

BRIEFLY

Putin praises Trump as ‘bright and talented’

MOSCOW (AP) — In Vladimir Putin’s view, Donald Trump is “bright and talented.” But as much as those words sound overtly like praise, there are some murky nuances.

The most unequivocally favorable part of the comments the Russian leader made Thursday to a scrum of reporters after his annual year-end news conference was about the Republican presidential aspirant’s claims that he wants to improve relations with Russia.

“He says that he wants to move to another, closer level of relations. Can we really not welcome that? Of course we welcome that,” Putin said.

Trump hasn’t given details about he would go about achieving that, relying instead on his fireproof self-regard.

“I think that I would probably get along with him very well,” Trump said in an October interview with CBS.

Putin “does not like Obama at all. He doesn’t respect Obama at all. And I’m sure that Obama doesn’t like him very much,” Trump had said.

Russia-U.S. relations have hit a particularly low point during the Obama administration, with the Kremlin persistently alleging that Washington’s pressure on Moscow over human rights and the sanctions imposed over Crimea and the conflict in eastern Ukraine are a cover for fomenting unrest aimed at driving Putin out of office.

House OKs tax-cut package, first leg of year-end budget

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans overwhelmed divided Democrats to whisk tax breaks for businesses, families and special interests through the House on Thursday as Congress sped toward final votes on a year-crowning budget accord that will also bankroll the government in 2016.

The tax measure, approved 318-109, includes political coups for both parties. More than 50 expiring tax cuts will be extended with more than 20 becoming permanent, including credits for companies’ expenditures for research and equipment purchases and reductions for lower-earning families and households with children and college students.

“Finally with this tax bill, families and businesses are going to have the long-term certainty that they need instead of scrambling year after year to find out what’s next,” declared House Speaker Paul Ryan, R-Wis.

Ryan, who just six weeks ago succeeded the deposed former Speaker John Boehner, all but claimed the bill’s passage as a personal triumph, citing it as an example of his drive “to get our House back on track.”

The Senate aimed to approve the tax bill Friday.

Both chambers also planned Friday votes on the second leg of the budget compromise, a \$1.1 trillion measure financing government, after which Congress was ready to adjourn until January.

Iran: No agreement seen in key issues before Syria talks

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Iran’s foreign minister said Thursday there “seems to be no agreement” on two key issues just hours before the latest international conference on Syria is held Friday morning in New York.

Mohammad Javad Zarif told The Associated Press that his country has seen “no lists we can agree upon” of Syrian opposition groups that should be included in peace negotiations set to begin by Jan. 1, or of Syrian groups that should be considered terrorist organizations instead.

“Card-carrying members of al-Qaida do not satisfy the conditions that we set for members of the opposition,” Zarif told reporters, ruling out any affiliates of the extremist group. “The opposition should be serious, and it should be inclusive.”

Zarif also said “we still don’t know” if there will be any concrete progress in the talks that are aimed at bringing an end to Syria’s conflict. Iran, a top Syria ally, will attend.

Russia and the United States are leading the talks, but Russia’s ambassador to the U.N. told reporters that he sees attempts to “undercut” the communiques that have been agreed upon in the Syria discussions so far.

Exec who jacked up lifesaving drug price is arrested

NEW YORK (AP) — A boyish-looking entrepreneur who became the new face of corporate greed when he jacked up the price of a lifesaving drug fiftyfold was led away in handcuffs by the FBI on unrelated fraud charges Thursday in a scene that left more than a few Americans positively gleeful.

Martin Shkreli, a 32-year-old former hedge fund manager and relentless self-promoter who has called himself “the world’s most eligible bachelor” on Twitter, was arrested in a gray hoodie and taken into federal court in Brooklyn, where he pleaded not guilty. He was released on \$5 million bail.

If convicted, he could get up to 20 years in prison. He left court without speaking to reporters. His attorneys had no immediate comment.

Online, many people took delight in his arrest, calling him a greedy, arrogant “punk” who gave capitalism a bad name and got what was coming to him. Some cracked jokes about lawyers jacking up their hourly fees 5,000 percent to defend him in his hour of need.

Prosecutors said that between 2009 and 2014, Shkreli lost some of his hedge fund investors’ money through bad trades, then looted Retrophin, a pharmaceutical company where he was CEO, for \$11 million to pay back his disgruntled clients.

Shkreli “engaged in multiple schemes to ensnare

ROUND-UP: Sen. Hansell, Rep. Barreto added their accolades

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Canyon, also had much to celebrate this night. Next season will mark the show’s 100th year since its first official performance in 1916 near Southwest Third and Emigrant. Recently, an iconic pair of Happy Canyon performers — rider Bryson Bronson and a paint horse named Chinook, owned by trainer Rusty Black — entertained a National Finals Rodeo audience in Las Vegas as they displayed the flag during the national anthem before Saturday night’s competition.

Black mingled in the Roy Raley Room Thursday. So did Pendleton Round-Up Arena Director Dave O’Neill and Livestock Director Randy Bracher, who spend much of the year scouting, gathering intelligence and finally selecting rough stock for the four days

of Round-Up. Their efforts ultimately drew the PRCA’s bucking stock award.

Many in the cowboy hat and Wrangler-clad crowd sidled over to ogle the ornate Rodeo of the Year buckle and the bronze Remuda trophy of five horses.

Speakers took turns standing behind the microphone and praising the iconic rodeo. Round-Up President Bill Levy led off, talking first about this month’s PRCA Convention where the best rodeo award was given.

“At what can only be described as the Academy Awards for the rodeo world, the Pendleton Round-Up — your rodeo — won the top awards,” Levy said.

At the National Finals Rodeo which followed, he said, the Pendleton brand appeared everywhere.

“Pendeton is held in such high regard and when

people find out you are from Pendleton, they are quick to tell you it has always been their dream to come here,” Levy said. “I personally had three people tell me it was on their bucket list.”

Plenty of glowing adjectives describing the Round-Up and Happy Canyon popped up in letters sent by dignitaries and read to the crowd. Gov. Kate Brown called the rodeo “a revered institution.” Sen. Jeff Merkley, D-OR, described the event as “a treasure” and “the best American rodeo.”

Sen. Bill Hansell, R-Athena, and Rep. Greg Barreto, R-Cove, added their accolades. Pendleton Mayor Phillip Houk and Umatilla County Commissioner George Murdock read separate proclamations honoring the rodeo, its organizers and volunteers.

Levy drew a laugh when he asked Houk, “Does that

mean we don’t have to pay parking tickets?”

The crowd cast their eyes at several television to watch some visual highlights of the year. Cowboys floated ropes around steers’ necks or rode brones and bulls in the trailer for a slow-motion documentary billed as a musical portrait of the Pendleton Round-Up by filmmaker Sufjan Stevens. Other footage showed Bronson and Chinook carrying flags at the NFR and also the Federation Equestre Internationale World Cup, an international dressage competition.

Levy summed up the sentiment of the night with this remark.

“Pendleton is truly the greatest rodeo in the world and we now have the awards to prove it.”

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