

Blinken in Afghanistan to sell US plan

Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken made an unannounced visit to Afghanistan on Thursday to sell Afghan leaders and a wary public on President Joe Biden's decision to withdraw all American troops from the country and end America's longest war.

Blinken sought to assure senior Afghan politicians that the United States remains committed to the country despite Biden's announcement a day earlier that the 2,500 U.S. soldiers remaining in the country would be coming home by the 20th anniversary of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks that led to the U.S. invasion in 2001.

"I wanted to demonstrate with my visit the ongoing commitment of the United States to the Islamic Republic and the people of Afghanistan," Blinken told Afghan President Ashraf Ghani as they met at the

presidential palace in Kabul. "The partnership is changing, but the partnership itself is enduring."

"We respect the decision and are adjusting our priorities," Ghani told Blinken, expressing gratitude for the sacrifices of U.S. troops.

Later, in a meeting with Abdullah Abdullah, who heads the National Reconciliation Council, Blinken repeated his message, saying that "we have a new chapter, but it is a new chapter that we're writing together."

"We are grateful to your people, your country, your administration," Abdullah said.

Blinken arrived in the Afghan capital from Brussels, where he and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin briefed NATO officials on the U.S. decision and won quick approval from the allies to end their Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan.

Biden, Blinken and Austin have all tried to put a brave face on the pullout, maintaining that the U.S.- and NATO-led missions to Afghanistan had achieved their goal of decimating Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida network that launched the 9/11 attacks and clearing the country of terrorist elements that could use Afghan soil to plot similar strikes.

However, that argument has faced pushback from some U.S. lawmakers and human rights advocates, who say the withdrawal will result in the loss of freedoms that Afghans enjoyed after the Taliban was ousted from power in late 2001.

"My views are very pessimistic," Naheed Farid, a member of parliament, told reporters when asked her thoughts about the future of her country. Farid was one of a half-dozen, mostly women, civic leaders who met with Blinken at the U.S. Embassy in Kabul.

NATO forces to leave Afghanistan after Biden decision

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

STUTTGART, Germany — The NATO alliance, which rushed to join the United States in Afghanistan in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, will depart the war-torn country alongside American forces in the months ahead, allies announced Wednesday.

"Standing shoulder to shoulder, we have paid a high price, both in blood and treasure," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said from NATO headquarters in Brussels, where he was flanked by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

The NATO drawdown of its 10,000 troops will begin by May 1 and will be "orderly, coordinated, and deliberate." The drawdown also will be completed within a few months, Stoltenberg

said.

"This is not an easy decision and it entails risks," the NATO chief said.

However, after two decades, he said it's become clear there is no Western-led military solution to the challenges Afghanistan faces.

"We will leave Afghanistan together and bring our troops home," Blinken said. "After years of saying we will leave at some point, that time has come."

Blinken also said the original purpose of the war, eliminating the threat to the U.S. homeland posed by al-Qaida in Afghanistan, has been achieved.

The war, which killed and maimed thousands of U.S. troops, ultimately reduced the ability of militants to launch attacks on the United States, Austin concurred.

"Our troops have accom-

plished the mission they were sent to Afghanistan to accomplish," he said.

Allies will respond forcefully, Austin said, if the Taliban launches attacks on coalition forces as they draw down.

NATO's decision, reached during a high-level meeting at alliance headquarters, was almost inevitable following an announcement Wednesday by President Joe Biden that the U.S. will pull all of its troops out of Afghanistan before the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, which sparked the longest American war in history.

The Afghanistan War marked the first time in history that NATO allies invoked Article V, an alliance bedrock principle that an attack on one member is met with a response from all. For nearly 20 years, U.S. commanders and political leaders have

said the end of the war in Afghanistan would be conditions based. But in announcing an end to U.S. military involvement, Biden said the time has come to pull out regardless of security conditions on the ground.

The withdrawal of roughly 2,500 U.S. troops in Afghanistan and thousands more NATO forces will be wrapped up before September.

The decision to depart is not without risk given the weakness of the Afghan government and doubts about the Afghan military's ability to hold off the Taliban without international military backing. Blinken acknowledged even with U.S. military backing, Afghan forces remain locked in a stalemate.

Austin said the U.S. will continue to lend financial support to Afghanistan and its security forces.

Military leaders push to address migrant flux

BY SARAH CAMMARATA
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — The commanders of U.S. Northern and Southern Commands testified Wednesday that the United States must approach the influx of Central American migrants at the U.S.-Mexico border as a national security issue and address the problem holistically.

“We have a national security imperative right now on our southern border that we need to deal with,” said Air Force Gen. Glen VanHerck, who leads U.S. Northern Command and North American Aerospace Defense Command.

VanHerck and Adm. Craig Faller, who leads U.S. Southern Command, told lawmakers on the House Armed Services Committee that multiple factors have come together to create an environment that has driven more

than 350,000 migrants to attempt to cross the U.S.-Mexico border in the first three months of 2021.

Their comments came at a full committee hearing about national security challenges and military activity in North and South America. A rising number of migrants, including unaccompanied children, are arriving at the U.S.-Mexico border, many to seek asylum.

