

Air Force approves exemptions to vaccine

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Air Force became the second military service to approve religious exemptions to the mandatory COVID-19 vaccine, granting requests from nine airmen to avoid the shots, officials said Tuesday.

The nine approved so far represent just a tiny fraction of the more than 6,400 requested by Air Force troops, and they come as other service members are challenging the lack of religious exemptions in court cases. The Marine Corps is the only other military service to grant any religious accommodations, allowing three so far. The Army and Navy have not approved any.

The services have come under criticism for their failure to grant religious exemptions, with members of Congress, the military and the public questioning if the review processes have been fair. All together, the services have received more than 14,000 requests for religious exemptions.

Military leaders have argued that reli-

gious exemptions to any of the many vaccines troops are required to get have been very rare over the years.

Service members are required to get as many as 17 different vaccines, depending on where they deploy.

A federal judge in Texas granted a preliminary injunction last month, stopping the Navy from acting against 35 sailors for refusing on religious grounds to comply with an order to get the COVID vaccine.

Eight of the Air Force approvals came during the initial review process, and one was granted on appeal to senior Air Force leaders. So far, religious exemption requests from more than 3,200 airmen were denied, and another 3,200 are pending.

“The Department of the Air Force determined the service members’ accommodations could be supported with no impact to mission readiness,” the statement Tuesday said.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and military leaders have argued that the vaccine

is critical to maintaining military readiness and the health of the force. And all of the services have now either discharged personnel for refusing the vaccine, or put a system in place to do so.

The Marine Corps has discharged 469, the Air Force has discharged 179 and the Navy has discharged 118, according to data released in the last week. The number include active-duty personnel and entry-level recruits who were still in boot camp.

The Army has issued more than 3,000 formal letters of reprimand and fired six soldiers, but has not yet discharged anyone.

All the military services have said the exemption decisions are based not only on the individual request, but also on its impact on the unit, its mission and readiness, as well as the health and safety of other troops.

Those who get an exemption and are allowed to stay in the service may, however, see an impact on their jobs.

Army’s 2nd Cavalry Regiment set for deployment

By JOHN VANDIVER

Stars and Stripes

VILSECK, Germany — Strykers and combat support vehicles lined up at the Army airfield Wednesday as about 1,000 American troops prepared to head to Romania for an open-ended deployment meant to reassure allies worried about Russia’s military buildup around Ukraine.

The Vilseck-based 2nd Cavalry Regiment soldiers will remain in Romania to shore up NATO’s eastern flank as long as the mission requires, said Col. Joe Ewers, the regiment’s commander.

“We will assure our allies, deter our adversaries and stand ready to defend our alliance,” Ewers said.

The first soldiers from Vilseck have already arrived in Romania, Ewers said, and the rest of the contingent is expected to be there in the coming days.

Russia has moved an estimated 130,000 troops and an assortment of advanced weaponry near Ukraine’s borders in the north, east and south. It is also conducting

naval exercises in the Black Sea, which borders Ukraine.

Ukraine announced its own series of military drills beginning Thursday.

In all, 3,000 U.S. troops are being repositioned at the order of President Joe Biden in response to the Kremlin’s buildup.

The Pentagon has sent 1,700 soldiers from the 82nd Airborne to Poland to reinforce defenses. An additional 300 soldiers from Fort Bragg, N.C., have set up a headquarters task force in Germany to coordinate the paratroopers’ mission.

Meanwhile, the Army’s recently reestablished V Corps is overseeing the 2nd Cavalry Regiment’s deployment to Romania, Ewers said.

Although the security landscape in Europe has changed given events in and around Ukraine, the regiment’s mission in Romania is expected to resemble familiar exercises along NATO’s eastern flank, Ewers said.

“This type of mission is not new or different for the 2nd Cavalry Regiment,” he

said.

Rank-and-file troops, however, were not authorized to discuss their new mission. That was left to Ewers, the unit’s top officer.

Ewers said the 1,000 soldiers will operate from various military sites around Romania as they train with allies. The regiment will engage in “tough, realistic training,” he said.

The Stryker squadron being sent to Romania is comprised of lightly armored, medium-weight combat vehicles designed to be deployed on short notice and provide a flexible, mobile anti-tank formation.

In Romania, the United States already has 900 troops carrying out a wide range of missions. Much of their activity is centered on Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base, which hosts elements of the 1st Air Cavalry Brigade and the 1st Infantry Division’s 1st Armored Brigade Combat Team.

The air base will likely be an initial staging area for the incoming 2nd Cavalry Regiment.

UK envoy heads to Moscow on Ukraine

Associated Press

LONDON — Britain's top diplomat flew Wednesday to Moscow, seeking to defuse tensions raised by Russia's military buildup near Ukraine and warning that an invasion would bring "massive consequences for all involved."

"Russia has a choice here. We strongly encourage them to engage, de-escalate and choose the path of diplomacy," Foreign Secretary Liz Truss said ahead of departing on the first visit to Moscow by the United Kingdom's top envoy in more than four years.

Russia has massed over 100,000 troops near Ukraine's border and has launched military maneuvers in the region, but says it has no plans to invade its neighbor. It wants guarantees from the West that NATO not allow Ukraine and other former Soviet nations as members, that the alli-

ance halt weapon deployments there, and that it roll back its forces from Eastern Europe. The United States and NATO have flatly rejected these demands.

