

Gunman holds schoolchildren, teachers hostage

TUSCALOOSA, Ala. — A gunman who said he wanted to help the homeless held more than 30 children and two teachers hostage at a private school here Tuesday.

"There are people on the streets who don't have a place to sleep or anything to eat. I'm doing this for them," the slightly built, gray-bearded gunman said as he held a rifle in a hallway of West End Christian School. "This is a political act, not a criminal act."

The gunman, who did not give his name, made his comments to reporters several hours after invading the school's elementary division

building and taking about 80 children hostage along with four teachers and an assistant.

The gunman sent a request for reporters to enter the school building and hear his case to help "get my message out." Nine children were released by the gunman after Associated Press reporter Hoyt Harwell entered the building and heard the man's statements.

Earlier, the gunman had freed about 40 of the initial hostages, with the freed children walking across a street in intermittent heavy rain to safety.

The remaining hostages included teachers

Judy Dunn, who is pregnant, and Mary Alice Blanton. The teachers and children could not be seen by Harwell, who was in a hallway while the gunman, with the rifle pointing above Harwell's head, stood in a doorway of one of the classrooms holding hostages. The children were quiet as the gunman spoke.

The governor sent the gunman a taped message, but its contents were not disclosed, said Hunt spokesman Terry Abbott.

"It's a real critical situation, and the less we say, the better," Abbott said.

"All I want is proof the governor will do

something," the gunman said. "They're wasting my time. The kids want out and I want out."

The gunman, who appeared to be in his 40s, said at another point that he wanted "immunity and a pardon."

Police said two men wearing ski masks and carrying at least one rifle invaded the school about 8:40 a.m., shortly after class began. Police Lt. David Hartin said about four hours after the school siege started, one of the two men surrendered to police, who did not release the names of the two.

Civil rights leader arrested in Alabama

MONTGOMERY, Ala. — Law officers arrested Alabama NAACP President Thomas Reed and 10 other black leaders on Tuesday when they tried to climb a fence around the Capitol to take down the confederate battle flag flying over the dome.

Reed, a state representative from Tuskegee, led a group of several dozen blacks to a driveway gate where Reed talked to state troopers for almost 20 minutes before attempting to climb the 8-foot high fence.

"I consider myself not violating the law of this state," Reed said.

After officers grabbed by the collar and pulled him down from the

fence, other members of his group, among them National NAACP board member Emmett Burns, attempted to climb over but were also restrained.

"We are under arrest," state Rep. John Rogers of Birmingham said as he entered the bus. The charges were not immediately known.

Earlier, as crowds had gathered for the march sponsored by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, local and state law enforcement officers set up barricades and confiscated an ax handle.

Reed contends the flag represents racism and oppression and said that if

it was not taken down voluntarily he planned to "enter the Capitol grounds and climb to the top of the state Capitol dome and remove the Confederate battle flag."

He said the banner is resented by blacks and "better-thinking white people."

The NAACP also is campaigning to bring down Confederate battle flags at statehouses in Alabama and South Carolina, as well as remove Confederate flags from the designs of the Georgia and Mississippi state flags.

Capitol security police were under orders from Gov. Guy Hunt not to allow anyone to reach the Capitol.

Key index falls for third straight month

WASHINGTON — The government said Tuesday its chief economic forecasting gauge fell for a third consecutive month in December, the traditional, but no infallible, signal of an impending recession.

While some economists said the three downturns were indeed foretelling an end to the record five-year peacetime expansion, other analysts disagreed, contending that 1988 will feature slower growth but no outright downturn.

The Commerce Department's Index of Leading Economic Indicators has taken on added significance since the record 508-point decline in stock prices which occurred on Oct. 19.

The 0.2 percent December decline in the index followed a sharp 1.2 percent November drop, which had been the biggest setback in more than six years, and a smaller 0.1 percent decrease in October.

Since the leading index was created in 1948, it has fallen for three

months a total of 12 times. In eight of those instances, a recession followed. The other four times economic growth slowed but there was no recession.

The last time the index declined three months in a row was from June through August in 1984. No recession followed, although the economy entered a two-year period in which growth slowed as a soaring trade deficit robbed American manufacturers of sales.

