Ukraine appeals to separatists for cease-fire

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

KYIV, Ukraine — Russia extended military drills near Ukraine’s northern borders Sunday amid increased fears that two days of sustained shelling along the contact line between soldiers and Russia-backed separatists in eastern Ukraine could spark an invasion. Ukraine’s president appealed for a cease-fire.

The exercises were originally set to end Sunday and brought a sizable contingent of Russian forces to Belarus. The presence of the Russian troops raised concern that they could be used to sweep down on the Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, a city of about 3 million people less than a three-hour drive away.

Western leaders warned that Russia was poised to attack its neighbor, which is surrounded on three sides by about 150,000 Russian soldiers, warplanes and equipment. Russia held nuclear drills Saturday as well as the conventional exercises in Belarus.

As the sun faded on another anxious, adrenalized day, Kareem Nikoui, a 20-year-old U.S. Marine from Southern California, balanced on top of a concrete traffic barrier and scanned the crowd. Thousands of Afghans had packed into the fetid, open-air corridor outside Kabul’s airport, desperate to flee Taliban rule and undeterred by warnings of a suicide bomber in the area.

Nearly 8,000 miles away, Nikoui’s mother, Shana Chappell, had a sinking feeling. She was aware the hastily orchestrated evacuation was growing increasingly perilous and worried about how her son would process the reality that thousands would be left behind.

It was Aug. 26. At 5:36 p.m. local time, the bomber struck, detonating a vest packed with explosives and ball bearings. Nikoui, standing barely 30 feet away, was killed, along with 12 other U.S. service members and an estimated 170 Afghans.

The attack at Hamid Karzai International Airport’s Abbey Gate was not preventable, the Pentagon determined, though critics of commanders’ decision-making have said the entry point was especially vulnerable and questioned why it was left open. The Americans were due to close the gate for the final time within a matter of minutes.

“All those Marines who were there will tell you that they felt scared,” Chappell said. “They were surrounded by the freaking Taliban. They were out in the wide open, and they were sitting ducks.”

Families of troops killed in Kabul airport bombing question investigation

INSIDE

Last Afghan refugees leave New Jersey base

By Dan Lamothe

The Washington Post

As the sun faded on another anxious, adrenalized day, Kareem Nikoui, a 20-year-old U.S. Marine from Southern California, balanced on top of a concrete traffic barrier and scanned the crowd. Thousands of Afghans had packed into the fetid, open-air corridor outside Kabul’s airport, desperate to flee Taliban rule and undeterred by warnings of a suicide bomber in the area.

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Families of troops killed in Kabul airport bombing question investigation

SEE FAMILIES ON PAGE 6

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 a surge in 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.

**EXCHANGE RATES**

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**WEATHER OUTLOOK**

**MONDAY IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

Baghdad 69/51
Kandahar •
Kuwait City 69/57
Riyadh 71/52
Doha 75/55

**MONDAY IN EUROPE**

Lajes, Azores 57/54
Kabul •
Kandahar •
Kuwait City 69/57
Bahrain 66/63
Doha 75/55

**TUESDAY IN THE PACIFIC**

Seoul 29/16
Osan 28/18
Tokyo 41/27

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

**ROUND-THE-WORLD NEWS**

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.
Thrift 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 Nerd-Wallet.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 participants in mutual funds, as well as Lifecycle funds, they really answer to most people’s desires in building wealth, because they are moderately-priced,” De Jesus told Stars and Stripes by phone Thursday. “New mutual funds, depending what mutual fund it’s focused on, in what industry in the stock market, it can fluctuate in volatility and earnings.”

— Jon Snyder jonathan.fox@stripes.com  
Twitter: @Jon_E_Snyder

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 unidentified man in California.

Fox admitted Thursday in court to contacting drug dealers in the U.S., importing 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 apol- ogized.

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 Okinawa government attorneys requested suspended sentences for both. They are scheduled for sentencing March 8, Judge Kozaki Kumiya said Thursday.

— Matthew M. Burke Matthew.M.Burke@stripes.com  
Twitter: @MatthewMBurke1

US envoy to Japan welcomes new US citizens aboard USS Reagan

By ALEX WILSON  
Stars and Stripes

YOKOSUKA NAVAL BASE, Japan — Rahm Emanuel’s first trip to the U.S. Navy’s largest installation in Japan left little time for catching his breath.

The new U.S. ambassador to Japan arrived by train Thursday at Yokosuka-chuo Station after the morning commuter rush and met immediately with the city’s mayor, Katsuaki Kamiji. The two spoke briefly and exchanged gifts: Chicago-distilled whiskey and a book on Yokosuka’s history.

Then Emanuel was off to the nearby naval base to meet with high-ranking officers and preside over a naturalization ceremony aboard the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan.

“When our two countries stay strong together and work together like our armed forces do, it’s an example of what our ideals can bring in the sense of collaboration and cooperation,” Emanuel, a former mayor of Chicago, told Kamiji.

The Yokosuka mayor was welcoming. “Once again, I would like to express that I’m very honored by your visit to Yokosuka, and I’m deeply grateful to have this opportunity to meet you for the first time ever,” he said.

Emanuel next stopped for a headquarters reception at Naval Forces Japan, then toured the Ronald Reagan prior to the ceremony where 17 sailors and military spouses from 11 countries were sworn in as U.S. citizens.

Previous ceremonies took place in the chapel or elsewhere on base, but Emanuel’s visit presented a unique opportunity, a spokeswoman for the carrier, Lt. Cmdr. Dawn Stankus, told Stars and Stripes on Thursday.

Emanuel, the son and grandson of immigrants, warmed to his audience.

“Like America at its best, the Ronald Reagan, this ship, derives its strength from the diversity of the sailors and families working towards a common purpose as one,” he said. “America at its best is captured here by Ronald Reagan.”

— Alex Wilson alex.wilson@stripes.com  
Twitter: @AlexMNWilson

Stars and Stripes
Calm prevails at Poland-Ukraine border

BY VANESSA GER</p>

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 along Ukraine’s western border.

In Medyka, a border crossing with Poland, the atmosphere is calm. At the nearby refugee center painted with the 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, but we all bought machine guns and weapons and cartridges,” Volodymyr Halyk, 29, said. “No one is afraid, 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 controlled by Moscow 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.

Mariusz Gumienny, the town council chairman in Medyka, said the thousands of additional U.S. troops who arrived in the area are helping to maintain a sense of security.

U.S. troops load equipment onto vehicles in Rzeszow, Poland, on Saturday.

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 an anti-military 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 does it want to provoke?”