Western nations have said they will impose their toughest-ever sanctions on Russian businesses and individuals if Moscow invades Ukraine.

"Russia should be in no doubt about the strength of our response," said Truss, who will meet Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov during the two-day visit.

Truss urged Moscow to abide by its international agreements that commit it to respecting Ukraine's independence and sovereignty.

Western leaders in recent weeks have engaged in multiple rounds of high-stakes diplomacy in hopes of de-escalating the crisis. French President Emmanuel Macron held over five hours of

talks Monday with President Vladimir Putin in Moscow before meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kyiv the next day.

Macron said that Putin told him he would not initiate an escalation, but also acknowledged that it will take time to find a diplomatic solution to the biggest security crisis between Russia and the West since the Cold War.

He later flew to Berlin to meet with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Polish President Andrzej Duda, and they urged de-escalation by Russia and that it engage in a meaningful dialogue on European security.

On Wednesday, Spanish Foreign Minister José Manuel Albares visited Kyiv to meet with his Ukrainian counterpart, Dmytro Kuleba. Afterward, Albares reiterated that dialogue and de-escalation should be the priori-

ties. Kuleba urged more sanctions against Russia and said "there is a chance to resolve the crisis through diplomatic means."

Scholz is expected in Kyiv and Moscow on Feb. 14-15. He met Monday with President Joe Biden, who vowed that the Nord Stream 2 Russia-to-Germany gas pipeline will be blocked in the event of an invasion. Such a move against the pipeline, which has been completed but is not yet operating, would hurt Russia economically but also cause energy supply problems for Germany.

Japan has decided to divert some of its gas reserves to Europe amid growing concern over possible disruptions of supplies due to the crisis, said Japanese Economy, Trade and Industry Minister Koichi Hagiuda. The decision was made at the request of the U.S. and European Union.

CENTCOM nominee outlines terror threats, challenges

By COREY DICKSTEIN
Stars and Stripes

Monitoring the actions of terrorist groups in Afghanistan without U.S. forces on the ground has proven "extremely difficult," the Army general nominated to take U.S. Central Command's reins later this year told senators Tuesday.

"Over-the-horizon capability is extremely difficult, but not impossible," Lt. Gen. Michael "Erik" Kurilla, the commander of the Army's 18th Airborne Corps at Fort Bragg, N.C., said during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing to consider his nomination by President Joe Biden to the four-star post. "I think the biggest challenge for Afghanistan is that as a landlocked country, we rely on another nation ... to enter Afghanistan, and the distances required to fly [in-

telligence, surveillance and reconnaissance missions] are great."

Kurilla, if confirmed by the Senate, would become the CENTCOM commander responsible for operations in 21 countries across North Africa, the Middle East and central Asia, where U.S. troops last summer left Afghanistan after two decades of war. Kurilla would oversee continuing operations against Islamic State terrorists in Iraq and Syria, but he would also be charged with monitoring and containing the ISIS Afghan affiliate — ISIS-Khorasan — and al-Qaida in Afghanistan using the so-called "over-the-horizon" capabilities that employ military assets from afar.

Kurilla, who has vast experience fighting in the CENTCOM region as a past commander of the Army's elite 75th Ranger Re-

giment and 82nd Airborne Division, said intelligence-collecting drones are spending two-thirds of their time flying to and from Afghanistan, leaving little time for them to watch the actions of terrorist groups in the country governed since August by the Taliban. He told senators — if they confirm him — that he would look closely at the best options to ensure ISIS-K and al-Qaida remain incapable of attacking the U.S. homeland from Afghanistan.

Among those options, Kurilla said he would consider some "case-by-case" intelligence sharing with the Taliban, if it proved fruitful in targeting ISIS-K, a group that is considered a common enemy. He also said the United States should look to rebuild some of the "human-intelligence capability that was lost during the withdrawal" from Af-

ghanistan.

Kurilla also said during the Senate hearing that the U.S. was continuing talks with nations near Afghanistan in hopes of staging over-the-horizon capabilities, but he declined further comment because he has not yet been involved in such discussions.

Kurilla appeared poised for an easy nomination, garnering assurances of support Tuesday from Republican and Democratic senators, including the committee's top leaders.

Kurilla was scheduled to depart for a deployment to Europe on Tuesday immediately after his confirmation hearing to command 18th Airborne Corps troops sent to NATO allied countries in recent days amid heightening tensions with Russia over its buildup of more than 100,000 forces on Ukraine's borders.

Red Hill families: 'History has repeated itself'

BY NIKKI WENTLING
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Some service members and their families who became ill when jet fuel leaked into the water supply at Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam urged lawmakers Tuesday to fight for long-term medical care for the victims and require transparency from the Navy about the contamination.

Army Maj. Amanda Feindt and Jamie Simic, a Navy spouse, traveled from Hawaii to meet with members of Congress and their aides about the water contamination incident at the Red Hill Fuel Storage Facility. The women, as well as their husbands and young children, were all sickened late last year after jet fuel from the huge underground storage facility leaked into one of three wells that the Navy uses for its water distribution system on the Ha-

waiian island of Oahu.