“I believe it’s a confluence of multiple things that are drawing folks to our border, from transnational criminal organizations to [coronavirus] to multiple natural disasters,” Faller said.

The military officials urged lawmakers to look at migration as a “national security imperative,” and the U.S. must come up with a whole of government approach to secure U.S. borders.

“The challenge is creating an environment where these folks

can succeed, so they don’t have to feel like they migrate. And that takes a whole of nation approach to get after transnational criminal organizations,” VanHerck said in response to a question from Rep. Lisa McClain, R-Mich., about the impact of President Joe Biden’s immigration policies.

McClain, along with some other Republicans, pushed witnesses to comment on whether Biden’s actions to reopen the southern border and “encourage migrants to illegally cross” into the U.S. makes the country less safe.

VanHerck did not directly comment on specific Biden policies, though he said “the administration is on a good track.”

Rep. Scott DesJarlais, R-Tenn., pressed VanHerck to answer a question on whether strong enforcement of existing

immigration laws would serve as a deterrent to illegal immigration.

“Our border security is national security and the laws that we have on the books would be part of contributing to overarching national security when enforced,” the general responded.

One Democrat, Rep. Joe Courtney of Connecticut, applauded Faller’s description of the external forces — including the pandemic, natural disasters and political violence — driving large numbers of people from their homes in Central America and toward the U.S. southern border.

“Thank you for that testimony today because I frankly think coming from you, it’s a really important message that people should really think about as we try to deal with the problems at the border,” he said.

‘Magic mushroom’ element could work better against depression

BY KARIN ZEITVOGEL
Stars and Stripes

The active ingredient in psychedelic mushrooms may be more effective at treating depression than a leading antidepressant, a study has found, potentially opening up new avenues of treatment for troops who suffer from the debilitating condition.

The severity of depressive symptoms dropped by at least half in 70% of people who were given psilocybin in clinical trials conducted last year at Imperial College London, the study published Thursday in the *New England Journal of Medicine* said. Only 48% of a group that took the common antidepressant escitalopram saw a similar decrease.

Thirty of 59 patients were given two separate doses of 25 milligrams of psilocybin at three-week intervals, and took a daily placebo for six weeks. The others received two much smaller doses of psilocybin — 1 mg — three weeks apart and took escita-

lopram, which is marketed under brand names like Cipralex and Lexapro, daily for six weeks.

All the patients had long-term, moderate to severe clinical depression and received psychological counseling throughout the study.

In addition to showing larger reductions in depressive symptoms, the psilocybin group reported greater improvements in their ability to cry or feel compassion, intense emotion and pleasure, the study said. They also said they felt less drowsy than those who took escitalopram.

“These findings provide further support for the growing evidence base that shows that in people with depression, psilocybin offers an alternative treatment to traditional antidepressants,” said professor David Nutt, principal investigator on the study and the Edmond J. Safra Chair in Neuropsychopharmacology at Imperial College London.

Navy retires ship destroyed in fire

Associated Press

SAN DIEGO — The U.S. Navy on Wednesday decommissioned the USS Bonhomme Richard docked off San Diego nine months after flames engulfed it in one of the worst U.S. warship fires outside of combat in recent memory.

The ceremony at Naval Base San Diego was not open to the public, with the Navy citing concerns over the spread of the coronavirus.

The amphibious assault ship is expected to be towed to a shipyard in Texas for dismantling.

The ship that ignited July 12 burned for four days and was left with extensive structural, electrical and mechanical damage. A Navy official said arson was believed to be the cause.

The Navy estimated that repairing the ship would run more than \$2.5 billion. Dismantling the ship is expected to cost about \$30 million.

US sanctions Russians, expels diplomats

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration on Thursday announced the expulsion of 10 Russian diplomats and sanctions against nearly three dozen people and companies as it moved to hold the Kremlin accountable for interference in last year's presidential election and the hacking of federal agencies.

The actions, foreshadowed for weeks by the administration, represent the first retaliatory measures announced against the Kremlin for the hack, familiarly known as the SolarWinds breach. In that intrusion, Russian hackers are believed to have infected widely used software with malicious code, enabling them to access the networks of at least nine agencies in what U.S. officials believe was an intelligence-gathering operation aimed at mining government secrets.

Besides that hack, U.S. officials last month alleged that Russian President Vladimir Putin authorized influence operations to help Donald Trump in his unsuccessful bid for reelection as president, though there's no evidence Russia or anyone else changed votes or manipulated the outcome.

The measures announced Thursday include sanctions on six Russian companies that support the country's cyber activities, in addition to sanctions on 32 individuals and entities accused of attempting to interfere in last year's presidential election, including by spreading disinformation.

The 10 diplomats being expelled include representatives of Russian intelligence services, the White House said.

The White House also said Biden was using diplomatic, military and intelligence channels to

respond to reports that Russia encouraged the Taliban to attack U.S. and allied troops in Afghanistan based on the "best assessments" of the intelligence community. Reports of alleged "bounties" surfaced last year, with the Trump administration coming under fire for not raising the issue directly with Russia. The White House did not publicly confirm the reports. "The safety and well-being of U.S. military personnel, and that of our allies and partners, is an absolute priority of the United States," the White House said Thursday.