Some economists insisted that the leading index was signalling an actual recession, which they said had been triggered by a loss of consumer confidence after the collapse of stock market prices.

"The question now is not whether we are in a recession, but how long and how deep it will be," said Irwin Kellner, chief economist of Manufacturers Hanover Trust.

Michael Evans, head of a Washington forecasting firm, said he also

believed the recession has begun, noting a second economic report Tuesday which showed that sales of new homes fell in December for the second consecutive month. The housing industry is often one of the first sectors to show weakness in an economic downturn.

The Commerce Department report said that home sales fell 6.2 percent in December, the biggest setback in seven months, with the weakness concentrated in the Northeast.

The Reagan administration, however, downplayed the significance of the leading index. Beryl Sprinkel, the president's chief economic advisor, told reporters that the administration had no intention of changing its forecast of continued economic growth in 1988.

The administration's 2.4 percent GNP forecast is the most pessimistic government outlook since 1981, but it is still above the consensus forecast of many private analysts.

In Brief

Hidden staffer kept police informed during siege

LUMBERTON, N.C. — When heads were counted during the hostage siege at The Robesonian newspaper, reporter Raymond Godfrey was nowhere to be found. He had slipped away during the confusing early minutes and had hidden in a darkened office.

During the next 10 hours Godfrey would become a vital link to Gov. Jim Martin's office, which was negotiating the release of 17 people taken hostage Monday by two armed American Indians who said they were protesting the death of a black jail inmate.

Hostages were released throughout the day until the last seven were freed and Eddie Hatcher, 30, and Timothy Jacobs, 19, members of Tuscarora faction of the Lumbee Indians, surrendered at 8 p.m.

Curtis bill stays with appropriations committee

An attempt to refer LB1042, providing for the continuation of the College of Technical Agriculture at Curtis failed on the floor of the Legislature Tuesday.

Sen. Jim McFarland of Lincoln, a member of the Education Committee, sought to have that bill moved from the Appropriations Committee to the Education Committee because, "it specified a mission" and that "clearly make it an education issue."

Bill for uniform school opening date sent to floor

The Education committee struck a compromise, then sent to the floor of the Legislature a bill that would establish a uniform opening date for the state's public schools.

As amended, LB841 would allow schools to open before Sept. 1 beginning in 1990. The original bill — sponsored by Sens. David Bernard-Stevens of North Platte and Stan Schellpeper of Stanton — tied the opening date to Labor Day.

Proponents have said the bill is designed to benefit the tourism industry in Nebraska. They say families could use the Labor Day weekend for vacations. And that, they say, would increase revenue and taxes that could help finance education.

Reagan attempts to salvage aid

WASHINGTON — President Reagan made a last-ditch effort to salvage his \$36.2 million aid package for the Contra rebels on Tuesday by promising to release money for arms and ammunition only if Congress agrees.

In an Oval Office address shunned by three major television networks, Reagan argued that Wednesday's vote in the House amounted to nothing less than "win or lose for peace and freedom. It is yes or no to America's national security."

"Our support is needed now — tomorrow will be too late," Reagan said, pleading support for the Contras' battle against the leftist government of Nicaragua.

It was unclear whether Reagan's last-minute maneuver would sway those undecided about Wednesday's crucial vote. Prior to the evening speech, Democratic leaders had said the president was likely to lose.

"I think there's going to be a bipartisan group tomorrow against this proposal," said House Majority Leader Thomas Foley, D-Wash.

But Reagan argued that the Contras represented the last hope to prevent the spread of communism in Central America and must not be abandoned.

"If we cut off aid to the freedom fighters, then the Sandinistas can go back to their old ways," Reagan said.

Initially, Reagan proposed that the plan's \$3.6 million for weapons would be held back until at least March 31. It would be released only if he found that no cease-fire had been achieved and the Sandinistas weren't abiding by their promises for democratic reform.