"I'm here as a mother of two children who were poisoned on American soil by an American asset," Feindt said. "I believe the Navy failed our children. I believe it was negligent."

Feindt and her 4-year-old daughter ended up in a hospital emergency room in December, suffering from uncontrollable vomiting, diarrhea and dehydration. Feindt experienced abdominal pain so bad that it felt like she was in labor, she said. Her daughter has since been diagnosed with a neurological condition believed to be linked to the contamination.

Before they became sick, Feindt had been reassured by the Navy that her neighborhood on Ford Island was clear of contaminants, she said.

Feindt and Simic are among thousands of service members and their families affected by the

contamination. The water supply serves 93,000 residents on and near the base, many of whom were sickened. Thousands, including Feindt and Simic, were displaced from their homes. As of Tuesday, their families were still living in hotel rooms.

Simic, Feindt, and about 100 other military families affected by the leak are being represented by Just Well Law, a personal injury law firm that specializes in toxic exposure and military housing.

Feindt and Simic said they want lawmakers to force the Navy to disclose the list of contaminants in the drinking water. They also want all homes on and near the base to be tested and the results made available. In areas where homes can't be made safe, the houses should be condemned and the families relocated, they said.

In addition, the families are seeking the same relief granted

service members and families who were exposed to contaminated water at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, N.C., in the 1950s through the 1980s.

Feindt and Simic are asking that service members and families affected by the Red Hill leak receive health coverage under the Department of Veterans Affairs or Tricare, the military's health care program, for the same conditions covered for veterans and their dependents who were exposed to contaminants at Camp Lejeune. The conditions include adult leukemia, aplastic anemia, bladder cancer, kidney cancer, liver cancer, multiple myeloma, non-Hodgkin's lymphoma and Parkinson's disease.

"History has repeated itself," said Kristina Baehr, one of their attorneys. "And now the remedies that helped that situation can help here."

US hospitals begin to limp out of latest surge of COVID cases

Associated Press

As omicron numbers drop at Denver Health, Dr. Anuj Mehta is reminded of the scene in the 1980 comedy "The Blues Brothers" when John Belushi and Dan Aykroyd pile out of a battered car after a police chase.

Suddenly, all the doors pop off the hinges, the front wheels fall off and smoke pours from the engine.

"And that's my fear," said Mehta, a pulmonary and critical care physician. "I'm worried that as soon as we stop, everything's just going to fall apart."

Across the United States, the number of people in the hospital with COVID-19 has tumbled more than 28% over the past three weeks to about 105,000 on average, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

But the ebbing of the omicron surge has left in its wake postponed surgeries, exhausted staff members and uncertainty over whether this is the last big wave or

whether another one lies ahead.

"What we want to see is that the omicron surge continues to decrease, that we don't see another variant of concern emerge, that we start to come out of the other side of this," said Dr. Chris Beyrer, an epidemiologist at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health.

But he added: "We've been proven wrong twice already, with delta and omicron. So that adds to people's anxiety and uncertainty and sense of like 'When does this end?'"

Hospitals limped through the omicron surge with workforces that were already depleted after many staff members quit the profession. The remaining health care workers got sick in droves.

Now, many hospitals are still in crisis mode as they work to reschedule people whose hip replacements and even cancer and brain surgeries were put off during the omicron crisis.

Bill to lessen confusion on GI Bill eligibility transfer

BY NIKKI WENTLING
Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Legislation introduced Wednesday would simplify the paperwork required for service members to transfer their GI Bill eligibility to their dependents, which lawmakers believe will lead to fewer errors and more students able to access the benefits.

"Our service members and their families sacrifice greatly for our freedoms, and it isn't right that confusing paperwork can get in the way of a dependent receiving education benefits," said Sen. Tommy Tuberville, R-Ala., who introduced the bill, along with Sens. Mark Rubio, R-Fla., and John Thune, R-S.D.

Service members can transfer their GI Bill benefits to their spouses or children if they have at least six years of service and commit to an additional four years. The process to transfer benefits

includes filling out multiple forms with the Department of Veterans Affairs and Defense Department.

The forms require service members to fill out an "end date." This field refers to the date when the benefit is no longer available, but it has been the source of confusion. There are multiple examples of service members misunderstanding the end date and making errors, which has barred eligible dependents from benefits, Tuberville's office said. The issue has also been the cause for confusion in instances when a service member or veteran has died. In those cases, unused education benefits can be transferred to eligible dependents.

Under the legislation, DOD and the VA would be ordered to modify the language used on their forms to clarify what information is required. The change requires an act of Congress.

House passes US funding for 1 more month

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Federal agencies would be financed for another month under bipartisan legislation approved by the House on Tuesday, the latest emblem of Congress' persistent inability to finish its budget work on time.

Senate passage, expected perhaps next week, will send the bill to President Joe Biden for his signature. Without that, the government would deplete its spending authority on Feb. 18 and have to shutter most of its doors, an election-year embarrassment that neither party

wants, and it almost certainly will not happen.

The bill includes \$350 million to address leaking military fuel tanks that have contaminated drinking water near Hawaii's Pearl Harbor, and nearly 6,000 people have complained of illness. The military has moved around 4,000 families into hotels and flown in water treatment systems from the U.S. mainland.