“A wave of refugees from Ukraine starts? This is what (people) fear most,” Gumienny told The Associated Press on Saturday.

At an international security conference in Munich, Germany, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki said Saturday that Poland plans to send more weapons to Ukraine. He said he thinks that Western countries have long ignored Russia’s attempts to restore its sway in the region but are finally becoming aware of the risk to all of Europe.

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CZARNEK SOKOLOWSKI/AP

US troops load equipment onto vehicles in Rzeszow, Poland, on Saturday.

A Ukrainian serviceman walks near the frontline village of Krymske, Luhansk region, in eastern Ukraine, on Saturday.

VADIM GORYAINOV/AP

U.S. troops load equipment onto vehicles in Rzeszow, Poland, on Saturday.

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 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.

“There is no panic. You can’t see inhabitants trying to protect themselves in any way. But one thing is still in my mind: what will happen if a wave of refugees from Ukraine starts? This is what (people) fear most,” Gumienny told The Associated Press on Saturday.

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By Robyn Dennis and Mary Ilyushina

The Washington Post

MOCKAS — The manufactured war scare mounted by Moscow-backed separatist regions 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 Russian-backed separatist fighters.

“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 because of fears of reprisals 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. Ukrainian 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 entered 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 spokesperson 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.”

From what I see, people are not afraid and are not going to leave,” he said. Nikolai, a Donetsk resident interviewed via Telegram, said the same thing, explaining: “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. “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.

“Evacuation of people was especially organized in order to show the ‘atrocity’ of the Ukrainian army,” said Yevgeny Vasiliev, a Kyiv activist with the Ukrainian group SOS Vostok, which supports victims of armed conflict in Ukraine. He is currently in eastern Ukraine working near the front lines. “You see, it’s easy to take children out of orphanages, or old people out of nursing homes. Nobody asks them. The same people are not going to leave,” he said.

But he added that separatist disinformation about explosions and attacks blamed on Ukraine was designed to intimidate others into leaving. “And it partially works.”

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 on the ground presence 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 evictions 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 February 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 shell-laden wall faced separatist territory — but that did not stop an online disinformation campaign by pro-Russian 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 Stirol 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 was on the scene. The journalists provided the video on the condition of anonymity because of concerns of drawing the attention of local authorities.

The video showed men lined up, addressed by a militia figure, who said Ukraine “taught by its American teachers” was massing forces to invade the young republic with its filthy boot.

“Each and every one of you will honorably complete your duty to the motherland.”
Families: Questions raised about whether report tells whole story

FROM PAGE 1

of those killed that day, the release of this month of a U.S. military investigation into the attack has caused them to question whether Defense Department officials distorted its findings. In interviews, they castigated the Biden administration for placing their loved ones — most, like Ni- koui, barely 20 years old — into such a dangerous situation and said that the Marines who survived the explosion told them they endured a firefight afterward — claims the Pentagon has dismissed.

The release of a 2,000-page investigatory report — first obtained by The Washington Post through a Freedom of Information Act request — has revealed stark new details about the operation, providing the fullest account yet of what happened during the 17-day sprint to exit Afghanistan after 20 years of war.

Among the documents are sworn witness statements from senior U.S. military commanders, who told investigators that they believe administration officials lacked a sense of urgency as the likelihood of a total Taliban take-over became increasingly evident and failed to heed their warnings to prepare for an evacuation weeks before Kabul fell. In response to those assertions, Pentagon spokesman John Kirby has said there was no effort in Washington to slow-roll the final withdrawal and that the White House coordinated closely with senior defense officials.

The airlift succeeded in getting 124,000 people to safety. It has been celebrated as a historic achievement by the U.S. military, even as the full scope of the danger and misery involved have become apparent in recent days. Administration officials have defended their decision-making, saying it was unclear the Afghan government would collapse so completely and so abruptly.

Once the capital fell on Aug. 15, more than 5,000 U.S. troops were rushed to Kabul to help evacuate a skeleton force of roughly 600 who had remained in Kabul to protect American diplomats.

Senior U.S. officials then reached an uneasy arrangement with the Taliban for migrant fighters to provide external security at the airport. In exchange, the U.S. military agreed to be gone no later than Aug. 31.


Hospitalman Maxton Soviak, 22, a Navy corpsman deployed with the Marines, and Army Staff Sgt. Ryan Knauss, 23, also died.

Pentagon officials estimate that 45 additional U.S. troops were wounded, with some suffering brain injuries that surfaced later. The attack, they said, was perpetrated by Islamic State-Khorra- san, an affiliate of the terrorist group based in Syria and Iraq that also has been at war with the Taliban.

The parents of Hoover — Darin Hoover Sr. and Kelly Barnett — said that, after the explosion, he “snaps and cracks of rounds all around him” and observed what appeared to be people suf- fering from gunshot wounds. Like all but a few witnesses, this individ- ual’s name was redacted from the report.

President Joe Biden has praised the service members involved and called those killed heroes, while maintaining that after 20 years and 2,461 U.S. military deaths, it was time for U.S. forces to leave Afghanistan. A deal that former President Donald Trump made with the Taliban in February 2020 to withdraw all U.S. troops by May 2021 left few alternatives, Biden noted.

“They were part of the bravest, most capable, and the most self- less military on the face of the Earth,” Biden said of the personel involved in the evacuation hours after the attack. “And they were part of, simply, what I call the backbone of America. They’re the spine of America, the best the country has to offer.”

On Feb. 4, U.S. military officials announced at the Pentagon that, after an extensive investigation, they had determined that a single suicide bomb with “disturbing le- thality” caused the staggering loss of life.

But according to their full re- port, survivors of the attack de- scribed a more complex situation. In witness statements, Marines recalled coming under and re- turning gunfire, sprinting to the blast site to treat survivors with tourniquets and clotting agents, and struggling to find enough re- frigerated storage for all of the re- mains.

One reconnaissance Marine with 15 years of military service said that, after the explosion, he heard “snaps and cracks of rounds all around him” and observed what appeared to be people suf- fering from gunshot wounds. Like all but a few witnesses, this indi- vidual’s name was redacted from the report.

Another Marine recalled shoot- ing numerous times. “I went in and saw a lot of Ma- rines shooting by the Jersey bar- rier,” the Marine said. “There was a lot of smoke. I couldn’t see where they were firing. They grabbed me and I started firing my weapon as well. I don’t know what I was firing at.”

A Marine scout sniper who was in a nearby tower said he saw a child suffering from what he sur- mised were gunshot wounds, be- cause of the size of the injuries. He recalled beginning to treat the child, only to discover a much larger fatal exit wound.

