

# Rumors Have Ammo Flying Off Shelves

BY MICHAEL VIRTANEN  
Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. — Gun enthusiasts fearful of new weapon controls and buying into rumor mills about government hoarding are purchasing bullets practically by the bushel, making it hard for stores nationwide to keep shelves stocked and even putting a pinch on some local law enforcement departments.

At a 24-hour Walmart in suburban Albany, the ammunition cabinet was three-fourths empty this week; sales clerks said customers must arrive before 9 the morning after a delivery to get what they want. A few miles away, Dick's Sporting Goods puts up a red rope after ammunition deliveries so buyers can line up early to get a number, averting races up the escalator to the gun counter. Both stores are limiting ammunition purchases to three boxes a day.

In mid-January, two days after New York became the first state to toughen laws post-Newtown, hunter and target shooter Mark Smith spent \$250 to stockpile ammunition, including \$43 for a brick of 500 .22-caliber bullets, commonly used for target shooting and hunting small game.

"I had a feeling there was going to be a huge ammunition shortage," said Smith, browsing shotgun shells this week at Dick's. "Especially .22s. It's probably the most popular round out there."

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MARK SMITH

Likewise, the .223 ammunition used in popular semi-automatic rifles is hard to find.

At Hunter's Haven, a strip-mall gun shop in the farming community of Rolesville, N.C., north of Raleigh, clerk Dean Turnage said ammunition is going out "as fast as we can get it in," even though new gun controls are not on the state's agenda.

The run started in November with President Barack Obama's re-election, followed by the mass shooting in December of children in Newtown, Conn., which led the president to launch an effort to strengthen federal gun controls and several states to tighten their laws.

Connecticut on Thursday became the latest to crack down as the governor signed a measure — effective immediately — that adds more than 100 firearms to the state's assault weapons ban, creates a dangerous weapon offender registry and institutes eligibility rules for ammunition purchases.

Hours before the law took effect, hundreds of customers streamed out of Hoffman's Gun Center in Newtown with guns and boxes of ammunition.

"The bad guys are going to get guns," said John

Power, 56, of Bristol, arguing the new law would not stop a troubled gunman.

The nation's 100 million firearms owners are driving the market for some 10 billion rounds annually, with demand and gun purchases both increasing the past several months, driven partly by fear that tougher laws will restrict the ability to buy firearms, said Lawrence Keane, whose National Shooting Sports Foundation is based in Newtown.

"There's a concern by firearms owners that this administration will pursue bans on products, bans on ammunition. ... It's not limited geographically to New York or anywhere else. It is nationwide," he said.

Some government critics attributed shortages to federal purchases of bullets, accusing officials of trying to hoard a billion rounds and disarm the populace.

"Department of Homeland Security and the federal government itself is buying up ammunition and components at such a rate, it's causing artificial shortage of supplies for the regular consumer," said Jesse Alday, a state corrections officer who was buying a couple of boxes of primers at Hunter's Haven.

"They're buying it up as fast as they can, for reasons they're not officially willing to admit or go into. ...

They're not willing to come up with any answers as to the reasons behind why they have enough ammunition on the U.S., on our own home soil, to wage a 25-year war," he said. "That's kind of strange."

# South Korea: North Korea Moved Missile To East Coast

BY SAM KIM AND HYUNG-JIN KIM  
Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — After a series of escalating threats, North Korea has moved a missile with "considerable range" to its east coast, South Korea's defense minister said Thursday. But he emphasized that the missile was not capable of reaching the United States and that there are no signs that the North is preparing for a full-scale conflict.

North Korea has been railing against U.S.-South Korean military exercises that began in March and are to continue until the end of this month. The allies insist the exercises in South Korea are routine, but the North calls them rehearsals for an invasion and says it needs nuclear weapons to defend itself. The North has also expressed anger over tightened U.N. sanctions for its February nuclear test.

Analysts say the ominous warnings in recent weeks are probably efforts to provoke softer policies from South Korea, to win diplomatic talks with Washington and solidify the image of young North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. Many of the threats come in the middle of the night in Asia — daytime for the U.S. audience.