Tuesday's House vote was 272-162. All but one voting Democrat supported the bill, but it was opposed by more than 3 in 4 Republicans, who often

use such votes to portray themselves as fiscal conservatives.

The short-term measure would fund government at last year's levels through March 11. Congressional leaders have said they hope that will give bargainers time to reach agreement on overall spending totals, and then write the 12 bills that spell out details on how agencies will spend that money.

Those bills finance everything from the armed forces to programs for education, the environment, veterans and public health. In addition, a portion of the 10-year, \$1 trillion infras-

tructure bill — about \$14 billion this year — can't be committed to projects until Congress approves a spending bill formally providing the money.

"No one wins" when Congress has to rely on short-term legislation to finance agencies piecemeal, said Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., who chairs the House Appropriations Committee. The top Republican on that panel, Rep. Kay Granger of Texas, said that while no one wants another stopgap bill, "the alternative is much worse" — a reference to a federal shutdown.

McConnell rebukes RNC, calls Jan. 6 'violent insurrection'

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell is criticizing the Republican National Committee for censuring two House GOP lawmakers investigating the "violent insurrection" on Jan. 6, 2021, saying it's not the party's job to police the views of lawmakers.

As former President Donald Trump has downplayed the attack by his supporters last year — the worst attack against the Capitol in two centuries — the RNC last week took a voice vote to approve censuring Reps. Liz Cheney, of Wyoming, and Adam Kinzinger, of Illinois, at the party's winter meeting in Salt Lake City. The two Republicans sit on a Democrat-led House committee that is aggressively investigating the siege and has subpoenaed many in the former president's inner circle.

The RNC resolution censuring Cheney and Kinzinger accused the House panel of leading a "persecution of ordinary citizens engaged in legitimate political discourse" — words that drew outrage from Democrats and firm pushback from several GOP senators. The rioters who broke into the Capitol through windows and doors brutally beat law enforcement officers and interrupted the certification of President Joe Biden's victory over Trump.

"It was a violent insurrection for the purpose of trying to prevent the peaceful transfer of power after a legitimately certified election from one administration to the next," McConnell said Tuesday. He said he still has confidence in RNC Chair Ronna McDaniel, but "the issue is whether or not the RNC should be sort of singling out members of our party who may have different

views than the majority. That's not the job of the RNC."

The dispute is the latest tug of war within the party over issues that McConnell and others see as politically beneficial and would prefer to talk about in an election year — inflation, for example — versus the discourse over the insurrection and Trump's election lies.

The censure was approved last week after an RNC subcommittee watered down a resolution that had recommended expelling the pair from the party. McDaniel denied that the "legitimate political discourse" wording in the censure resolution was referring to the violent attack on the Capitol and said it had to do with other actions taken by the House committee investigating the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection. But the resolution drew no such distinction.

US appeals court rules in Biden's favor on abortion referrals

Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Federally funded family planning clinics can continue to make abortion referrals for now, a federal court ruled Tuesday, in a setback for a dozen Republican attorneys general who have sued to restore a Trump-era ban on the practice.

The 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati denied a request by the 12 states to pause rules for the federal govern-

ment's family planning program while their case is heard. The states were eager to stop implementation before the next round of federal grants starts rolling out in March.

At issue are new rules from Democratic President Joe Biden's Department of Health and Human Services that returned the federal family planning program, called Title X, to how it ran under the Obama administra-

tion, when clinics were able to refer women seeking abortions to a provider.

Rules that Ohio Attorney General Dave Yost, who brought the lawsuit, wants permanently reinstated were put into place in 2019 under former President Donald Trump, also a Republican. One required federally funded family planning clinics to be physically and financially independent of abortion clinics. The

other required them to refrain from referring patients for abortions.

Yost argued the rules were intended as firewalls between family planning clinics, which can receive taxpayer funding, and their abortion services, which cannot. U.S. District Judge Timothy Black, however, said opponents centered their case on a policy disagreement, not a legal one.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Nun, 80, gets prison for \$835K school theft

CA LOS ANGELES — A Los Angeles nun and school principal who stole more than \$800,000 to pay for a gambling habit was sentenced to a year in federal prison.

Mary Margaret Kreuper, 80, admitted to stealing the money from 2008 to 2018 while she was principal at St. James Catholic School in the LA suburb of Torrance.

She pleaded guilty last July to one count each of wire fraud and money laundering

U.S. District Court Judge Otis D. Wright II also ordered Kreuper to pay back the school approximately \$835,000 as restitution, the Long Beach Press-Telegram reported.

Mysterious smell in city likened to animal corpse

MS HATTIEBURG — Residents said a mysterious smell — one that has lingered for months in past years — is back in downtown Hattiesburg.

The Hattiesburg American reported that its source is unknown. Some residents say the smell is like ammonia, with others comparing it to the scent of a rotting animal corpse.

Hattiesburg Mayor Toby Barker said city officials will continue in their quest to track down the source.

2 inmates found dead in county jail over 3 days

AL HUNTSVILLE — Two prisoners were found dead in the Madison County Jail over three days, au-

thorities said, but there was no indication the deaths were related.

A 48-year-old woman was founded unresponsive in a cell in what authorities described during a news conference as an apparent suicide. Neither jail workers nor paramedics could revive the woman, who had been jailed since Jan. 27 on a probation violation, officials said.