“I can say for sure that we could have been hit,” he told investiga- tors. “Three shots hit the tower. One was in line with my head.”

Chappell, who lives about 100 miles from Camp Pendleton in Norco, Calif., said that her son’s Marine friends have visited her frequently and believe they were attacked with small-arms fire af- ter the bombing.

“I talked to one kid personally, face-to-face at my son’s burial,” she said. “That’s how I found out about gunfire. He showed me his scar and told me had been shot.”

Mark Schmitz, whose son was killed in the blast, said in an email that he saw “MAJOR conflicting reports” in the investigation and asked the military to turn over metal fragments found in his son so he could have them privately analyzed.

Military officials told them the fragments had been discarded, he said.

“The parents of Hoover — Darin Hoover Sr. and Kelly Barnett — said in an interview that they have concerns about gunfire, but believe their son was killed in the blast and that investigators did their best to assess what had hap- pened. But they remain deeply frustrated, they said.

“They were put in an untenable situation,” Hoover said of the mili- tary personnel sent to Kabul. “Yes, it was a humanitarian effort on their part. And they did the abso- lute best that they could do giv- en the circumstances. However, they should not have been put in those circumstances in the first place.”

Other families have taken an apologetic tone.

“What we have learned of his last hours does not change that he is gone forever,” Sovia’s family posted Feb. 4 on a Facebook page established in his memory. “Our family is standing together and we choose to remember Maxton not as a victim, we choose to remem- ber him for the hero he is. Remem- ber his name.”

Kirby said in a statement that “we grieve alongside these Gold Star families,” while backing the inquiry’s principal conclusions.

“We do not pretend to under- stand the depths of their grief, but we respect their concerns and their unique perspectives about the loss of their loved ones,” he said. “To that end, we stand by the investigation’s finding that the at- tack on Abbey Gate could not have been prevented and that the deci- sion made by commanders on the ground to keep the gate open was consistent with their mission of trying to evacuate as many people as possible.”

Associated Press

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

With assistance from refugee re- settlement 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 Unit- ed States.

The U.S. admitted 76,000 Af- ghans as part of Operation Allies Welcome, the largest resettlement effort for refugees in recent decades.

“It’s a really important milestone in Operation Allies Welcome but I want to stress that this mission isn’t over,” said Krisch O’Mara Vigna- jah, president and CEO of Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service, one of nine national resettlement

organizations that were part of the effort.

Housing facilities for refugees at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in central New Jersey will re- main open in the interim, the agen- cies said. The base held the largest number of Afghans, reaching a peak of 14,500. The next largest was at Fort McCoy in Wisconsin, where the last group departed this past week.

Afghans underwent immigra- tion processing and health screen- ing while they waited at the bases, often for months, until the stranded refugee organizations could place them in communities. The govern- ment set up schools for the children who made up about 40 percent of the refugees at the New Jersey base.

Resettlement organizations and Homeland Security, the lead federal agency in the process, have faced the challenge of having everyone off the bases by Feb. 15. It was a challenge because of the scarcity of affordable housing, cutbacks to refugee programs under President Donald Trump and the sheer number of refugees.

Most of the refugees have settled in established Afghan communi- ties 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 qual- ify for the special immigrant visa for people who worked as military interpreters or for the U.S. govern- ment in some other capacity during America’s longest war.
**Japan border controls to loosen in March**

By Joseph Ditzler  
Stars and Stripes

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, 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.

Chief Executive Carrie Lam 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.

**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 strict 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 Thursday’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.

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.
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 policeman in riot gear. The relentless blare of truckers’ horns has subsided. 

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 Nelson Wiseman, a political science professor at the University of Toronto. Trudeau’s Liberals look bad for allowing protesters to foment weeks of chaos in the capital city, he said, while the Conservatives look bad for championing protesters, many of them from the farthest fringes of the right.

The conservatives “have to be careful not to alienate more moderate voters, who are generally not sympathetic to the protesters or right-wing populism more generally,” said Daniel Bélanger, a political science professor at McGill University in Montreal. The self-styled Freedom Convoy shook Canada’s reputation for civility, inspired convoys in France, New Zealand and the Netherlands and interrupted trade, causing economic damage on both sides of the border. Hundreds of trucks eventually occupied the streets around Parliament, a display that was part protest and part carnival.

Authorities moved quickly to reopen the border posts, but police in Ottawa did little but issue warnings until the past couple days, even as hundreds and sometimes thousands of protesters clogged the streets of the city and besieged Parliament Hill.

Truckers ignored warnings that they were risking arrest and could have their rigs seized and bank accounts frozen under the new emergency powers invoked by Trudeau.

On Friday, authorities launched the largest police operation in Canadian history, arresting a string of Ottawa protesters and increasing that pressure on Saturday until the streets in front of Parliament were clear. Eventually, police arrested at least 191 people and towed away 57 vehicles. Many protesters retreated as the pressure increased.

UK’s Queen Elizabeth II tests positive; mild ailment

Associated Press
LONDON — Queen Elizabeth II tested positive for COVID-19 on Sunday and is experiencing mild symptoms, Buckingham Palace said, adding that the 95-year-old monarch would carry on working.

The palace said the queen would continue with “light” duties at Windsor Castle over the coming week.

“The queen will continue to receive medical attention and will follow all the appropriate guidelines,” the palace said in a statement.

People in the U.K. who test positive for COVID-19 are required to self-isolate for at least five days, though the British government says it plans to lift that requirement for England in the coming week.

The queen has received three doses of coronavirus vaccine. Both her eldest son Prince Charles, 73, and 74-year-old daughter-in-law Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall have also recently contracted COVID-19.

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

By Jill Lawless
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.

The legal requirement to isolate in England will be ended in January, scraping vaccine passports for venues and ending mask mandates in most settings apart from hospitals in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, which set their own public health rules, also have opened up, although more slowly.

A combination of higher vaccination rates in the U.K. and the milder omicron variant means easing restrictions didn’t lead to a surge in hospitalizations and deaths. Both are falling, though the U.K. still has Europe’s highest coronavirus toll after Russia, with more than 160,000 recorded deaths.

In Britain, 85% of people age 12 and up have had two vaccine doses and almost two-thirds have had a third booster shot.

Now the Conservative government says it will remove “all remaining domestic COVID regulations that restrict public freedoms” as part of a “move away from government intervention to personal responsibility.”

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.

“COVID will not suddenly disappear, and we need to learn 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.