The sanctions, presumably intended to send a clear retributive message to Russia and to deter similar acts in the future, are certain to exacerbate an already tense relationship between the U.S. and Russia.

President Joe Biden told Putin this week in their second call to "de-escalate tensions" following

a Russian military buildup on Ukraine's border, and said the U.S. would "act firmly in defense of its national interests" regarding Russian intrusions and election interference.

In a television interview last month, Biden replied "I do" when asked if he thought Putin was a "killer." He said the days of the U.S. "rolling over" to Putin were done. Putin later recalled his ambassador to the U.S. and pointed at the U.S. history of slavery and slaughtering Native Americans and the atomic bombing of Japan in World War II.

U.S. officials are still grappling with the aftereffects of the SolarWinds intrusion, which affected agencies including the Treasury, Justice, Energy and Homeland Security departments, and are still assessing what information may have been stolen.

Unemployment claims in US lowest since outbreak

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The number of Americans applying for unemployment benefits tumbled last week to 576,000, a post-COVID low and a hopeful sign that layoffs are easing as the economy recovers from the pandemic recession.

The Labor Department said Thursday that applications plummeted by 193,000 from a revised 769,000 a week earlier. Jobless claims are now down sharply from a peak of 900,000 in early January.

For the week ending March 27, 16.9 million people were continuing to collect jobless benefits, down from 18.2 million in the previous week. Those figures make clear that even as the economy has strengthened in recent weeks, millions are facing a loss of a job or income and have been struggling to pay bills or rent.

The drop in claims comes after employers adding 916,000 jobs in March, the most since August, in a sign that a sustained recovery is taking hold as vaccinations accelerate, pandemic business restrictions are lifted in many states and Americans appear increasingly willing to travel, shop, eat out and otherwise spend again.

The nation's unemployment rate has declined steadily, from a high of 14.8% a year ago to 6%. The last time the jobless rate was this low, weekly claims were around 350,000, still well below their current level.

Most analysts have grown bullish about the economy's prospects for the coming months. Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell expressed his belief in an appearance Sunday on "60 Minutes" that the economy is at "an inflection point" and appears poised for a boom.

WHO: Europe passes 1M virus deaths, can't relax

Associated Press

GENEVA — A top official from the World Health Organization says Europe has surpassed 1 million deaths from COVID-19 and the situation remains "serious," with about 1.6 million new cases reported each week in the region.

The comments by Dr. Hans Kluge on Thursday aimed to emphasize that Europe must keep up its guard with social distancing and speed up vaccinations as virus variants drive new infections to record levels in some nations.

Overall, a tally by Johns Hopkins University shows nearly 3 million deaths have been linked to COVID-19 worldwide — with the Americas hardest hit, followed by Europe. The United States, Brazil and Mexico have reported the highest number of deaths, collectively at more than 1.1 million.

Speaking to reporters during a visit to Greece, Kluge did point to

"early signs that transmission may be slowing across several countries" in WHO's 53-country European region, which stretches into Central Asia — and cited "declining incidence" among the oldest people. He said the proportion of COVID-19 deaths among people over 80, who have been prioritized for vaccines, had dropped to nearly 30% — the lowest level in the pandemic.

Britain in particular has seen new infections and COVID-19 deaths drop dramatically since January, due to a successful vaccination program and a prolonged national lockdown that is only being reversed in stages.

Addressing recent concerns about vaccines, Kluge also said the risk of people suffering blood clots is far higher for people with COVID-19 than for people who receive AstraZeneca's coronavirus vaccine.

Defense rests case without calling Chauvin to testify

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — The defense at the murder trial of former Officer Derek Chauvin in the death of George Floyd rested its case Thursday without putting Chauvin on the stand, presenting a total of two days of testimony to the prosecution's two weeks.

Closing arguments are set to begin Monday morning, after which the jury will get the case.

Before the jury was brought into the courtroom, Chauvin, his COVID-19 mask removed in a rare courtroom moment, informed the judge that he would not testify, saying he would invoke his Fifth Amendment right not to take the stand.

It would have been the first time Chauvin publicly told his side of the story.

The prosecution briefly recalled a lung and critical care expert to knock down a defense witness' theory that carbon monoxide poisoning from a squad car's exhaust might have contributed to Floyd's death.

Dr. Martin Tobin noted hospital tests

that showed Floyd's level was at most 2%, within the normal range.

And with that, both sides finished presenting their cases.

After closing arguments, the racially diverse jury will begin deliberating at the barbed-wire-ringed courthouse, with Minneapolis on edge against a repeat of the protests and violence that broke out last spring over Floyd's death.

Judge Peter Cahill reminded the jurors they will be sequestered starting Monday, and said: "If I were you, I would plan for long and hope for short."

The question of whether Chauvin would testify was the subject of weeks of speculation.

The decision not to testify was announced a day after a forensic pathologist testifying for the defense said that Floyd died of a sudden heart rhythm disturbance as a result of his heart disease.

That contradicted prosecution experts who said Floyd succumbed to a lack of oxygen from the way he was pinned down.