Two days later, officers found a 28-year-old man unresponsive in a cell, said Sheriff Kevin Turner. The man, who had been in jail about a day on two counts of murder related to a 2016 shooting in Huntsville, may have ingested drugs before being booked, authorities said.

Man charged in \$1M silver dollar scheme

SC COLUMBIA — A man was charged with scamming a friend he met at a dancing club in South Carolina out of more than \$1 million in an alleged scheme to buy silver dollars, The State reported.

Court documents show Clyde Anthony Murchison III was jailed on a federal wire fraud charge, the newspaper reported.

The victim told Murchison about \$26,000 in cash he had after selling property. In response, Murchison said his friend could make more money if he purchased silver dollars, melted the silver down and resold it for a higher price, according to a sworn statement.

The victim gave Murchison a check for \$1 million to pay for an order of Morgan silver dollars that were released by the U.S. Mint, documents showed. The man later grew suspicious after contacting a bank where the

coins were supposed to be delivered and contacted authorities.

Deaths of 28 alpacas at farm investigated

IN GOSPORT — Authorities are investigating the deaths of 28 alpacas at a southern Indiana farm where two dozen other animals, including llamas and horses, were found alive but severely malnourished.

Owen County sheriff's deputies and a veterinarian from the State Board of Animal Health who visited SuPaca Farms near Gosport on Jan. 28 to check on the welfare of the farm's animals found 28 dead alpacas, The Herald-Times reported.

After officers reported that the live animals on the property were in poor health, lacked food and water, and were severely malnourished, a judge granted a court order allowing authorities to seize seven alpacas, three llamas, nine dogs, three chickens and two horses from the farm.

2 arrested after drugs, money found at home

MN MINNETONKA — Charges were pending for two men who were arrested after nearly 400 pounds of marijuana and hundreds of THC vaping cartridges were seized at a Minnetonka home, authorities said.

Lt. Derek Schuldt, commander of the Anoka-Hennepin Narcotics and Violent Crimes Task Force, said he suspects other people were involved in the drug operation, so the investigation is ongoing.

Authorities said they seized 700 vaping cartridges, along

with 9 pounds of THC wax, more than 3 pounds of psychedelic mushrooms, 6 ounces of cocaine, 300 prescription pills and \$26,000.

Public properties fined over snow removal

MA BOSTON — Boston has issued thousands of dollars in fines to publicly owned properties for failing to remove snow and ice after the recent storm.

A city-owned building in Roxbury with offices for several city agencies was fined \$6,800 for 46 tickets, while the state-run Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority was fined \$2,400 for 18 tickets, the Boston Globe reported.

City inspectors issued 1,100 tickets and nearly \$103,000 in fines for all types of properties — commercial and residential — as of Sunday.

Woman arrested during smash-and-grab robbery

IL OAK BROOK — A 21-year-old woman was arrested during a smash-and-grab robbery at a suburban Chicago Neiman Marcus store.

Terri Collins, of Chicago, was charged with burglary and retail theft, the DuPage County state's attorney's office said.

Several people cut security wires off high-end coats in the Oak Brook store, grabbed coats and attempted to flee.

Collins was arrested after a security guard knocked coats and wire cutters from her hands, the state's attorney's office said. Additional coats were recovered outside the store.

— From wire reports

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Jacobellis wins gold in snowboardcross

Associated Press

ZHANGJIAKOU, China — When bad things happen at the Olympics, no one ever lets it go.

Nobody's learned that lesson the hard way more than Lindsey Jacobellis.

A full 16 years and a world removed from the day the American snowboardcross racer gave away the gold medal with a showboat move near the finish line, Jacobellis rode hard to the end and won it.

Instead of a blank stare and a look of shocked disbelief after taking silver in Italy, Jacobellis clenched her fists and pumped them to celebrate gold in China. She smiled wide and placed her hands over her heart. The victory Wednesday marked a remarkable climb back up an Olympic mountain that Jacobellis, now 36 and a seasoned veteran in this game, had every reason to detest.

Or leave behind.

"Some days, I really don't like it," she said. "Some days, it's very stressful and aggravat-

ing and there's anxiety through the roof. But when it all comes all together, it really makes it worth it."

It only felt fitting that Jacobellis, a five-time Olympian who has been humbled aplenty at the Games, made a breakthrough for a U.S. team that, until she showed up, could not seem to get anything right. Hours before her win, over on the Alpine course, Mikaela Shiffrin skidded out in the slalom to make her 0-for-2 at the Olympics. That opened the door for Jacobellis to flip the script and make some history, too.

She won America's first gold medal of the Beijing Olympics. She became the oldest U.S. woman to win a gold in Winter Games history. Also, the 16 years marked the longest gap between medals for any U.S. woman at the Winter Olympics.

Shiffrin's struggles aren't the only troubles the U.S. has had. Earlier in the week, two defending snowboard champions,

Red Gerard and Jamie Anderson, failed to medal in slopesstyle. Anderson took to social media and conceded her "mental health and clarity just hasn't been on par."

Jacobellis made her mistake when she was 20, back in a time when the mental health of Olympians wasn't much on the minds of media or anyone in the sports space.