By Steve Parsons
Queen Elizabeth II speaks during an audience at Windsor Castle, on Wednesday.

Charles has since returned to work.

Senior politicians sent get-well messages, with Health Secretary Sajid Javid tweeting “Wishing Her Majesty The Queen a quick recovery.” Opposition Labour Party leader Keir Starmer wished the queen “good health and a speedy recovery. Get well soon, Ma’am.”

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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 the Supreme Court’s decision in December to let it stay in effect while it’s appealed was “absurd” and “outrageous.”

“But they opened up the door. 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 weapons 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 defense 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 semiautomatic rifles or pistols that have a variety of functions. 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.

California’s bill, authored by Democratic state Sen. Bob Hertzberg’s office, would let anyone who “aids and abets” a sale or anyone who is “in fact responsible” for selling assault weapons, .50 BMG 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.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom and several elected officials backed state legislation that would allow for private citizens to enforce the state’s ban on assault weapons Friday at Del Mar Fairgrounds. A new bill in California would allow private citizens to go after gun makers in the same way Texas lets citizens target abortion providers, though gun advocates immediately promised a court challenge if it becomes law.

Estimated 73% of US immune to omicron variant

Associated Press

The omicron wave that assaulted the United States this winter also bolstered its defenses, leaving enough protection against the coronavirus that future spikes will likely require much less — if any — dramatic disruption to society.

Millions of individual American immune systems now recognize the virus and are primed to fight it off if they encounter omicron, or even another variant.

About half of eligible Americans have received booster shots, there have been nearly 80 million confirmed infections overall and many more infections have never been reported. One influential model uses those factors and other estimates that 73% of Americans are, for now, immune to omicron, the dominant variant, and that could rise to 80% by mid-March.

This will prevent or shorten new illnesses in protected people and reduce the amount of virus circulating overall, likely tamping down new waves. Hospitals will get a break from overwhelmed ICUs, experts agree.

“We have changed,” said Ali Mokdad, a professor of health metrics sciences at the University of Washington. “We have been exposed to this virus and we know how to deal with it.”

The coronavirus — the current variant or future ones that are sure to pop up — remains a dangerous germ. It is still infecting more than 130,000 Americans and killing more than 2,000 every day. Tens of millions of people remain vulnerable.

And there will be future breakthroughs. The notion of a “herd immunity” that could stop the virus has slipped away under the harsh reality of new variants, waning immunity, and the rejection of vaccines by some Americans.

But the coronavirus is no longer new. Two years ago it arrived in a nation where nobody’s immune system had seen it before. The entire population — 330 million people — were immunologically naive, that is, susceptible to infection.

“The world is moving forward on this and we’re trying to understand how we move forward from here,” said Mokdad, who works at the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation model, which calculated the 73% figure for The Associated Press.

As mask mandates ease, workers return to offices and flights fill up, experts are trying to understand whether this return to normal can last, or if another setback is looming.

To address that, researchers are trying to answer questions about the virus, the vaccine, and how our bodies respond. How fast is it really waning against omicron? How long does protection from infection last? How many mild infections were never reported? How many people got infected but had no symptoms?

To find clues, they use health data from other countries such as Britain, Denmark, South Africa and Qatar to project what could be in store.

Scientists at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health estimate that about three out of four people in the United States will have been infected by omicron by the end of the surge.

“We know it’s a huge proportion of the population,” said Shaun Truelove, an epidemiologist and disease modeler at Johns Hopkins. “This varies a lot by location, and in some areas we expect the number infected to be closer to one in two.

That means different regions or groups of people have different levels of protection — and risk. In Virginia, disease modelers are thinking about their population in terms of groups with different levels of immunity.

They estimate about 45% of Virginians have the highest level of immunity through boosted vaccination or through previous infection with omicron. Another 47% have immunity that has waned somewhat, and 7% are the most vulnerable because they were never vaccinated or never infected.

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

“That’s going to be a nice shield of armor for our population as a whole,” Lewis said. “If we do get to those low case rates, we certainly can ease back on some of these restrictions.”

Still, while the population is better protected, many individuals are not. Even by the most optimistic estimates for population immunity, 80 million or so Americans are still vulnerable.

Bird flu confirmed in backyard flock in NY

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.

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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.
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 liftoff 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.

Kristina Guha, an analyst at investment bank Evercore ISI, said that Brainard “broadly 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 partiy 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 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 worst. 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.

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 be because of tax policy but because of family ties and quality of life. Some say they live in high-tax New York, for example, because the city offers opportunities.

The notion that if the people in Mississippi had not had an income tax, they’d all ... get on a bus to Mississippi and move down here — it’s just laughable on its face,” Bryan said.

Mississippi’s population has dwindled in the past decade, even as other Sun Belt states are bustling with new residents. Tax-cut proposals are a direct effort to compete with states that don’t tax earnings, including Texas, Florida and Tennessee — places to which many young Mississippians are moving for fatter paychecks.

Married couple Les and Amanda Jordan live near the south Mississippi town of Summit. He’s a retired public school administrator and she’s a retired nurse practitioner. Both worked for the state. Amanda Jordan said tax rates could influence young people’s decisions about where to live. The couple has a grandson in Texas, one of the states without an income tax.

Les Jordan said he’s torn. “On the one hand, you’re talking about — 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 years ago the poorest 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 anything 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 school districts and the ones struggling. Legislators consistently short-change the state’s school funding formula by hundreds of millions of dollars to feed this system.

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 Michigan woman 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 day 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.

The 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 DHALONEGA — A reward is being offered in hopes of finding a man who stormed 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 employees to turn over the loot at the Crisson Gold Mine in Dahlonega, WSB-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 a gun, authorities 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, Clemons said. It appeared they were playing with the gun when it discharged 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 Raeonne Cunningham has been charged with manslaughter.

Man accused of trying to open door during flight

OR PORTLAND — A Portland, 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 appearance 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 covering on an emergency exit handle and pulled on the handle with his full body weight before a flight attendant intervened.

Once the plane landed in Portland, Port of Portland police arrested him.

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

Police said they initially suspected 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 older sister.

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

Restaurant subject of probe after patrons fall ill

NY SAUGERTIES — A young girl reported missing in 2019 was found hidden under a staircase by officers searching 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 police.

Afraid of Siam restaurant located on Centennial Center Boulevard reported increased heart rates, blurred vision, disorientation, loss of consciousness, and numbness or tingling within hours of being at the restaurant.

The restaurant opened in 2019 and consistently passed inspection reports, KTNV-TV in Las Vegas has reported.