Corrections

An article on a public hearing for LB890 in the Jan. 26 issue of the Daily Nebraskan misquoted Rosalee Yeaworth, dean and professor of the College of Nursing at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Yeaworth testified that associate-degree education in nursing programs most appropriately belongs in community colleges, and that a student who earns an associate degree rather than a licensed practical nursing program has transferable college credit and can build upon that degree for a higher one.

Yeaworth cautioned that programs need to be accredited by the National League for Nursing for credit to be transferable.

Yeaworth's name also was misspelled in the article.

A Jan. 29 Daily Nebraskan article on Dean Battiatto contained an error. While Battiatto was quoted correctly, after checking a local bookstore the DN confirmed that Jerry Lucas, not Jerry West, co-wrote "The Memory Book."

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Early spring is on the way

PUNXSUTAWNEY, Pa. — Those dreary days of winter got you down? Don't despair, spring is just around the corner if you believe Punxsutawney Phil, the weather-forecasting groundhog who predicted an early thaw Tuesday for only the ninth time in 101 years.

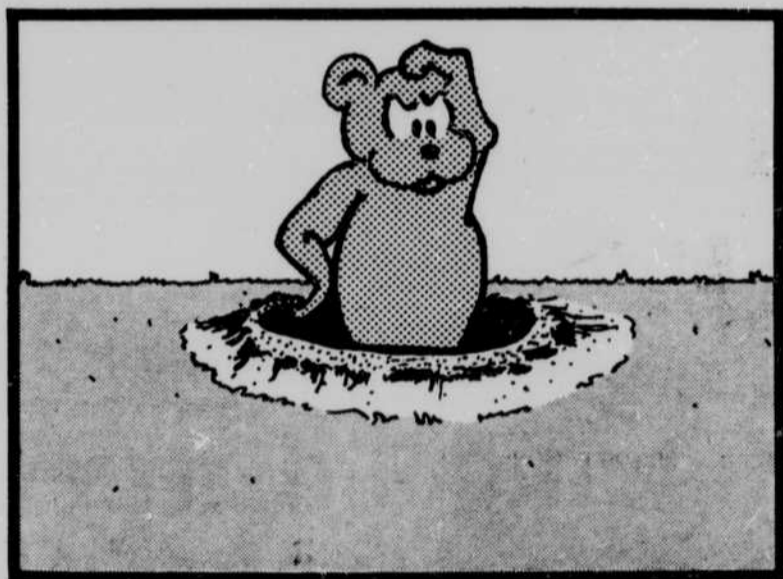
At sunrise, the woodchuck was whisked out of his luxurious burrow in a muddy clearing atop Gobbler's Knob and looked about at a crowd of reporters, photographers and several hundred Groundhog Day celebrants. But he failed to see his shadow.

According to Groundhog Day tradition, if a groundhog sees its shadow after crawling out of its burrow, six weeks of winter will follow. If it doesn't, spring will arrive early.

Phil's fame has given rise to furry forecasters elsewhere, who delivered a split verdict Tuesday.

In Quarryville, Pa., Octarao Orphie saw his shadow at 7:11 a.m. The woodchuck crawled out of his burrow at the Slumbering Groundhog Lodge, spotted his shadow, then went back inside to keep warm during predicted cold days ahead, according to his supporters.

A groundhog named Jimmy in



John Bruce/Daily Nebraskan

Sun Prairie, Wis., also saw his shadow Tuesday morning.

But Buckeye Chuck, Ohio's official groundhog, along with General Lee of Atlanta, New York City's Woody the Woodchuck, and Dunkirk Dave of Dunkirk, N.Y., agreed with Phil.

West Virginia's groundhogs were indecisive. Concord Charlie saw his shadow, but a grouchy French Creek Freddie finally emerged to rain, a gray sky and no shadow.

Folks in Punxsutawney, a western Pennsylvania mountain com-

munity of 8,000, scoff at all of Phil's imitators, no matter what their forecasts.

"Phil is the only true weather forecaster," said James Means, president of the Punxsutawney Groundhog Club and leader of its "inner circle," a group of about a dozen prominent businessmen who decide Phil's prediction in advance.

The group took Phil from his year-round home at the town library and placed him inside the burrow several hours before dawn. They plucked him out at the first light of day in a steady, cold rain.