On that day in Italy, she was far in the clear in the gold-medal race, but she bent her legs up and grabbed her board and gave a flashy little twist toward the grandstand. A method grab. It was a showy move saved for winning runs in a game where style trumps almost everything.

But Jacobellis fell.

A hot-dogger and a showoff, some critics labeled her. Got what she deserved, others said.

The woman who had gone into those Olympics as the quintessential star-in-the-making left as something else. Every four years when the Games returned, the story was reheated

and retold. Jacobellis made one final over those three Olympics. Never got back on the podium.

"I so vividly remember her little method off the jump and watching that gold medal slip out her fingers," Aussie rider Belle Brockhoff said. "She's copped so much (expletive) from the media and everything. For her to keep coming at it and not giving up is pretty inspirational."

The Olympics are only a small part of the game for snowboard racers. Since 2007, Jacobellis has amassed 23 World Cup victories and 45 podiums and has become a towering presence in her sport. Not surprisingly, this was a popular victory with the riders.

"She was already an example when I was young," said the silver medalist, 27-year-old Chloe Trespeuch of France. "I'm so happy for her. Even if my goal was also the gold, she really deserved it. She has been here for a very long time."

Shiffrin skis out again, going 0-for-2 in Alpine events

Associated Press

BEIJING — The first question posed to Mikaela Shiffrin as she met with reporters after her second consecutive quick exit from an Alpine skiing race at the Beijing Games was short, simple and to the point: What happened?

The complicated, thought-out, talked-out answers that followed entailed little analysis of her actual performance on skis — which lasted all of five seconds before things went awry in Wednesday's first run of the two-leg slalom, about half as long as the American stayed on course in Monday's first run of the two-leg giant slalom — and, in the end, boiled down to this: Shiffrin herself was not exactly sure what brought her to this point

or where she goes from here.

"I've never been in this position before," the two-time Olympic gold medalist said, tears dampening her cheeks, "and I don't know how to handle it."

What the shaken Shiffrin was certain of: "It feels like a really big letdown."

The 26-year-old from Colorado, who won the slalom at the 2014 Sochi Games and the giant slalom at the 2018 Pyeongchang Games, was the seventh racer out of the starting hut Wednesday on a course set by her coach, Mike Day.

She began losing her balance and teetering out of control just four seconds and four gates in, swerving too far as she veered to her right. The neon yellow handle of her

right ski pole scraped along the snow as she ended up way wide of the fifth gate.

Shiffrin went over to the side of the course, clicked out of her skis and plopped herself down on the ground, shaking her head, then resting it on her arms atop her bent knees. That will be the lasting image of this day — back in the U.S., NBC's coverage lingered on that shot of Shiffrin, drawing anger on social media from some viewers — and, perhaps, of these Olympics for someone who arrived in China as one of the biggest stars of any Winter Games sport.

"GS and slalom, those were my biggest focuses," she said. "So it really feels like a lot of work for nothing."

Other racers said the top

was not particularly slippery or difficult. Indeed, reigning slalom world champion Katharina Liensberger of Austria — who took the silver behind Wednesday's gold medalist Petra Vlhova of Slovakia — called it "a really easy course."

Vlhova, Shiffrin's top World Cup rival this season, soared from eighth place after the opening run to the victory with a combined time of 1 minute, 44.98 seconds. She claimed Slovakia's first Olympic Alpine medal ever.

In the closest Shiffrin came to offering an explanation for what went awry, she said she was trying to attack too much.

"I was pushing," she said, "and maybe it was past my limit."

Crosby scores 499th in Pens' win

Associated Press

BOSTON — Sidney Crosby scored his 499th career regular-season goal as the Pittsburgh Penguins rallied from a two-goal deficit and beat the Boston Bruins 4-2 on Tuesday night.

Danton Heinen scored twice in a span of 28 seconds in the second period and Crosby added another score with 7:07 left in the frame, moving him within one goal of joining Washington's Alex Ovechkin as the only active players to score 500 goals in the regular season.

Tristan Jarry stopped 43 shots for the Penguins, and Bryan Rust scored into an empty net with 1:29 left in the third as Pittsburgh snapped a four-game winless streak.

David Pastrnak scored twice for the Bruins, who outshot the Penguins 45-25 but couldn't get anything past Jarry after the first period. Jeremy Swayman finished with 21 saves.

"It wasn't the prettiest game by any stretch, but we've got a resilient group. We find ways to score goals and I think we're just a scrappy group," Pittsburgh coach Mike Sullivan said.

Devils 7, Canadiens 1: Michael McLeod scored twice and New Jersey won at Mon-

tréal to snap a seven-game losing streak.

The Devils also got goals from Dawson Mercer, Nico Hischier, Jesper Boqvist, Pavel Zacha and Tomas Tatar in his first game back in Montreal.

Brett Kulak had the Canadiens' lone goal.

Jon Gillies stopped 29 of 30 shots for New Jersey. Montreal's Cayden Primeau allowed seven goals on 34 shots.

Blue Jackets 5, Capitals 4: Boone Jenner scored his 19th goal with 44.4 seconds remaining and Columbus posted a wild victory at Washington.

Jenner scored less than two minutes after the Capitals' Tom Wilson tied the game on a 6-on-5 chance. The Blue Jackets rallied from an early 2-0 deficit.