The report of the movement of the missile came hours after North Korea's military warned that it has been authorized to attack the U.S. using "smaller, lighter and diversified" nuclear weapons. The reference to smaller weapons could be a claim that North Korea has improved its nuclear technology, or a bluff.

The North is not believed to have mastered the technology needed to miniaturize nuclear bombs enough to mount them on long-range missiles. Nor has it demonstrated that those missiles, if it has them at all, are accurate. It also could be years before the country completes the laborious process of creating enough weaponized fuel to back up its nuclear threats.

South Korean Defense Minister Kim Kwan-jin said he did not know the reasons behind the North's missile movement, and that it "could be for testing or drills."

He dismissed reports in Japanese media that the missile could be a KN-08, which is believed to be a long-range missile that if operable could hit the United States.

Kim told lawmakers at a parliamentary committee meeting that the missile has "considerable range" but not enough to hit the U.S. mainland.

The range he described could refer to a mobile North Korean missile known as the Musudan, believed to have a range of 3,000 kilometers (1,800 miles). That would make Japan and South Korea potential targets — along with U.S. bases in both countries — but there are doubts about the missile's accuracy.

The Pentagon announced that it will hasten the deployment of a missile defense system to the U.S. Pacific territory of Guam to strengthen regional protection against a possible attack.

Experts say North Korea has not shown that it has accurate long-range missiles. Some suspect that an apparent long-range missile unveiled by the North at a parade last year was actually a mockup.

"From what we know of its existing inventory, North Korea has short- and medium-range missiles that could complicate a situation on the Korean Peninsula (and perhaps reach Japan), but we have not seen any evidence that it has long-range missiles that could strike the continental U.S., Guam or Hawaii," James Hardy, Asia Pacific editor of IHS Jane's Defence Weekly, wrote in a recent analysis.

## Conn. Gov. Signs Sweeping Gun Restrictions

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — Gov. Dannel P. Malloy, who four months ago broke the news to shocked parents that their children had been slaughtered in a Connecticut elementary school, signed into law Thursday sweeping new restrictions on weapons and large capacity ammunition magazines similar to the ones used by the man who gunned down 20 child and six educators in the massacre.

Alongside family members of some of the victims of the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School, Malloy signed the bill hours after the General Assembly approved the measure to give the state some of the toughest gun laws in the country.

"This is a profoundly emotional day for everyone in this room," the governor said. "We have come together in a way that few places in the nation have demonstrated the ability to do."

In the hours after the shooting Dec. 14, as anxious family members gathered inside a firehouse and waited for news, Malloy told them their loved ones were not coming home. He said later that he didn't think it was right for the families to wait for the victims to be formally identified.

Now, Connecticut joins states including California, New York, New Jersey and Massachusetts in having the country's strongest gun control laws, said Brian Malte, director of mobilization for the Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence in Washington.

## Obama's Budget To Avoid Deep Medicaid Cuts

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama's budget next week will steer clear of major cuts to Medicaid, including tens of billions in reductions to the health care plan for the poor that the administration had proposed only last year.

Big cuts in the federal-state program wouldn't go over too well at a time that Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius is wooing financially skittish Republican governors to expand Medicaid coverage to millions who now are uninsured. That expansion in the states is critical to the success of Obama's health overhaul, which is rolling out this fall and early next year.

The president's budget is to be released next Wednesday.

Perhaps half the nearly 30 million people gaining health insurance under the law are to be covered through Medicaid. But the Supreme Court last year gave individual states the right to reject the expansion. A principal argument against the expansion in state capitals is that Washington cannot be trusted to keep its promise of generous funding for new Medicaid recipients.

In recent weeks, senior White House officials have gone out of their way to reassure activists that Medicaid will be protected in the budget.

## Thousands In West Bank Protest Deaths

JERUSALEM (AP) — Thousands of outraged Palestinians took to the streets of the West Bank on Thursday, joining funeral processions and demonstrations after two protesters were killed by Israeli troops and a Palestinian prisoner died of cancer in Israeli custody.