Panel advances bill on slavery reparations

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A House panel advanced a decadeslong effort to pay reparations to the descendants of slaves by approving legislation Wednesday that would create a commission to study the issue.

It's the first time the House Judiciary Committee has acted on the legislation. Still, prospects for final passage remain poor in such a closely divided Congress. The vote to advance the measure to the full House passed 25-17 after a lengthy and often passionate debate that stretched late into the night.

The legislation would establish a commission to examine slavery and discrimination in the United States from 1619 to the present. The commission would then recommend ways to educate Americans about its findings and appropriate remedies, including how the government would offer a formal apology and what form of compensation should be awarded.

The bill, commonly referred to as H.R. 40, was first introduced by Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich., in 1989. The 40 refers to the failed government effort to provide 40 acres of land to newly freed slaves as the Civil War drew to a close.

"This legislation is long overdue," said Rep. Jerrold Nadler, the Democratic chairman of the committee. "H.R. 40 is intended to begin a national conversation about how to confront the brutal mistreatment of African Americans during chattel slavery, Jim Crow segregation and the enduring structural racism that remains endemic to our society today."

The momentum supporters have been able to generate for the bill this Congress follows the biggest reckoning on racism in a generation in the wake of George Floyd's death while in police custody.

Still, the House bill has no Republicans among its 176 co-sponsors and would need 60 votes in the evenly divided Senate, 50-50, to overcome a filibuster. Republicans on the Judiciary Committee were unanimous in voting against the measure.

Rep. Jim Jordan, of Ohio, the ranking Republican on the committee, said the commission's makeup would lead to a foregone conclusion in support of reparations.

Supporters said the bill is not about a check, but about developing a structured response to historical and ongoing wrongs.

Wright family wants stronger charges against ex-Minn. cop

Associated Press

BROOKLYN CENTER, Minn. — Black community leaders and family members of Daunte Wright were calling for more serious charges against a white police officer in Wright's death, comparing her case to the murder charge brought against a Black officer who killed a white woman in nearby Minneapolis.

Former Brooklyn Center police Officer Kim Potter was charged with second-degree manslaughter in Sunday's shooting of Wright, a 20-year-old Black man, during a traffic stop. The former police chief in Brooklyn Center, a majority nonwhite suburb, said Potter mistakenly fired her handgun when she meant to use her Taser. Both the chief and Potter resigned Tuesday. Potter was due for her initial court appearance Thursday.

However, protesters and Wright's family members say there's no excuse for the shooting and want prosecutors to file more

serious charges.

"The family is glad she got charged but they do hope and pray for a day where they get equal justice," Wright family attorney Ben Crump said Wednesday. "Why should we always get a fragment of justice?"

Advocates for Wright point to the 2017 case of Mohamed Noor. The Black former Minneapolis police officer fatally shot Justice Ruzszyk Damond, a white woman who was a dual citizen of the U.S. and Australia, in the alley behind her home after she called 911 to report what she thought was a woman being assaulted. Noor was convicted of third-degree murder in addition to second-degree manslaughter and sentenced to 12 ½ years in prison. Potter's charge carries a maximum 10-year prison sentence.

Noor testified that he fired to protect his partner's life after hearing a loud bang on the squad car and seeing a woman at his partner's window raising her arm.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man fleeing police crashes Maserati SUV

CA OAKLAND — A man fleeing the California Highway Patrol totaled his girlfriend's Maserati SUV after he careened up an embankment and slammed into the underside of an overpass, wedging the vehicle under a freeway in Oakland, authorities said.

"The driver is lucky to be alive. The owner of the Maserati ... not so lucky," the CHP said in a social media post that included photos of the mangled luxury vehicle.

Police said the 32-year-old man was speeding on a highway when a CHP officer tried to stop him. He accelerated to over 100 mph and then exited the freeway, veering over a curve, up the embankment and ending up just beneath the freeway, said Officer David Arias, a spokesman for the CHP in Oakland.

Cannabis-themed license plates to be auctioned

CO DENVER — Cannabis-themed license plates in Colorado are being auctioned off to the highest bidder in a fundraiser for the Colorado Disability Funding Committee.

The state is selling the rights to 14 plates with cannabis-themed phrases, including "BONG," "GANJA," "TEGRIDY" and "HASH," KUSA-TV reported.

A license plate with "ISIT420," a reference to slang for smoking pot, has so far garnered bids of more than \$6,500, making it the highest in demand. Bids are being collected until 4:20 p.m. on April 20, a day considered the unofficial "pot holiday."

Winning bidders will be able to use the configuration of letters

and numbers they chose on a novelty plate of their choosing but must pay registration fees, personalized plate protection fees and the costs for potential designer backgrounds.

Postcard from Titanic's radio operator to be sold

MA BOSTON — A postcard written by the Titanic's senior radio operator just weeks before the ocean liner sank in the North Atlantic in 1912 was put up for auction.

The card was written by Jack Phillips to his sister, Elsie Phillips, in March 1912 while awaiting the ship's first sea trials, according to RR Auction in Boston.

"Very busy working late. Hope to leave on Monday & arrive Soton Wednesday afternoon. Hope you quite OK. Heard from Ethel yesterday," he wrote. It's signed "Love Jack."