Patrik Laine scored his 11th and 12th goals of the season, Trey Fix-Wolansky gave Columbus its first lead in his NHL debut and Adam Boqvist added a goal and an assist. Laine also assisted Jenner's winner, and Gustav Nyquist had two assists.

Elvis Merzlikins made 29 stops for the Blue Jackets.

Senators 4, Hurricanes 3: Brady Tkachuk snapped a 15-game scoring drought with a pair of goals, leading host Ottawa past Carolina.

Alex Formenton and Chris Tierney also scored, and Tim Stutzle chipped in with two assists for the Senators. Anton Forsberg stopped 42 shots.

Jets 2, Wild 0: Connor Hellebuyck made 27 saves and Mark Scheifele scored a power-play goal as host Winnipeg halted Minnesota's six-game winning streak.

It was Hellebuyck's third shutout this season and 27th of his career. The Wild hadn't been shut out this season.

Golden Knights 4, Oilers 0: William Karlsson and Reilly Smith each had a goal and an assist, and Laurent Brossoit made 28 saves for his third career shutout, leading visiting Vegas to its third straight win.

Brett Howden and Alex Pietrangelo also scored for the Pacific Division-leading Golden Knights.

Canucks 5, Coyotes 1: J.T. Miller had a goal and an assist and notched his 400th career point in host Vancouver's win over Arizona.

Elias Pettersson and Bo Horvat each added a goal and an assist for the Canucks. Connor Garland and Brock Boeser also scored, and defenseman Oliver Ekman-Larsson finished with three assists in his first game against his former team.

After his fall, White stomps way into halpipe final

Associated Press

ZHANGJIAKOU, China — After falling on his first attempt Wednesday, Shaun White hammered down a pressure-packed halfpipe qualifying run to make it through to the medal round of his fifth and final Olympics.

The three-time gold medalist fell on his signature trick on his first run — the Double McTwist 1260 — and was mired in 19th place. Each rider gets two tries and only their best score counts. The top 12 advance to Friday's final. White ended up in fourth place.

After a 50-minute wait following his fall, White returned to the top of the pipe and nailed the same run he'd tried before.

He stomped every landing and at the bottom tore off his goggles and let out a "Yeahhhh." He qualified be-

hind two-time silver medalist Ayumu Hirano, 2018 bronze medalist Scotty James and Hirano's Japanese teammate, Ruka Hirano.

"I can't tell you the relief I felt off that last hit," White said. "It was just the thrill and excitement to be going to finals."

Chloe Kim cheered White when he reached the bottom. She was on hand at the halfpipe after cruising through her own, far less dramatic qualifying round. She was perfect through her first trip down the halfpipe and finished in first place. In her second run, she fell while trying a trick she'd never attempted before, a switch backside 720.

"Oh, well," she said at the bottom, and playfully stuck out her tongue while she waited for a score that didn't matter.

Mitsuki Ono of Japan was

second in qualifying a day after appearing to be bothered by a hip ailment in training and in some discomfort. Cai Xuetong of China had the third-best score in qualifying, with Queral Castellet of Spain also in the mix.

The biggest surprise was the performance of American Maddie Mastro, who finished just outside of the top 12 that advanced to Thursday's final. She had been in the last spot but was bumped out by one of the final riders, Elizabeth Hosking of Canada.

"I was not really stoked on that (second run)," Mastro said. "I did my first three hits and they went well and the rest of the run, I don't know what happened. It just didn't happen but that's OK — on to the next."

White's big save prevented

another setback on what has become a rough Olympics on the mountain for the United States.

White came to Beijing after a bout with COVID-19, an ankle injury, a longer-than-expected journey through Olympic qualifying and a number of changes to his training schedule. But he made it to China with a cautious sense of optimism.

He is not considered a favorite and said he had a run he wanted to put down. Thanks to his clutch run in qualifying, he'll get that chance.

The 35-year-old was the top American in Wednesday's qualifiers, leading the way for Taylor Gold, who qualified eighth and Chase Josey, who snuck into the 12-man final in the last position on the last run of the day. Lucas Foster, a first-time Olympian, finished 17th.

Arkansas surprises No. 1 Auburn in OT

Associated Press

FAYETTEVILLE, Ark. — JD Notae scored 28 points and Arkansas used clutch foul shooting in overtime to knock off No. 1 Auburn 80-76 on Tuesday night.

The Razorbacks (19-5, 8-3 Southeastern Conference) hit 11 of 14 free throws in the final 1:52 of overtime in front of a raucous crowd at Bud Walton Arena.

Jabari Smith scored 20 points and Wendell Green Jr. had 19 for the Tigers (22-2, 10-1), who had won 19 straight since a double-overtime loss to Connecticut in November.

It's the first time an Arkansas team has beaten a No. 1-ranked team since 1984, against North Carolina.

The Razorbacks led by as many as 12 points in the first half before Auburn rallied within 28-25 at the break.

The Tigers took a 64-59 lead on a three-pointer by Green with under three minutes left. But Arkansas came back to tie it at 66 when Jaylin Williams scored underneath in the final

half-minute of the second half.

Auburn had the ball with 20 seconds left but could only get a long three-point try by Green at the buzzer.

