

IT'S TOURNEY TIME

COLORADO OUT, NORTHERN COLORADO IN NCAA FIELD > PAGES 1B,4B
CUT OUT THE MEN'S NCAA TOURNAMENT BRACKET > PAGE 5B



KEYED IN



Fan-Ya Lin, 21, a junior at Weber State University in Ogden, Utah, plays Mozart's "Piano Concerto No. 23 in A Major" to win the Grand Junction Symphony Orchestra's 2010-11 Young Artist Competition on Sunday in Recital Hall at Mesa State College. She receives \$1,500 and the chance to perform with the symphony next season. See story, page 2A.

CHRISTOPHER TOMLINSON/The Daily Sentinel

17 Americans treated for radiation

By THE NEW YORK TIMES
NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON — U.S. Navy officials in Japan said early today that 17 military personnel who had been aboard three helicopters assisting in the earthquake relief effort in Japan had been exposed to low levels of contamination.

Cmdr. Jeff A. Davis, a spokesman for the U.S. 7th Fleet in Japan, said the Navy personnel — who apparently had flown through a radioactive plume from a damaged nuclear power plant — had been ordered to dispose of their uniforms and to undergo a decontamination scrub that had successfully removed radioactive particles.

"They received very, very low levels of contamination," Davis said in a telephone interview from Japan early today.

"It certainly is not cause for alarm," he said. "It is something we have to watch very carefully and make sure we are able to monitor, and to mitigate against this environmental hazard."

The Navy personnel aboard the three helicopters had received the equivalent of one month's natural background radiation from the sun, rocks or soil, he said.

The helicopter crew members had landed aboard the USS Ronald Reagan, a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier whose on-board sensors had indicated that the warship, too, had been exposed

U.S. helicopters, aircraft carrier pass through nuclear plume near Japan



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A SEA HAWK HELICOPTER launches Sunday from the flight deck of the aircraft carrier USS Ronald Reagan, which is off the coast of Japan to provide disaster relief and humanitarian assistance to Japan as directed in support of Operation Tomodachi.

to airborne contamination at very low levels.

The helicopter crew members were tested individually with hand-held radiation monitors.

The carrier and its strike group were operating about 100 miles northeast of the damaged power plant at the time, but the helicopters had flown closer to assist in relief missions near Sendai, the city that bore much

of the brunt of the tsunami after Friday's earthquake.

"As a precautionary measure, USS Ronald Reagan and other U.S. 7th Fleet ships conducting disaster-response operations in the area have moved out of the downwind direction from the site to assess the situation and determine what appropriate mitigating actions are necessary," Davis said.

But he stressed that the fleet remains "committed to our mission of providing assistance to the people of Japan."

Ever since an earthquake struck Japan on Friday, the authorities worldwide have been laying plans to map where radioactive plumes might blow and determine what, if any danger they could pose to people.

Blogs were churning with alarm.

But officials insisted that unless the quake-damaged nuclear plants deteriorated into full meltdown, any radiation that reached the United States would be too weak to do any harm.

Washington had "hypothetical plots" for worst-case plume dispersal within hours of the start of the crisis, a senior official said Sunday.

The aim, the official added, was "more to help Japan" than the United States, since few experts foresaw high levels of radiation reaching the West Coast.

For now, the prevailing winds over Japan were blowing eastward across the Pacific.

If they continue to do so, international stations for radioactive tracking at Wake or Midway Islands might detect radiation later this week, said Annika Thunborg, a spokeswoman for an arm of the United Nations in Vienna that monitors the planet for spikes in radioactivity.

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Parties cancel each other out in Statehouse

At legislative midpoint, 80% of Dems' bills killed, 84% of GOP's attempts fail

By CHARLES ASHBY
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DENVER — As the 2011 legislative session reached its midway point last week, the only thing lawmakers from both parties agreed they've been really successful at so far has been in killing each other's bills.

As of today, the start of the second half of the 120-day session, about 80 percent of the Democratic bills introduced in the Republican-controlled House had been killed in the first committee they were debated.

In the Senate, where Democrats have the majority, things weren't much different. There, about 84 percent of Republican bills were axed right away.

Those who lead the majorities in the two chambers said that shouldn't be viewed as a bad thing, but their minority counterparts said the opposite.

Senate President Brandon Shaffer, D-Longmont, and House Speaker Frank McNulty, R-Highlands Ranch, said seeing so many bills die so quickly is to be expected when power is split between the parties.

In the end, it will mean what does get passed will be fair to both sides because it forces more bipartisanship, the two men said.

The measures that have died include ideas both sides historically oppose, such as GOP bills to crack down on illegal immigration, or Democratic ideas aimed at increasing the number of people who can vote in elections.

"In a year when we've got significant budget issues and we have to focus on redistricting in the latter half of the session, I think it's a good thing," Shaffer said. "The lack of distracting bills frees us up to focus on what's really important in the last half of the session."

They said the split in party control has resulted in about 80 fewer bills being introduced this year compared to previous years, and that, too, frees lawmakers to focus on more crucial matters, they said.

The minority parties in the two chambers, however, didn't view the first half of the 2011 session quite as positively. Senate Minority Leader Mike Kopp, R-Littleton, and House Minority Leader Sal

Western Slope pols make some headway

By CHARLES ASHBY
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DENVER — Despite the number of bills that have been killed right out of the chute so far in the 2011 session, at least two local lawmakers had some success in getting their ideas passed.

Freshmen Reps. Don Coram, R-Montrose, and Ray Scott, R-Grand Junction, had bills signed into law so far this session.

For Coram, that was a measure to fix a poorly worded state law on how regional tourism boards are made up, which prevented multi-county boards

from being unnecessarily too big, and another to add a judge to the Montrose County Courthouse.

For Scott, it was a bill to help spur the housing market by allowing homeowners to finance their own sales.

Although the two have seen some defeats, they are fast earning reputations among their colleagues as legislators who know what they're doing.

"Both are very engaged, both are very intelligent, both just quite frankly get it," said Rep. Jerry Sonnenberg, R-Sterling, who works with both as chairman of the House

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District 51 online school passes pilot test, expands

By EMILY ANDERSON
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After one year as a pilot program, Grande River Virtual Academy officially will become a part of School District 51's permanent academic options this fall.

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15 apply for county administrator position

By MIKE WIGGINS
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Four months after trying and failing to agree on a new county administrator, Mesa County commissioners are giving it another go and plan to interview candidates next month.

The county is accepting applications through Friday. As of the end of the last week, the county had received 15 applications, Human Resources Manager Sandy Perry said.

The position announcement indicates the county is seeking applicants with master's de-

grees in public administration and at least six years of management experience. The annual salary ranges from \$104,084 to \$145,718, depending upon qualifications. It's the same salary range the county advertised last year after County Administrator Jon Peacock resigned.

Commissioner Janet Rowland said none of the applicants thus far is from the Grand Valley, although she said she talked to a few local residents who may be interested in the position.

See APPLY, page 8A >