It is postmarked Belfast, where the Titanic was built, and has a canceled halfpenny stamp.

The postcard is being sold by the estate of Vera and John Gillespie, longtime members of the Massachusetts-based Titanic Historical Society, said Bobby Livingston, executive vice president at RR Auction.

Truck, stolen trailer crash into vehicles

IN INDIANAPOLIS — Several people were injured after the driver of a truck with a stolen trailer crashed into several vehicles in Indianapolis.

Police tried to stop the truck but called off the pursuit when the driver fled east in the westbound lanes of Interstate 70, police said.

At least two other vehicles were sideswiped by the truck before it exited the freeway, ran a red light

and struck other vehicles.

The driver and a passenger ran from the crash site but were arrested nearby, police said.

Inmate found breaking hole in window at jail

KS WICHITA — A detention deputy doing his regular early morning rounds discovered an inmate trying to break a hole to an outer cell window at the county jail in Wichita, authorities said.

The Sedgwick County Sheriff's Office said in a news release that the deputy noticed paper covering part of the window and instructed the inmate to remove it so he could examine the window. He found damage to the window about six inches in diameter.

The inmate had broken the first several layers of glass, but had not yet broken through to the outside of the building.

A hole of this size would have provided an access point to introduce contraband into the facility, the sheriff's office said.

Statehouse break-in, vandalism investigated

OH COLUMBUS — A man broke into the Ohio Statehouse, used a fire extinguisher to spray chemicals on the historic building's Rotunda floor, and then called 911 seeking medical help, according to the State Highway Patrol.

Columbus police responding to the call found the man outside on the west lawn of the downtown building near the monument to former Ohio Gov. and President William McKinley.

The man appeared to be under the influence of drugs, said Lt. Craig Cvetan, a patrol spokes-

man. The man broke a window to get inside, broke a second window once inside the building, and broke a third to escape, Cvetan said.

Spring arrives: Block falls through ice in contest

VT DANVILLE — Spring has arrived in a northeastern Vermont community where a cinder block fell through the ice at Joe's Pond in West Danville.

Each year people buy tickets to guess when that will happen in the annual Joe's Pond Ice Out Contest. This year, the block went through the ice disconnecting a clock at 4:57 p.m. on April 10.

Over 10,000 tickets were sold but the winner has not yet been announced.

According to the Joe's Pond Association, the contest was started in the 1980s due to cabin fever.

Life-sized elephant statue installed at stadium

AL TUSCALOOSA — A life-sized statue of an elephant was moved to a street corner outside the University of Alabama's football stadium after 20 years at a country club.

The 7-ton bronze statue now stands on a tall pedestal outside Bryant-Denny Stadium in Tuscaloosa, news outlets reported. Although the university's sports nickname is the Crimson Tide, its mascot is an elephant.

The statue dubbed Tuska, by English artist Terry Matthews, is 19 feet, 1 inch from the base to the tip of its trunk. A gift from former athletic director Bill Battle and his wife, Mary, helped the school move Tuska, The Montgomery Advertiser reported.

— From wire reports



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Olympic organizers, IOC push on with Games

Associated Press

Tokyo pitched itself as “a safe pair of hands” when it was awarded the Olympics 7 ½ years ago.

“The certainty was a crucial factor,” Craig Reddie, an IOC vice president at the time, said after the 2013 vote in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Now, nothing is certain as Tokyo’s postponed Olympics hit the 100-days-to-go mark on Wednesday. Despite surging cases of COVID-19, myriad scandals and overwhelming public opposition in Japan to holding the Games, organizers and the IOC are pushing on.

Tokyo’s 1964 Olympics celebrated Japan’s rapid recovery from defeat in World War II. These Olympics will be marked by footnotes and asterisks. The athletes will aim high, of course, but the goals elsewhere will be modest: get through it, avoid becoming a super-spreader event, and stoke some national pride knowing few other countries could have pulled this off.

“The government is very conscious of how ‘the world’ views Japan,” Dr. Gill Steel, who teaches political science at Doshisha University in Kyoto, wrote in an email. “Canceling the Olympics would have been seen, at some level, as a public failure on the international stage.”

The price will be steep when the Olympics open on July 23.

The official cost is \$15.4 billion. Olympic spending is tough to track, but several government audits suggest it might be twice that much, and all but \$6.7 billion is public money.

The Switzerland-based IOC generates 91% of its income from selling broadcast

rights and sponsorship. This amounts to at least \$5 billion in a four-year cycle, but the revenue flow from networks like American-based NBC has been stalled by the postponement.

What does Tokyo get out of the 17-day sports circus?

Fans from abroad are banned, tourism is out, and there’ll be no room for neighborhood partying. Athletes are being told to arrive late, leave early and maneuver around a moving maze of rules.

There are also reputational costs for Japan and the International Olympic Committee: a bribery scandal, botched planning, and repeated misogyny in the Tokyo Olympic leadership.

The IOC is betting Tokyo will be a distraction — “the light at the end of the pandemic tunnel” — but various polls suggest up to 80% of Japanese want the Olympics canceled or postponed. And many scientists are opposed.

