scandals started unfolding shortly after the end of the 2014 Sochi Games, the IOC had the advantage of knowing the reports, the meetings, the terrible headlines and the chaos would largely take place outside of the Games themselves and out of the general public’s view.

The Valieva case can be fairly viewed as a byproduct of all the half-measures taken to sanction the Russians. But her drama clouded virtually every aspect of Games that already had issues.

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We are dissatisfied because that’s how we feel about sport is the authentic pioneering struggle to redefine the possible, or to compete head to head, pouring every measure of devotion into the effort," Max Cobb, an outspoken leader in U.S. Olympic circles, wrote in an essay this weekend.

“It’s a great mix of awe and honest effort that inspires, except when it isn’t.”

Max Cobb

President/CEO, U.S. biathlon program, on Olympic competition long buildup, are harder to find these days.

With only one other choice for 2022 — Kazakhstan — the IOC decision to hand over one of its crown jewels to China came with compromises.

Beijing’s organizing committee, and, in conjunction, the Chinese government, took extreme measures to keep the COVID-19 virus, which originated inside its borders years ago, from spreading. Because of that, these Games brought with them the looming threat of a positive test, maybe even an athlete from the blue, that could end an athlete’s chance for glory for it ever began.

There were some beautiful moments, too, along with some that brought out the raw emotion in a way that only the Olympics can.

Shaun White’s farewell to snowboarding after five Olympics touched hearts. Mikaela Shiffrin’s willingness to unflinchingly face her setbacks was a reminder that there’s more to be gained from these games than trips to the medals stand.

China’s favorite story might have come from Gu. The 18-year-old freeskier made history by becoming the first winter action-sports athlete to win three medals in the same Olympics — two golds and a silver.

The fact that Gu is American and chose to compete for her mother’s homeland of China, however, made it clear that, her good intentions aside, there is no taking politics out of these Games.

In the end, no athlete’s plight told the story of the Beijing Games more viscerally than that of skater Valieva.
Before he got out of town, the great Canadian snowboarder Mark McMorris called the Beijing Games a version of "sports prison." He was joking — sort of — but his vision wasn’t that far off.

The cordoned-off Olympic bubble that folded up when the closing ceremony ended Sunday produced its usual collage of amazing athletes doing great things. This 17-day journey, however, has been witnessed through a sealed-off looking glass — a lens warped and sterilized by Beijing’s organizing committee with underwriting from the Chinese government.

The ultimate sponsor: the International Olympic Committee, which has been under fire for producing Games that, to many, have felt soulless while also being tainted by scandal and political posturing.

"I think that sometimes it doesn’t seem like their heart is in the right place," the outspoken freestyle skier Gus Kenworthy said. "It feels like it’s a greed game. I mean, the Olympics are so incredible. But it’s a TV show."

As the IOC pulls up stakes from Beijing, it has 29 months to hit the reset button and hope for a different, COVID-free and much better vibe when the Summer Games go to Paris.

The lingering question is whether, even in a more-welcoming, democratic locale, the Olympic overseers can repair their reputations to the point that people — most notably, the dwindling TV audience and the increasingly alienated throng of athletes — start to enjoy this enterprise again.

Some images they’ll have to work to forget:

The thousands of testers, cloaked head to toe in personal protective gear, shoving swabs down athletes’ throats day after day for their mandatory COVID-19 screenings.

The Olympic flame, burning in the center of the snowflake-shaped cauldron, was on display near the National Stadium during the 2022 Winter Olympics in Beijing.