In overtime, the Tigers took a 68-66 lead on a putback by Allen Flanigan, then later went ahead 70-69 when Dylan Cardwell picked up a loose ball in the lane and scored.

The Razorbacks scored the next seven points, all on foul shots by Williams and Notae. Williams finished with 13 points.

No. 3 Purdue 84, No. 13 Illinois 68: Jaden Ivey scored 26 points and Eric Hunter Jr. scored all nine of his points during a key run to start the second half as the host Boilermakers snapped the Fighting Illini's four-game winning streak.

No. 5 Kentucky 86, South Carolina 76: Oscar Tshiebwe posted his sixth straight double-double with 18 points and 14 rebounds and TyTy Washington scored 12 of his 14 points in the second half to lead the visiting Wildcats, who reached 20 victo-

ries in a season for the 13th time in 14 years.

No. 12 UCLA 79, Stanford 70: Johnny Juzang scored 23 points, including a momentum-changing four-point play, and Jaime Jaquez Jr. added 16 points to help the visiting Bruins beat the Cardinal.

No. 14 Wisconsin 70, No. 17 Michigan State 62: Johnny Davis had a game-high 25 points to lead the visiting Badgers to their second straight victory in East Lansing.

No. 15 Villanova 75, St. John's 69: Justin Moore scored 16 points on a sore ankle and the Wildcats held off a furious late charge by the Red Storm at Madison Square Garden.

No. 21 Southern California 74, Pacific 68: Boogie Ellis scored 13 points to help the host Trojans overcome playing without injured star Isaiah Mobley and beat the Tigers.

Santa Clara 77, No. 22 St. Mary's 72: PJ Pipes scored 21 points, and Jalen Williams had 18 points and 10 assists as the host Broncos beat the Gaels.

No. 24 Connecticut 80, No. 18 Marquette 72: Adama Sano scored 24 points and grabbed 15 rebounds, his fifth double-double of the season, to lead the host Huskies to a sweep of the season series with the Golden Eagles.

UNLV 78, Air Force 44: Bryce Hamilton had 24 points as the host Runnin' Rebels rolled past the Falcons.

Royce Hamm Jr. had 12 points and 16 rebounds for UNLV (14-10, 6-5 Mountain West Conference). David Muoka added 12 points and three blocks. Justin Webster had 11 points. Jordan McCabe had three points and 10 assists.

Ethan Taylor had 10 points for Air Force (10-12, 3-8), whose losing streak stretched to four games.

A.J. Walker was held to three points despite coming into the contest as the Falcons' leading scorer at 15 points per game. He hit 20% from three-point range (1-for-5).

Air Force defeated UNLV 69-62 on Jan. 20.

Celtics pull away from Nets for sixth straight victory

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Jaylen Brown and Marcus Smart each scored 22 points and the Boston Celtics rolled to their sixth straight win, beating the star-less Brooklyn Nets 126-91 on Tuesday night.

Without Kevin Durant, James Harden and Kyrie Irving, Brooklyn wasn't competitive in its ninth straight loss. Boston jumped to a 28-2 lead in a game that was never in doubt.

Harden missed his third straight game with left hamstring tightness. Durant remains out with a sprained knee ligament and Irving is still ineligible to play home games because he isn't vaccinated against the coronavirus.

Jayson Tatum scored 19 points

as the Celtics continued their strong stretch and moved past the Nets into seventh place in the Eastern Conference.

"I don't know how often or if we've ever been so good to start like that before, but it felt good," Brown said. "We knew some of those guys were out. We wanted to just take care of business early. We didn't want to play around and give them confidence and let them linger into the game."

Bucks 131, Lakers 116: Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 44 points on 17-for-20 shooting, and Bobby Portis had 23 points with five three-pointers in Milwaukee's victory at Los Angeles.

Suns 114, 76ers 109: Devin Booker scored 35 points and Chris Paul had 16 points and 12

assists to lead Phoenix to a win at Philadelphia for its NBA-high 44th victory.

Hawks 133, Pacers 112: Trae Young scored 34 points and host Atlanta regained its three-point touch, overwhelming trade-depleted Indiana.

Timberwolves 134, Kings 114: Karl-Anthony Towns had 25 points, Minnesota made 22 three-pointers and won at Sacramento for its fifth straight.

Magic 113, Trail Blazers 95: Cole Anthony scored 23 points and Orlando took a win at Portland hours after a trade ended guard CJ McCollum's nearly nine-year tenure with the Trail Blazers.

Mavericks 116, Pistons 86: Luka Doncic had 33 points with

11 assists while coming up three rebounds shy of his third consecutive triple-double, Jalen Brunson scored 21 points and host Dallas overwhelmed Detroit.

Grizzlies 135, Clippers 109: Ja Morant had 30 points and Jaren Jackson Jr. added 26 points, 11 rebounds and three blocks to lead host Memphis past Los Angeles.

Nuggets 132, Knicks 115: Rookie Bones Hyland scored 22 points, Nikola Jokic had 21 and host Denver sent New York to a fourth consecutive loss and the 10th in its last 12 games.

Pelicans 110, Rockets 97: Brandon Ingram scored 26 points and New Orleans won at Houston to extend its winning streak to four games.