Some customers have told local news outlets they suspect their food was tainted with THC — the compound in cannabis that produces the high sensation — after seeking medical attention and testing positive for it.

Lawmakers designate mastodon as state fossil

IN INDIANAPOLIS — Indiana lawmakers have designated the American mastodon as the state’s first official fossil, advancing the proposal to the governor’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 already 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 Hoosier College geology professor Stanley Totten told the House Natural Resources Committee earlier this month. They’re now the most common Ice Age fossil found in Indiana.

Farmers offer rewards to stop copper thefts

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

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

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

“It’s very frustrating, because some farmers have been victimized more than once,” Stukenholtz said. “We’re just hopeful that some of these (thieves) have associates who may be inclined to give us some leads for cash rewards.”

From The Associated Press
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 maicho, 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 waiting really to have access to the documents and to figure out how to use that to help drive safety and better practices for the sales and marketing.”

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 detailed looks yet at the business and tactics used during the 2020 racial protests, when our community trusts law enforcement, but no cases have reached trial. But even allies on Friday were frustrated by the lack of details, said Saul Berry, a Democratic candidate for a state House seat, said in a statement Saturday that he is one of those charged. He blasted Garza for trying to influence voters with what he called a witch-hunt.

“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 tear gas, 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.

By late Friday, all of the newly charged 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 tear gas, called the indictments overdue and said Garza deserves credit.

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.

The news conference announcing the settlement, Koskoff, showed Remington ads that he said appealed to troubled youths like Adam Lanza, 20, who carried out the Sandy Hook shooting. Lanza used a Remington-made Bushmaster XM15-E2S rifle that was legally owned by his mother. He killed his mother in their home before going to the school.

The ads contained messages including “Consider Your Man Card Reissued” and “Clear the Room, Cover the Rooftop, Rescue the Hostage.”

Koskoff said Remington targeted younger, at-risk males in advertising and product placement in violent video games. The lawsuit said the company’s advertising played a role in the school shooting, but did not elaborate.

Lanza had severe and deteriorating mental health problems, which combined with his preoccupation with violence and access to his mother’s weapons “proved a recipe for mass murder,” a report by Connecticut’s child advocate said. From the 10th grade, Lanza’s mother kept him at home, where he was surrounded by an arsenal of firearms and spent long hours playing violent video games, the report said. His medical and school records included references to diagnoses of autism spectrum disorder, anxiety and obsessive compulsive disorder, although psychiatrists say those conditions are not indicative of future violence.

The National Shooting Sports Foundation, a gun industry group that happens to be based in Newtown, said the Sandy Hook families never produced evidence that Remington’s advertising had any effect on Lanza. The foundation estimates that there have been more than 20 million AR-15-style rifles sold in the U.S. and that few are used in crimes.

According to the latest FBI crime statistics, of the 13,600 firearms used in homicides in 2020, about 450 were rifles; more than 8,000 handguns were used.

AR-15-style rifles, however, have been used in many notable mass shootings, including Sandy Hook, the 2017 Las Vegas massacre that killed 58 people and wounded hundreds, and the 2018 school shooting in Parkland, Fla., that killed 14 students and three staff members.

Byline: Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas — Jose Garza ran for district attorney in Austin on promises to hold police accountable in Texas’ capital city. He got off to a fast start, charging at least seven officers during his first year on the job, including one charged with murder twice.

But now 13 months later, Garza’s predecessors as the district attorney of Travis County have accused Garza of being driven by ad revenue, which Garza has denied.

Garza’s campaign made a lot of promises to create a culture of accountability at the police department and to start releasing names of officers who were arrested for police misconduct.

“Nineteen is, whew, I don’t know any place else that’s done that,” said Saul Berry, a Democratic candidate for a state House seat, which Garza’s predecessor as the district attorney of Travis County.

The indictment widened the rift in the booming city between Austin police and Garza, a Democrat whose 2020 campaign was backed by liberal allies including U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders and promised crackdowns on misconduct by law enforcement.

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 counties 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.
**FACES**

Troy Kotsur is going for it

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

**BY JAKE COYLE**
Associated Press

In 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 and courage to say it, on 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. “‘One person described it as feeling like being cozy and tucked in bed.’”

Kotsur’s long road to the Oscars began, his first deaf actor ever nominated individually for a Screen Actors Guild award. The rush of accolades has been discomfiting. When he was nominated for a BAFTA, he celebrated so much he fell out of his chair. Accepting the Gotham award for best supporting performance, he told the crowd that he wasn’t speechless but “absolutely handless right now.”

“It’s just overwhelming,” Kotsur says of the acclaim. “It’s awesome. I feel like I can die happy, with a smile on my face.”

The only one to ever go through something similar was Kotsur’s ‘CODA’ co-star Marlee Matlin. In ‘CODA,’ they play the parents of a deaf Gloucester fishing family with a hearing daughter. Kotsur remembers watching Matlin become the first deaf actor to win an Oscar, in 1987 for “Children of a Lesser God.”

“I felt like I could have hope as a deaf actor;” Kotsur remembered in an interview by Zoom from his home in Mesa, Ariz., through an interpreter. “Of course, I didn’t realize what a tough journey it would be going through show business.”

“Sometimes, sign language can be more three-dimensional and meaningful than spoken dialogue.”

Troy Kotsur

Kotsur’s long road to the Oscars began, he figures, in elementary school. With little TV programming accessible to him, Kotsur loved highly visual cartoons like “Tom and Jerry” and would animatedly retell them to his deaf classmates on the bus. His father fondly calls Kotsur a “risk taker” for pursuing performing. He studied acting at Galaudet University, and then toured with the National Theatre of the Deaf.

With few other acting opportunities available for deaf actors, Kotsur found freedom on the stage. Beginning with “Of Mice and Men” in 1994, Kotsur has acted in 20 productions at Deaf West, the nonprofit Los Angeles theater company founded in 1991. In one show, he met his wife, the actress Deanne Bray. He played Cyrano de Bergerac and starred in “American Buffalo.” DJ Kurs, director of Deaf West, remembers first being “utterly drawn in by Kotsur’s magnetism” in “Streetcar.” Many times since, he’s seen Kotsur’s immersive process close up.

“Working with him in rehearsal is like being in the presence of a mad scientist,” Kurs said by email. “He’s always tinkering and fine-tuning, bringing in different elements of the character. This process doesn’t end until the moment the curtain goes up on opening night.”

On stage, Kotsur honed the full-body physicality of his acting. “It’s really important for me on stage to show emotion through sign language,” says Kotsur. “Sometimes, sign language can be more three-dimensional and meaningful than spoken dialogue.”