“It is best to not hold the Olympics given the considerable risks,” Dr. Norio Sugaya, an infectious diseases expert at Keiyu Hospital in Yokohama, told The Associated Press.

Japan’s vaccine rollout has been almost nonexistent, few will get shots before the Olympics open, and Tokyo has raised its “alert level” with another wave predicted about the time of the opening ceremony. About 9,500 deaths in Japan have been attributed to COVID-19, good by global measures but poor by standards in Asia.

And what’s the impact of 15,400 Olympic and Paralympic athletes from more than 200 countries and territories entering Japan, joined by tens of thousands of officials, judges, media, and broadcast-

ers?

“The risks are high in Japan. Japan is dangerous, not a safe place at all,” Sugaya said.

The IOC and Japanese politicians decided a year ago to postpone but not cancel the Olympics, driven by inertia and the clout of Japanese ad giant Dentsu Inc., which has lined up a record of \$3.5 billion in local sponsorship — probably three times more than any previous Olympics.

“I think the government knows full well the Japanese public doesn’t want the Olympics as of now,” Dr. Aki Tonami, who teaches political science at the University of Tsukuba, wrote in an email to AP. “But no one wants to be the one to pull the plug.”

Tokyo’s initial logo was scrapped after claims it was plagiarized, the original stadium concept was dropped when costs soared past \$2 billion, and organizing committee president Yoshiro Mori — a former prime minister — stepped down two months ago after making derogatory comments about women. Artistic director Hiroshi Sasaki left a few weeks later, essentially for the same reason.

On top of it all, French prosecutors believe Tokyo landed the Olympics by channeling bribes to IOC voters. Rio de Janeiro apparently landed the 2016 Olympics the same way, prosecutors allege.

“It’s so easy to make money off the system,” said Dr. Lisa Kihl, who studies sports governance at the University of Minnesota. “Nobody is going to rock the boat because everybody is benefitting from it. ...Until sports internationally are governed like financial institutions, it’s not going to change.”

Sources: NCAA drops rule where transfers sit a year

Associated Press

Starting next season, major college football and basketball players will be permitted to transfer one time before graduating without being required to sit out a year of competition.

The NCAA Division I Council voted Wednesday to change the long-standing rule that has often deterred players in high-profile sports from switching schools, two people with knowledge of the council’s decision told The Associated Press.

The people spoke on condition of anonymity because the two-day meeting was still in session and the council’s decisions would not become official until it ended Thursday. The

Athletic first reported the council’s vote.

The so-called one-time exception has been available to athletes in other NCAA sports for years, allowing them to transfer and play immediately. Athletes in football, men’s and women’s basketball, men’s ice hockey and baseball have not had that available to them without asking the NCAA for a special waiver and claiming a hardship caused the need for a transfer.

Athletes who have graduated have also been permitted to transfer without sitting out, but not undergraduates.

Starting this fall semester, all athletes will be operating under the same rules: Transfers will be allowed to play right away.

Those in fall and winter sports must notify their schools they intend to transfer by May 1; in spring sports, the notification date will be July 1. The notification dates begin in 2022.

For this year, athletes in all sports will be required to notify their schools about their intent to transfer by July 1.

The council also voted to let the current dead period in recruiting in all sports expire June 1. A ban on in-person recruiting has been in place for more than a year because of the pandemic. Coaches will again be permitted to visit recruits off campus, hold camps on campus and welcome prospective student-athletes on official recruiting visits.

HBP means Rodón settles for no-hitter

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Carlos Rodón jumped around near the mound, surrounded by exuberant teammates. All the injuries, all the uncertainty, it seemed like a lifetime ago.

From no roster spot to no-hitter — Rodón had arrived at his moment.

The left-hander threw the second no-hitter of the young baseball season Wednesday night, losing his bid for a perfect game on a hit batter with one out in the ninth inning, and the Chicago White Sox cruised to an 8-0 victory over the Cleveland Indians.

“It just feels good to finally sit here and tell you I dominated today, and it felt good,” Rodón said. “I’ve never really done that. I’ve never done that on this level at least, and it feels good to say I did it.”

The 28-year-old pitcher got some help

from AL MVP José Abreu, who picked up Josh Naylor’s slow bouncer leading off the ninth and got his toe on first base in the nick of time. The pandemic-limited crowd of 7,148, bundled up on a cool, crisp night, had to endure a quick replay review when the Indians challenged, but the call was upheld.

Rodón then plunked Roberto Pérez on the back foot with an 0-2 slider — the only runner he allowed. An incredulous Rodón looked on almost in bewilderment as Pérez made his way to first, asking the veteran catcher if the ball actually hit him.

Rodón regained his composure in time to strike out Yu Chang looking and retire Jordan Luplow on a sharp grounder to third baseman Yoán Moncada, starting a joyous celebration. Rodón held out his arms as Moncada jumped toward him and backup

catcher Zack Collins joined the impromptu party.

“That was the most incredible thing that I’ve ever been a part of behind the plate,” the 26-year-old Collins said.

Sidelined by a string of injuries throughout his career, Rodón was out of a job for a while last winter. Back in December, the White Sox declined to offer him a 2021 contract. The No. 3 pick in the 2014 amateur draft re-signed with the team as a free agent, agreeing to a one-year deal for \$3 million on Feb. 1.