The unrest clouded an upcoming visit by U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry and underscored the difficult task he faces as he tries to restart peace talks in the coming months.

The demonstrations were among the largest in the West Bank in months, and came amid rising violence. But officials on both sides urged calm, and by nightfall, the situation appeared to be quieting down.

Israeli troops had been on heightened alert since Maysara Abu Hamdiyah, a 64-year-old prisoner, died Tuesday from throat cancer. The Palestinians have blamed Israel for not giving him proper treatment.

Tensions rose further Wednesday when two Palestinian youths were killed in the northern West Bank after throwing firebombs toward Israeli troops. In an apparent show of solidarity with Abu Hamdiyah, militants in the Gaza Strip fired rockets into Israel for three straight days, drawing Israeli retaliation, in the greatest challenge yet to a cease-fire reached in November.

## Lead Poisoning Toll Revised To 1 In 38 Kids

NEW YORK (AP) — More than half a million U.S. children are now believed to have lead poisoning, roughly twice the previous high estimate, health officials reported Thursday.

The increase is the result of the government last year lowering the threshold for lead poisoning, so now more children are considered at risk.

Too much lead can harm developing brains and can mean a lower IQ. Lead poisoning used to be a much larger concern in the United States, but has declined significantly as lead was removed from paint and gasoline and other sources.

The new number translates to about 1 in 38 young children. That estimate suggests a need for more testing and preventive measures, some experts said, but budget cuts last year eliminated federal grant funding for such programs.

Those cuts represent "an abandonment of children," said David Rosner, a Columbia University public health historian who writes books about lead poisoning.

"We've been acting like the problem was solved and this was a thing of the past," he added.

Lead can harm a child's brain, kidneys and other organs. High levels in the blood can cause coma, convulsions and death. Lower levels can reduce intelligence, impair hearing and behavior and cause other problems.

Most cases of lead poisoning are handled by tracking and removing the lead source, and monitoring the children to make sure lead levels stay down. A special treatment to remove lead and other heavy metals is used only for extremely high levels.

Often, children who get lead poisoning live in old homes that are dilapidated or under renovation. They pick up paint chips or dust and put it in their mouth. Other sources include soil contaminated by old leaded gasoline, dust from industrial worksites and tainted drinking water.

Lead has been banned in household paint since 1978 and was gone from gasoline by the late 1980s.

After lowering the standard, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention went back and looked at old blood tests from 1,653 children under 6 to determine how many would have lead poisoning under the new definition.

About 3 percent of them — or about 50 kids — had blood lead levels higher than the new threshold of 5 micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood. Using that result, CDC officials calculated that an estimated 535,000 young children have lead poisoning.

## A BIG THANK YOU



OLIVIER DOULIERY/ABACA PRESS/MCT  
First lady Michelle Obama hugs two school children that helped plant the White House kitchen garden Thursday in Washington, D.C.

# Jordan Aid To Rebels Raises Tensions With Syria

BY JAMAL HALABY AND ZEINA KARAM  
Associated Press

AMMAN, Jordan — Jordan tightened security along its border with Syria, doubling the number of soldiers as President Bashar Assad's regime warned Thursday the kingdom is "playing with fire" by allowing the U.S. and other countries to train and arm Syrian rebels on its territory.

The warning, coinciding with significant rebel advances near the border, plays into Jordanian fears that its larger neighbor might try to retaliate for its support of the opposition fighters.

The stepped up security also reflects the kingdom's fears that the chaos from Syria's 2-year-old civil war could lead to a failed state on its doorstep where Islamic militants have a free hand.

The Syrian warnings followed statements from U.S. and other Western and Arab officials that Jordan has been facilitating arms shipments and hosting training camps for Syrian

rebels since last October.

A front-page editorial in the government daily al-Thawra accused Amman of adopting a policy of "ambiguity" by training the rebels while at the same time publicly insisting on a political solution to the Syrian crisis.

Jordan is "playing with fire," state radio said.

"Jordan's attempt to put out the flame from the leaked information will not help as it continues with its mysterious policy, which brings it closer to the volcanic crater," al-Thawra said.