Kotsur had long been used to seeing one-dimensional and victimized deaf characters, but “CODA” presented something he had rarely seen. The Roises of “CODA” may have to work a little harder but they’re a family like any other, with funny dinner-table conversation and casual bickering. Kotsur’s Frank is also a little rambly and a little profane. In one scene in which he instructs his daughter on safe sex, he mimes a soldier putting on a helmet.

Kotsur, long accustomed to hearing actors curse, delighted in Frank’s vulgarity; he proudly recalls the film’s back-and-forth with the MPAA after “CODA” nearly received an R-rating. But to Kotsur, Frank is like a real deaf person — “a hard-working deaf person that just makes it through.”

“I want the audience to have a different perspective. I want them to get rid of their preconceived notions of what deaf people are like," says Kotsur. “There are deaf doctors. There are deaf lawyers. There are deaf firemen. A lot of hearing people are oblivious to that.”

**TELEVISION**

‘Stranger Things,’ ‘Atlanta’ announce their final seasons

From wire reports

‘Stranger Things’ star Finn Wolfhard, Noah Schnapp, Caleb McLaughlin, Gaten Matarazzo, Sadie Sink and Millie Bobby Brown as a ragtag bunch of adolescent misfits growing up in the sleepy town of Hawkins, Ind., in the 1980s.

The kids must repeatedly band together to save Hawkins from terrifying monsters, mad scientists and evil forces from a different dimension.

On Twitter, Netflix teased that the upcoming season of ‘Stranger Things’ will be double the length of Season 3, as well as “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 (Bryan Tyree Henry) and their circle.

“Atlanta” is 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 the 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 for the 2022 Grammys, 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.
**Candy Bomber** shows that kindness is a superpower

**BY DAVID VON DREHLE**

The Washington Post

The young American pilot was perplexed — and a little bit angry. A veteran of World War II, he was now flying nerve-rattling missions in his Douglas C-54 transport plane over the menacing artillery of an army of enemies (who used to allow) to deliver supplies to allies (who used to be enemies).

This was the head-scratching fate of the earliest Cold Warriors. Many of them had become disillusioned by the way some people who had been killed or maimed by Germans. The Soviets had been allies, and reliable ones — hard fighters who shortened the ordeal considerably by giving Hitler a two-front war. Now, three years after the German surrender, Americans were defying Soviet guns to feed hungry Germans. Something about that did not sit right.

Worse, there was a story about the Romans leveling the conquered city of Carthage, then plowing the ground with salt! That’s how this young man felt about the Germans.

The pilot’s name was Gail Halvorsen. He was a Mormon from a hard-scrabble farm life in Idaho and Utah. In the Depression, he would look up from his chores at the pale blue sky and imagine flying himself. As a young man, he met his wife of Pat and made those dreams come true. His wartime assignment was to fly transport planes in the Atlantic theater over waters haunted by prowling U-boats.

Conquered Germany was divided among the former allies into four occupied zones, and its capital, Berlin, was similarly divided, though the entire city lay in the Soviet zone.

The U.S. British and French parts of Berlin were accessible by only one road and one railway across Soviet territory, and as competitive tensions rose in the post-war period, the Soviets came to see those arteries as a tool for driving the West to economic ruin. “What happens to Berlin happens to Germany,” explained the Soviet foreign minister. “What happens to Germany happens to Europe.”

In June 1948, Moscow ordered the routes cut. Determined not to give up Berlin, President Harry S. Truman sent on an unprecedented, and unresolved, solution: an airlift to deliver food that the Soviets couldn’t control. The Berlin Airlift — landed an average of one plane every 63 seconds around the clock — lasted 11 months.

Halvorsen flew one of them. And he wasn’t too happy about feeding Germans, until one day he found himself drawn to a throng of children outside the fence at Tempelhof airport.

With excited gestures, they managed to touch the pilot’s heart — which, it turned out, was just waiting to thaw. These weren’t enemies, he saw, they were poor, deprived children, just as he had been, watching the sky, just as he had done.

In his pocket were two sticks of gum. Halvorsen flew one of them. And he wasn’t too happy about feeding Germans, until one day he found himself drawn to a throng of children outside the fence at Tempelhof airport.

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Eugene Sheffer Crossword

Across
1 Release money
5 Skillet
8 Roasting rod
12 “M*A*S*H” star
13 Genetic letters
14 Celestial bear
15 Aerial stunt
16 Train driver
18 River formations
20 Mouths off to
21 Final notice
23 Modern, to Mann
24 Tore to shreds
28 IRS enforcer
31 Leb. neighbor
32 — Haute
34 Historic period
35 Not single-sex
37 Enters secretly
39 Weep
41 Org.
42 Little angel
45 Pupil’s cover
49 City of Light
51 Verdi opera
52 Thomas — Edison
53 Mandela’s org.
54 Consider
55 British gun
56 Canonized
57 Crisp cookie

Down
1 Hairless
2 Balm ingredient
3 Teen fave
4 Portable PC
5 Acts as chairperson
6 Raggedy doll
7 Really pesters
8 Twilight time
9 Supposes
10 “Got it”
11 Old salts
17 Author Fleming
19 Help a hood
22 — profit (make money)
24 Rock’s Ocasek
25 Equal (Pref.)
26 Keep from spoiling
27 Charisma
29 “Exodus” hero
30 Indian bread
33 Not difficult
36 Wilde’s Gray
38 Works with dough
40 Greyhound vehicle
42 IRS employees
43 Sentry’s cry
44 Prejudice
46 Property claim
47 Inventor’s inspiration
48 Slightly wet
50 Busy insect

Answer to Previous Puzzle

2/21 CRYPTOQUIP

TTOQT STZTFJNOC WKNR OKATO
APK’M BQMMQFZ N ONRPTO
QBXKORNFR WKJC XNOR: RPT

PTNJSMM KNOMBNF.
Saturday’s Cryptoquip: MEDICAL WORKER WHO STUDIES THE PROBABLE EFFECT RUM-DRINKING HAS ON THE HEART: BACARDI-OLOGIST.