That move looks like a pretty good call at the moment. Rodón (2-0) won a spot in the rotation in spring training and pitched five scoreless innings in his first start of the season. He was supposed to pitch Monday but was scratched because of an upset stomach.

Verdugo lifts Red Sox past Twins in doubleheader

Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS — Alex Verdugo had three hits, including a two-run single in a six-run fifth inning, and the Boston Red Sox extended their winning streak to nine games, beating the Minnesota Twins 7-1 to sweep Wednesday’s doubleheader.

Eduardo Rodríguez (2-0) pitched five innings and gave up one run on five hits for Boston, which has come from behind in six of its nine wins this season. The Red Sox have their longest winning streak since a 10-game run in 2018, a season that ended with a World Series title.

Boston is also the first team in major league history to open the season with at least three straight losses and immediately follow that by winning at least nine straight, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

Verdugo had five hits in the doubleheader and capped the day with his second homer of the season in the seventh inning. The Red Sox won the first game 3-2.

“To win some ballgames, and to actually be at the top of the standings and kind of like overlooked a little bit, I love it,” Verdugo said. “I love this group of

guys. I love this team, the chemistry, everything. It’s something special on this team.”

Dodgers 4, Rockies 2: Justin Turner homered and drove in two runs, and rookie Zach McKinstry added a late homer as host Los Angeles beat Colorado for its fifth consecutive victory.

Luke Raley got his first career hit in the eighth inning for the major league-leading Dodgers, who have won 10 of 11 while remaining unbeaten in their past 11 games at Dodger Stadium since last Sept. 23.

Marlins 6, Braves 5 (10): Jesus Aguilar drove in the winning run with a 10th-inning double and Miami overcame two homers by Ronald Acuña Jr. for its third straight win at Atlanta.

Leading off in extra innings with Starling Marte placed at second, Aguilar dumped a low pitch from Tyler Matzek (0-1) down the left-field line to bring home the tiebreaking run.

Blue Jays 5, Yankees 4: Bo Bichette homered twice, including a game-ending drive leading off the ninth inning that lifted Toronto over visiting New York.

Bichette drove a pitch from Chad Green (0-2) the opposite

way to right-center field as the Blue Jays took two of three from their AL East rival.

Brewers 7, Cubs 0: Corbin Burnes struck out 10 in six dominant innings and also delivered a two-run single for his first career RBIs as host Milwaukee beat Chicago.

Burnes (1-1) allowed just two hits to continue his sizzling start to the season. His bases-loaded single up the middle capped the Brewers’ four-run outburst in the sixth.

Nationals 6, Cardinals 0: Joe Ross pitched six sharp innings and Washington threw its first regular-season shutout at St. Louis.

Ross (1-0) improved to 3-0 in four career starts against the Cardinals. He allowed four hits, struck out five and walked one. He also singled and scored a run.

Giants 3, Reds 0: Johnny Cueto pitched neatly into the sixth inning before exiting with a tight lat muscle, and San Francisco finished off visiting Cincinnati.

Cueto (2-0) removed himself from the game after fanning Nick Castellanos for the second out in the sixth.

Royals 6, Angels 1: Salvador Pérez homered and doubled to cap off an impressive series, leading Brad Keller and host Kansas City past Los Angeles.

Pérez drove in two runs and went 8-for-12 with four RBIs this week against the Angels.

Rangers 5, Rays 1: Nate Lowe hit a solo homer and rookie Kohei Aihara got his first major league victory, pitching into the sixth inning as Texas won at Tampa Bay.

Pirates 5, Padres 1: Gregory Polanco homered and host Pittsburgh beat San Diego’s Joe Musgrove in his first start since throwing the first no-hitter in franchise history.

Mets 5, Phillies 1: David Peterson matched a career high with 10 strikeouts in six dominant innings and batterymate James McCann hit his first home run with New York, sending the team past visiting Philadelphia for its third straight win.

Tigers 6, Astros 4: Michael Fulmer earned his first win since 2018 and visiting Detroit built a big lead before holding off short-handed Houston for a three-game sweep.

Embiid, 76ers down short-handed Nets

Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA — The Nets played without starters from the opening tip. The 76ers tried to rest theirs in the fourth quarter.

But with Brooklyn's deep reserves making it a game late between the two top teams in the East, Ben Simmons and Joel Embiid checked in to bail out the checked-out Sixers.

Embiid had 39 points and 13 rebounds and Philadelphia beat Brooklyn 123-117 on Wednesday night in an anticipated matchup that fizzled with the Nets missing their biggest stars.

"When the playoffs start, it's a whole new beast. And we'll be ready for them," 76ers coach Doc Rivers said. "And I'm sure they'll be ready for us."

Philadelphia (38-17) moved into first place in the Eastern Conference and holds the tiebreaker in a game played without James Harden, Kevin Durant, Blake Griffin and LaMarcus Aldridge. With the Nets standouts hurt or just rested, the game had more of a preseason feel than a possible preview of the conference finals this summer.

No matter, the Sixers moved back atop the standings and have the No. 1 seed in sight with just 17 games left this season.