Over the years, Syria has accused Jordan of being America's "puppet" because of its strong alliance with the United States and a "spy" for Israel, with which Amman maintains cordial ties under a peace treaty signed in 1994.

A Jordanian security official said the kingdom had tightened security along its 230-mile (370-kilometer) border with Syria, including doubling the number of soldiers in the last two days, though he declined to disclose the size of the force.

He said Jordan was also hoping to receive one or two Patriot missile batteries, which the U.S. might temporarily pull out of the Persian Gulf to station on Jordan's northern border. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to give official statements to the media.

Jordan's chief of staff, Gen. Mishaal Zaben, said Jordan was installing more cameras, radar and sophisticated early detection equipment to help prevent smuggling and infiltrations across the border and assist Syrian refugees as they cross into Jordan. The equipment will "significantly bolster Jordan's defenses along the border with Syria," he said.

Still, Jordanian Information Minister Sameeh Maaytah said the political tension with Syria would not evolve into an all-out war.

"Syria must be aware that Jordan has no desire to meddle in its internal affairs whether by training rebel forces, or facilitating arms shipments to them," he added. "But Jordan must protect its interests, land, border and people."

# Ebert, Nation's Best-Known Film Critic, Dies At 70

BY CARYN ROUSSEAU  
Associated Press

CHICAGO — Roger Ebert had the most-watched thumb in Hollywood.

With a twist of his wrist, the Pulitzer Prize-winning critic rendered decisions that influenced a nation of moviegoers and could sometimes make or break a film.

The heavy-set writer in the horn-rimmed glasses teamed up on television with Gene Siskel to create a format for criticism that proved enormously appealing in its simplicity: uncomplicated reviews that were both intelligent and accessible and didn't talk down to ordinary movie fans.

Ebert, film critic for the *Chicago Sun-Times* since 1967, died Thursday at the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago, two days after announcing on his blog that he was undergoing radiation treatment for a recurrence of cancer. He was 70.

"So on this day of reflection I say again, thank you for going on this journey with me. I'll see you at the movies," Ebert wrote Tuesday on his blog.

Despite his wide influence, Ebert considered himself "beneath everything else a fan."



LIONEL HAHN/ABACA PRESS/MCT  
Roger Ebert, the Pulitzer Prize-winning movie critic for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, has died Thursday, April 4, 2013, according to a family friend. He was 70 years old. Here, Ebert attends the IFP Independent Spirit Awards in Santa Monica, California, on March 22, 2003.

"I have seen untold numbers of movies and forgotten most of them, I hope, but I remember those worth remembering, and they are all on the same shelf in my mind," Ebert wrote in his 2011 memoir titled "Life Itself."

After cancer surgeries in 2006, Ebert lost portions of his jaw and the ability to eat, drink and speak.

But he went back to writing full time and eventually even returned to television. In addition to his work for the *Sun-Times*, he became a prolific user of social media, connecting with hundreds of thousands of fans on Facebook and Twitter.

Ebert's thumb — pointing up or down — was his trademark. It was

the main logo of the long-running TV shows Ebert co-hosted, first with Siskel of the rival *Chicago Tribune* and — after Siskel's death in 1999 — with *Sun-Times* colleague Richard Roeper. A "two thumbs-up" accolade was sure to find its way into the advertising for the movie in question.

The nation's best-known movie reviewer "wrote with passion through a real knowledge of film and film history, and in doing so, helped many movies find their audiences," director Steven Spielberg said. His death is "virtually the end of an era, and now the balcony is closed forever."

In early 2011, Ebert launched a new show, "Ebert Presents At the Movies." The show had new hosts and featured Ebert in his own segment, "Roger's Office." He used a chin prosthesis and enlisted voice-over guests or his computer to read his reviews.

Fans admired his courage, but Ebert told The Associated Press that bravery had "little to do with it."

"You play the cards you're dealt," Ebert wrote in an email in January 2011. "What's your choice? I have no pain. I enjoy life, and why should I complain?"