Today’s Cryptoquip Clue: T equals E
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**COLLEGE BASEBALL**

**Friday night games**

- **Merrimack 80, Sacred Heart 79**
- **Mass.-Dartmouth 88, Castleton 74**
- **Holy Cross 55, Navy 50**
- **Farmingdale St. 113, Old Westbury 80**
- **Eastern Nazarene 85, Lesley 49**
- **Denison 72, Allegheny 56**
- **DeSales 76, Lycoming 38**
- **Colgate 72, Boston U. 53**
- **Centenary (NJ) 80, Immaculata 74**
- **California (Pa.) 90, Clarion 60**
- **Buffalo 87, W. Michigan 73**
- **Bucknell 92, Lafayette 89, OT**

**Saturday’s men’s scores**

**EAST**

- **NYU 55, Back to the Basics 74**
- **Army 61, American 35**
- **Virginia 76, Old Dominion 69**
- **Chaminade 98, Manhattan (N.Y.) 63**
- **Penn 67, Brown 35**
- **Texas Christian 83, Arizona State 65**
- **Wagner 65, Missouri State 62**
- **Sacred Heart 61, Merrimack 56**
- **St. Francis (N.Y.) 66, St. Francis (Pa.) 54**
- **Stony Brook 95, Hartford 69**

**MIDWEST**

- **Bobcats 83, No. 21 Indiana 50**
- **Atalanta 76, No. 29 Minnesota 51**
- **Miami (Ohio) 78, Toledo 58**
- **Northern Illinois 71, Western Michigan 59**
- **Eastern Michigan 76, Ball State 51**
- **Ohio 82, Bowling Green 69**
- **Northwestern 72, Purdue 60**
- **Indiana 80, Purdue 65**
- **Michigan State 87, Penn State 59**
- **Ohio State 83, Rutgers 54**

**SOUTHWEST**

- **Angelo State 83, New Mexico 74**
- **Lamar 77, Texas Woman’s 71**
- **Tulsa 65, South Florida 57**
- **South Carolina 77, LSU 75**
- **Shorter 74, Valdosta St. 70**
- **SE Missouri 92, Morehead St. 84**
- **NC Wesleyan 92, Greensboro 71**
- **Washington & Lee 88, Randolph 61**
- **VMI 80, Chattanooga 75**
- **Roanoke 67, Bridgewater (Va.) 58**

**Pac-12**

- **Stanford 85, USC 68**
- **Colorado 85, Utah 76**
- **Washington 77, Oregon State 59**
- **Colorado State 72, Arizona State 69**
- **Arizona 43, Arizona St. 21**

**SEC**

- **Missouri 95, Kentucky 72**
- **Georgia 82, South Carolina 75**
- **Vanderbilt 89, Ole Miss 59**
- **Florida 75, Georgia 60**
- **Georgia 69, Tennessee 62**
- **LSU 63, Alabama 40**
- **Kentucky 72, Tennessee 64**
- **Ole Miss 82, Mississippi State 72**
- **Tennessee 62, Missouri 53**
- **Texas A&M 53, Mississippi State 45**

**ACC**

- **Virginia 78, Boston College 60**
- **Clemson 79, Duke 53**
- **Miami 62, Wake Forest 53**
- **Florida State 79, Louisville 62**
- **Boston College 58, Virginia Tech 47**
- **Virginia Tech 63, Georgia Tech 47**
- **North Carolina 75, Virginia 62**
- **Syracuse 69, Georgia Tech 52**
- **Virginia 68, Boston College 53**
- **Virginia 69, Wake Forest 53**

**Big Ten**

- **Ohio State 82, Indiana 72**
- **Michigan State 79, Penn State 72**
- **Ohio State 82, Penn State 72**
- **Ohio State 79, Penn State 73**
- **Ohio State 82, Penn State 74**
- **Ohio State 79, Penn State 73**
- **Ohio State 82, Penn State 74**
- **Ohio State 79, Penn State 73**
- **Ohio State 82, Penn State 74**
- **Ohio State 79, Penn State 73**
TOP 25 Roundup

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 one, which was Florida’s 14th straight win over Auburn in Gainesville. The senior made 6 of 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. 4 Kentucky 90, No. 25 Alabama 81: Kellan Grady made seven threes for a season-high 23 points and Oscar Tshiebwe added 21 points with 14 rebounds for the host Wildcats, who had to rally twice.

Short-handed because of injuries to starting guards TyTy Washington Jr. and Salvir Wheeler, Kentucky (22-5, 11-3 Southeastern Conference) trailed 46-34 with 3½ 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 points and 11 rebounds to help the Jayhawks win on the road.

Kansas (22-4, 11-2) maintained its 16th consecutive game and its 67th straight at home, a streak that dates to 2018 and is the longest in the nation. The Zags are the current front-runner for the top seed in the NCAA Tournament.

No. 3 Arizona 84, Oregon 81: Bennedict 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. Kriis-
a’s long three with the shot clock winding down and 1:26 remaining pushed Arizona’s lead 79-76.

No. 7 Baylor 72, TCU 62: Jerry My Sochan matched his season high with 17 points as five players scored in double figures for the host Bears, who led throughout despite missing two hurting guards.

Baylor (22-5, 10-4 Big 12) played with only six players, except for a two-minute stretch by a seldom-used sophomore in the first half, while bouncing back from a 10-point loss at No. 11 Texas Tech three nights earlier.

No. 9 Duke 88, Florida State 70: Freshman Paolo Banchero scored 17 points as the host 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-
gleton posted career highs in scoring as the host Bruins shook off 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 Husk-
es, who have won four of five.

ACADEMIES ROUNDUP

Maldonado leads No. 22 Wyoming past Air Force

Associated Press

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

Maldonado also had eight assists and seven rebounds, and Ike 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. 28, 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 Cow-
boys’ 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.

Junior O’Neil and Matt Rogers added 14 points apiece for Army (8-19, 4-11 Patriot League). Stacy Beckton Jr. and Elijah Ste-
phens chipped in 13 points each.

Charlie Peterson had 13 points for Army (13-15, 7-9), whose losing streak stretched to six games.

Holy Cross 55, Navy 50: Gerrale Gates had 24 points and 12 rebounds as the visiting Crusaders downed the Midshipmen.

Bo Montgomery had 15 points and 10 re-
bounds for Holy Cross (9-18, 7-9 Patriot League). Kyrell Luc added seven assists.

Navy’s 26-field goal percentage represent-
ed the worst mark by a Crusaders opponent this season.

Tyler Nelson had 15 points for the Midship-
men (18-9, 11-5), whose four-game winning streak came to an end. Greg Summers added six rebounds.

John Carter Jr., who led Navy in scoring enter-
ing the matchup with 13 points per game, failed to make a shot from the floor (0-for-6).
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.

**NHL ROUNDUP**

**Rantanen has goal, assist as Avs beat Sabres**

Associated Press

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Mikko Rantanen scored a goal and an assist on Alex Newhook’s tiebreaking score in the third period, and the NHL-leading Colorado Avalanche beat the Buffalo Sabres 5-3 on Saturday.