Mavericks 114, Grizzlies 113: Luka Doncic hit a leaning,

lunging three-pointer as time expired to give Dallas a victory at Memphis.

Doncic ended the night with 29 points, while Kristaps Porzingis added 21 points. Dwight Powell had 12 points.

Grayson Allen led the Grizzlies with 23 points, but the 90.6% free-throw shooter missed a pair of foul shots with 2.2 second lefts, setting the stage for Doncic's winning three in the matchup of teams jockeying for postseason positioning.

Bucks 130, Timberwolves 105: Khris Middleton had 27 points, eight rebounds and seven assists in three quarters as Milwaukee breezed to a win at Minnesota.

Brook Lopez added 18 points and eight rebounds, Jrue Holiday pitched in 15 points and three steals, and the Bucks built a lead as big as 30 points early in the fourth quarter on the way to their second consecutive blow-out.

Warriors 147, Thunder 109: Stephen Curry scored 25 of his 42 points in the third quarter, and Golden State ran away to a win at Oklahoma City.

Curry went 8-for-8 from the field and made all six of his three-point attempts in the third quarter to post his high point total for a quarter this season. He made 11 of 16 three-pointers and 14 of 20 shots overall.

Cavaliers 103, Hornets 90: Taurean Prince scored a season-high 25 points with six three-pointers, Jarrett Allen had 15 points and eight rebounds in his first action since March 26 and Cleveland handed short-handed Charlotte its third straight loss at home.

Kevin Love added 17 points and 11 rebounds for the Cavaliers, who snapped a two-game skid.

Raptors 117, Spurs 112: OG Anunoby scored 22 points, Pascal Siakam had 20 points and 11 rebounds and short-handed Toronto beat visiting San Antonio.

Raptors rookie Malachi Flynn had a big fourth quarter, scoring eight of his 16 points in the period and finishing with seven assists. Khem Birch had 14 points and six rebounds in his first start for the Raptors.

Knicks 116, Pelicans 106: Julius Randle scored 32 points against his former team and New York clamped down defensively on Zion Williamson for a victory at New Orleans.

Alec Burks scored New York's first 11 points of the fourth quarter, added a crushing three and finished with 21 points for the Knicks, who've won four straight for the first time this season.

Magic 115, Bulls 106: James Ennis scored 22 points, Wendell Carter Jr. added 19 points and

12 rebounds, and Orlando snapped a six-game losing streak by winning at Chicago.

Zach LaVine scored 30. Nikola Vucevic had 29 points and 11 rebounds in his first game against the Magic since they dealt the two-time All-Star to the Bulls at the deadline.

Clippers 100, Pistons 98: Reggie Jackson sank a jumper with 2.3 seconds left against his former team, giving visiting Los Angeles its seventh straight victory.

The Clippers rallied from an 11-point deficit in the fourth quarter despite playing without several key players. Kawhi Leonard, Paul George, Serge Ibaka, Patrick Beverley and Marcus Morris were all out for Los Angeles.

Pacers 132, Rockets 124: Caris LeVert scored 27 points, Domantas Sabonis added 22 and Malcolm Brogdon fell just short of a triple-double as Indiana won at Houston.

Wizards 123, Kings 111: Russell Westbrook recorded his 170th career triple-double, Bradley Beal scored 31 points, and Washington ended its longest road trip of the season by beating Sacramento.

Nuggets 123, Heat 106: Nikola Jokic had 17 points, 11 assists and 10 rebounds for his 15th triple-double of the season to lead host Denver over Miami.

Zuccarello's four points help Wild put away Coyotes

Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. — Mats Zuccarello scored twice and Nick Bonino had a goal and two assists on Wednesday to lead the Minnesota Wild past the Arizona Coyotes 5-2.

It was the Wild's first game since the death on Sunday of 20-year-old Daunte Wright, a Black man fatally shot by police during a traffic stop. The Wild's game on Monday against St. Louis was postponed until next month, and

this game was moved to 1 p.m. local time.

Both of Zuccarello's goals came on Minnesota's resurgent power play, which converted all three of its opportunities in the game. The Wild have 12 power-play goals in their past seven games.

Zach Parise and Jared Spurgeon also scored and Cam Talbot made 28 saves for Minnesota, which beat Arizona for the fifth time in six games this season and

solidified its hold on third place in the West Division.

Avalanche 4, Blues 3: Mikko Rantanen and J.T. Compher each had a goal and an assist and visiting Colorado won its fourth straight.

Ducks 4, Sharks 1: Anthony Stolarz made 27 saves, Ryan Getzlaf scored his first goal in more than a month and visiting Anaheim completed a two-game sweep of San Jose.

Golden Knights 6, Kings 2:

Max Pacioretty and Tomas Nosek each had a goal and two assists, Marc-Andre Fleury made 21 saves and visiting Vegas beat Los Angeles.

Jets 3, Senators 2: Mathieu Perreault and Trevor Lewis scored third-period goals to rally visiting Winnipeg past Ottawa.

Flames 4, Canadiens 1: Mark Giordano had a goal and an assist, Jacob Markstrom stopped 26 shots and visiting Calgary beat Montreal.