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Killing at UGA fuels immigration debate



Students gather Monday in Athens to pay tribute to two students who died last week on the University of Georgia campus, including Laken Riley, 22, whose body was found near a popular trail. Authorities charged Jose Antonio Ibarra, 26, who entered the United States illegally in 2022, in Riley’s killing. NELL CARROLL FOR THE AJC

Biden, Trump to visit border amid renewed call for tougher policies.

By Greg Bluestein
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The killing of a nursing student on the University of Georgia’s campus has turned into a new flashpoint in the national debate over illegal immigration that immediately factored into the 2024 election and could lead to significant policy shifts at the state level.

Former President Donald Trump and President Joe Biden will travel to the U.S. border with Mexico today in trips announced shortly after the death of Laken Riley, 22, whose body was found near a popular trail shortly after she went for a run.

Authorities charged Jose Antonio Ibarra, 26, in Riley’s killing. Federal officials say Ibarra entered the U.S. illegally in 2022 and accuse him of bludgeoning her to death and then “dragging the victim to a secluded area.”

The killing brought renewed attention to immigration, a theme that Trump has hammered Biden over throughout his comeback bid. Trump, the likely GOP presidential nominee, called Ibarra an “animal” and highlighted his promise to shut down the border if he’s elected to another term.

The White House, meanwhile, called for Riley’s killer to be “held accountable” and

Immigration continued on A11

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» Demonstrators disrupt mayor’s talk, A3
» Veteran prosecutor to lead case, A11



Immigrants and advocates worry that an arrest in the death of Laken Riley, a nursing student killed on the UGA campus last week, will reflect badly on others from Venezuela. NELL CARROLL FOR THE ATLANTA JOURNAL-CONSTITUTION

‘Not fair’: Venezuelans in Georgia fear backlash

By Lautaro Grinspan
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Klinsman Torres is a migrant from Venezuela currently living and working in metro Atlanta. He unlawfully crossed the U.S.-Mexico border in August 2022 – just weeks before countryman Jose Antonio Ibarra did the same, according to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

On Feb. 23, Ibarra became a nationally known figure, after being charged with kidnapping and murdering a nursing stu-

dent at the University of Georgia who had gone out for a jog. Laken Riley, the victim, was 22. Her death is believed to be the first homicide on campus in nearly 30 years.

Torres says the Athens killing – and the bright spotlight it has placed on border policy – have loomed large in recent conversations with fellow Georgia-based Venezuelans. They are worried that inflammatory rhetoric around immigrants and immigration could reverse

Immigrants continued on A11

Economic slowdown forecast but no recession

High borrowing costs hurting Georgia businesses, consumers.

By Michael E. Kanell
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Rajeev Dhawan, director of the Economic Forecasting Center at Georgia State University, says the state’s economy will avoid a recession this year but will slow significantly before accelerating in 2025.

Despite buffeting from high interest rates, lenders’ caution and some corporate cost-cutting, Georgia’s economy will avoid a recession this year but will slow significantly before accelerating in 2025, according to the quarterly prediction by the Georgia Economic Forecasting Center.

The state will add 37,400 jobs in 2024, less than half the expansion of last year, said Rajeev Dhawan, director of the center.

“The economy is weaker than it appears,” he said at Tuesday’s session, conducted via the internet.

While unemployment is low, signs of a slowdown can be seen in the decisions made by employers now, he said. “Investment today is job growth six to nine months down the road. Business investment is trending down, which

Economy continued on A6

Votes set on immigration, religion, schools

State legislators face deadline today to pass several contentious bills.

By Mark Niesse
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A big day of heated debates and votes arrives at the Georgia Capitol today, a critical deadline for contentious bills on immigration enforcement, religious rights and sex education.

Dozens of bills are scheduled for votes on Crossover Day, the General Assembly’s internal cutoff for bills to pass at least one chamber – either the state House or Senate.

Crossover Day is the 28th business day of the state’s 40-day legislative session, which is scheduled to end March 28.

Bills that fail to pass before the deadline have less of a chance of becoming law, but they could later be revived if their language is inserted into legislation that earlier passed the House or Senate. No bill is truly dead until lawmakers leave the Capitol

Crossover continued on A6

AJC BILL TRACKER

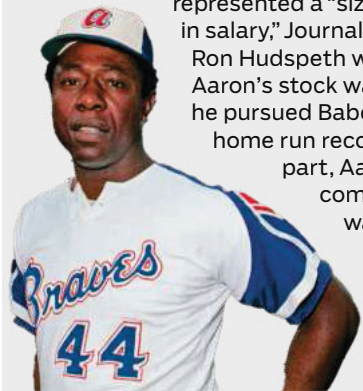
You can check on the status of bills and resolutions at the legislature on The AJC’s Bill Tracker at ajc.com/bill-tracker

AJC.com

SPORTS, B2

Aaron made payday history 52 years ago today

It’s true that Hank Aaron never made the astronomical money baseball players make today. But on Feb. 29, 1972, Aaron signed what at the time was the richest deal in Major League Baseball history. His three-year, \$200,000 contract represented a “sizeable increase in salary,” Journal sportswriter Ron Hudspeth wrote, noting Aaron’s stock was up as he pursued Babe Ruth’s home run record. For his part, Aaron had no complaints: “It was what I expected and what I asked for,” Aaron told the Journal.



Atlanta launches audit as city faces shortage of fire rescue vehicles

Maintenance problems, lack of investment are a concern.

By Riley Bunch
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The city is in the process of auditing the Atlanta Fire Rescue Department’s vehicle fleet as maintenance problems and an ordering backlog has intensified equipment issues that have been brewing for years.

City Council members began raising red flags last fall about the fluctuating numbers of fire trucks and ladders that were out of commission at various times across the city. The problem is so extensive that anywhere from 15 to 20 trucks at a time could be off of streets for repairs.

A memo from the City Auditor’s Office sent to Mayor Andre Dickens and council members in December said a review of fire fleet maintenance is underway and expected to be completed by late April.



The Atlanta Fire Rescue Department is grappling with a pervasive equipment shortage driven by out-of-date vehicles and slow purchasing timelines. The city Auditor’s Office is conducting an audit of fleet maintenance. FILE

“Our risk assessment flagged public safety and deferred maintenance as areas of concern,” the city of Atlanta Audit Committee said. “(AFRD) provides fire mitigation,

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SPORTS, B1

Falcons should sign free-agent quarterback



Columnist Mark Bradley says if the club’s goal is to win now and end its playoff drought, then veteran QB Kirk Cousins is the best solution.

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