Nathan MacKinnon also scored a goal and an assist, and Nazem Kadri scored the other goal and an assist, J.T. Compher had a season-best road win streak to 8-0-1 in their past nine road games and Dustin Tokarski stopped 31 shots.

The Avalanche won for the 14th time in 15 games and host Calgary on Sunday. Rantanen had a goal and an assist in his team’s 5-3 win Saturday in Buffalo.

**NHL scoreboard**

Eastern Conference

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**Scoreboard**

**Beef. It's What's For Dinner, 300**

NASCAR Xfinity Series Saturday 
At Daytona International Speedway 
Daytona Beach, Fla. 
Lap length: 2.54 miles 
(Start position in parentheses)

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**By Jenna Fryer**

Associated Press

DAYTONA BEACH, Fla. — Austin Hill won the Xfinity Series opener at Daytona International Speedway following Myatt Snider’s airborne crash that shredded a chunk of catchfence directly in front of where Michael Jordan 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 hallowed steel and even the engine block was ripped from the car.

**Hill wins as crash ends Xfinity opener**

Hill, who had his first hat trick in the Truck Series this season, was telling him, ‘I’m just putting that in the history books 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 NASA-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 for a full-time Xfinity ride with Richard Childress Racing.

Hill’s win in his very first race with RCF was the first victory this day at Daytona for Ford. Hill had won two Daytona 500 qualifying races and Friday’s night’s Truck Series opener opened for 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 Keselowski joined as a part-owner.

Hill said he used the entire race to work with spotter Derek Knee land 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 memory bank to remember for late in the race,’” Hill said. “We timed it perfectly. Obviously, that caution came out, but we had a heck of a run, so who knows what would have happened there.”

John Raoux/AP

Austin Hill celebrates in Victory Lane after winning Saturday’s NASCAR Xfinity Series race at Daytona International Speedway in Daytona Beach, Fla. It was the first Xfinity race of the season.
Big win for Towns in 3-Point Contest

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, Luke 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, Darius Garland, Evan Mobley and Jarrett Allen, won the Skills Challenge.

After his surprising three-point win, Towns accepted his trophy at Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse while holding a wax model of his likeness and wearing a white suit.

“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,” 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.

“When Cole missed those two first ones with the Tims on, I was like no those Tims are heavy,” Toppin said. “I like, we got 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, Isiah 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 pitted teams and not individual players.

Western Conference
Southwest Division

Chicago 38 21 .644 —
Cleveland 35 23 .603 2
Milwaukee 36 24 .600 2½
Indiana 20 40 .500 18½
Detroit 40 22 .667 24½

Eastern Conference
Atlantic Division

Philadelphia 35 23 .603 —
Boston 34 26 .500 2
Toronto 32 29 .561 2½
Brooklyn 31 28 .526 4½
New York 38 29 .538 10½

Southeast Division

Miami 38 21 .644 —
Atlanta 29 30 .483 9½
Charlotte 29 31 .543 9
Washington 27 31 .543 10½
Orlando 15 43 .250 25

By Martha Bellisle
Associated Press

SHANGHAI — Mikaela Shiffrin skied cleanly through the finish line four times Sunday. At the bottom of the parallel course, she hugged teammates and buddled with them under a bed comforter for warmth.

The Americans won, and the Americans ended up off the podium. But after such an exasperating Olympics, the moment was good as gold for Shiffrin anyway.

“It’s the most special feeling, the most positive and optimistic feeling that I’ve had for this whole time that we’ve been here,” she said.

Shiffrin and the American mixed ski team missed out on a medal by 0.42 seconds, losing in the bronze matchup to Norway on Sunday. The narrow loss meant the two-time gold medalist would leave China empty handed, but after crashing out several times at the Beijing Games, Shiffrin was riding high from a strong U.S. showing.

“I have had a lot of disappoint- ing moments at these Games, to-day is not one of them,” Shiffrin said. “Today is my favorite memory.”

The top-ranked Austrians won gold in the Winter Games’ second iteration of the mixed team parallel event, holding off Germany in the final.

River Radamus delivered the win the U.S. needed in the last heat to force a 2-2 deadlock, but he wasn’t fast enough to tilt the tie-breaker — combined times of the fastest man and woman — to the Americans’ favor.

By Ron Schimanker
AP

Shiffrin, US take 4th in mixed team event

Associated Press

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Games were safe, odd global moment

BY TED ANTHONY

AP Photo

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 terrifying roiling inside China’s COVID bubble.

A Men’s Winter Games of love and hate, the workings of sport and politics on display.

The end of the 2022 Winter Games was safe, odd global moment, enabled by the China that underscores how much less we care. Cities willing to foot the bill for the Games, then share the heat with the IOC over a year-long buildup, are harder to find these days.

With only one other choice for Sochi — the IOC decision to hand over one of its torch-carriers for serving them up “in such an excellent way and a safe way.”

By many mechanical measures, these Games were a success. They were, in fact, quite safe — albeit in the carefully mediat- ed, dress-up-for-company way that author- itarian governments always do best. The lo- cal volunteers, as is usually the case, were delightful, helpful and engaging, and they re- ceived high-profile accolades at the closing. The venues — most of it fake, some of it real. The venues — many of them, like the Bird’s Nest and the Aquatic Center, harvest- ed from the 2008 edition of the Beijing Olympics — performed to expectations. One new venue, Big Air Shougang, carved from a re- purposed steel mill, was an appealingly edgeshadow of winter wonderland and rust-belt industrial landscape.

TV ratings were down, but streaming view- ership was up: By Saturday, NBC had streamed 3.5 billion minutes from Beijing, compared to 2.2 billion in South Korea in 2018.

Internationally, many criticized them as the “authoritarian Olympics” and de- nounced the IOC for holding them in concert with a government accused of gross human rights violations against ethnic Uighurs and Tibetans in its far west and harsh policies against Hong Kong democracy activists off its southeastern coast. Several Western gov- ernments boycotted by not sending any official delegations, though they sent athletes.

For its part, China denied such allegations, as it typically does, and featured a Uyghur as part of its slate of Olympic torch-carriers for the opening ceremony Feb. 4. And then, of course, there were the Russians. And doping. Again.

That the IOC had to turn to au- thoritarian Russia, then China, for two of its last two Winter Olympics underscores how much less we care. Cities willing to foot the bill for the Games, then share the heat with the IOC over a year-long buildup, are harder to find these days.

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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.