

OVER THE PASS



CONNECTIONS

“What’s your favorite food or drink for cold wintry days?”

By Tim Keller
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The Chronicle-News

Photos by Tim Keller / The Chronicle-News

“I like hot chocolate, and ham hock and bean soup. I make both myself. The soup is my New Year’s specialty. It’s good luck. The hot chocolate is for any time we feel the need to warm up.”

—Betty Dunn, merchandiser



“Glühwein—mulled red wine with spices and orange juice and sugar. My favorite food is my husband’s red chili, hot with lots of meat. It has to be his: I wouldn’t eat anyone else’s chili.”

—Alice Sporleder, rancher’s wife, Walsenburg



“Grilled cheese sandwiches and tomato soup — with hot chocolate. Other than that, it’s pizza— always.”

— Bob Walton, manager, Sugarite Canyon Ranch



“Hot apple cider and chili. Not together, though. They don’t sound good together.”

— Nancy Poe, retired teacher

NATION

Obama defends gun plan as constitutional

JOSH LEDERMAN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Gearing up for a certain confrontation with Congress, President Barack Obama defended his plans to tighten the nation’s gun-control restrictions on his own, insisting Monday that the steps he’ll announce fall within his legal authority and uphold the constitutional right to own a gun.

Opening his final year in office on an aggressive note, Obama summoned his attorney general and FBI chief to the Oval Office to firm up a set of measures he said he’d announce over the next few days. Although the details are still uncertain, Obama’s administration has been preparing behind the scenes to expand background checks on gun sales by forcing more sellers to register as dealers.

“This is not going to solve every violent crime in this country,” Obama said, tempering expectations for gun control advocates calling for far-reaching executive action. “It’s not going to prevent every mass shooting; it’s not going to keep every gun out of the hands of a criminal. It will potentially save lives and spare families the pain of these extraordinary losses.”

More than three years after the massacre in Newtown, Connecticut, with many other mass shootings since, Obama is training his attention once again on a policy goal that has eluded his administration. He tried the legislative route in 2013, pushing hard for a package that included expanded background checks. But that effort collapsed spectacularly in Congress. Obama and his aides have described their inability to move the issue forward as one of the most frustrating failures in his presidency.

This time, with barely a year left in office and his political currency dwindling, Obama is eschewing Congress in favor of presidential action. Any proposal for new gun laws would be a non-starter in the Republican-controlled Congress — especially in a presidential election year.

Obama’s steps were certain to draw intense opposition in Congress, and indeed, lawmakers and Obama’s political opponents had already started pre-emptively panning Obama’s plan. House Speaker Paul Ryan said he wasn’t sure exactly what Obama would announce, but dismissed it as an attempt to divide the country and distract from Obama’s “failed policies” to address terrorism.

“The president is at minimum subverting the legislative branch, and potentially overturning its will,” said Ryan, R-Wis.

The changes to the background check would be aimed at some unregistered sellers who skirt the requirement by selling at gun shows, online or informal settings. Under current law, only federally licensed firearms dealers are required to seek background checks. The administration is expected to require more people to register as dealers by altering the criteria, such as the number and frequency of guns sold, whether sellers profit off sales, whether they advertise, rent space or tables at gun shows and pay taxes.

Other moves being considered include improving reporting of lost and stolen weapons and beefing up inspections of licensed dealers, according to people familiar with the plans who weren’t authorized to disclose details before the announcement.

Yet from the campaign trail to the halls of Congress, critics were already taking the president to task, both for the expected content of the actions and for the manner in which he’s taking them. Republicans and gun rights advocates pledged to derail them before they can be implemented.

Although the likeliest venue for a challenge appeared to be the courts, opponents were also examining other ways

to try to stop Obama’s actions. Rep. John Culberson, R-Texas, the House panel chairman who oversees the Justice Department budget, threatened in a letter Monday to Attorney General Loretta to withhold money for the department if it tries to implement executive action on guns.

Mindful of inevitable challenges, the White House carefully crafted the steps with legal justifications in mind, White House officials said, and Obama added he was acting “well within my legal authority.”

“I’m also confident that the recommendations that are being made by our team here are ones that are entirely consistent with the Second Amendment and people’s lawful right to bear arms,” Obama said.

Aiming to set the stage for a productive final year in office, Obama planned to spend the week promoting the gun effort and pushing back on its critics. He met at the White House on Monday with Democratic lawmakers who have supported stricter gun control, and planned to take his argument to prime time on Thursday with a town hall discussion about gun violence on CNN.

The initiative also promised to be prominent in Obama’s final State of the Union address next Tuesday, scheduled earlier than usual this year.

DENVER FOOTBALL

Kubiak in no hurry to choose starting QB for playoffs

ARNIE STAPLETON
AP Pro Football Writer

ENGLEWOOD, Colo. (AP) — Gary Kubiak isn’t ready to say who his starting quarterback is for the playoffs.

Choosing between Peyton Manning and Brock Osweiler, though, is a nice problem for him to have.

“I would say it’s enjoyable because of where we’re at,” Kubiak said Monday.

That would be atop the AFC playoff bracket.

The Broncos (12-4) host a divisional round game Jan. 17. They avoided slipping into the wild-card round when Manning rallied the Broncos to a 27-20 win over San Diego on Sunday in his first relief appearance in 21 years, three months and 11 days.

“In this business you work really, really hard to get in the position that we’re in right now and to be a part of this next month,” Kubiak said. “There’s always going to be tough decisions to make.”

Like sticking with Manning — providing his left foot held up OK — or going back to Osweiler, who was coming off his best game, a comeback from a two-touchdown deficit against Cincinnati, when he got the hook Sunday.

Manning began the game as a backup for the first time since his freshman year at Tennessee, when he replaced an injured Todd Helton against Mississippi State.

Osweiler hit Demaryius Thomas for a 72-yard TD just 31 seconds into the game. At that point, it looked as if Manning’s only hope to get into the game would be mop-up duty to test his playoff readiness.

Emmanuel Sanders, however, fumbled at the 10-yard line following a 46-yard reception on the next drive and the Broncos began to unravel.

After their fifth turnover — only one of which could be pinned on Osweiler — Kubiak noted a sense of desperation and turned to Manning to provide a spark.

When Manning trotted out with 8:18 left in the third quarter, so did veteran Tyler Polumbus, replacing a rattled right tackle, Michael Schofield.

“I thought everybody was cheering for me,” deadpanned Polumbus.

Although Manning completed just 5 of 9 passes for 69 yards — including just 1 of 4 throws of more than 15 yards — the five-time MVP settled down the team, driving the Broncos to two TDs and two field goals.

Changing the call at the line of scrimmage, Manning kept putting the Broncos in the perfect play and Ronnie Hillman and C.J. Anderson combined for a season-high 212 yards rushing.

Manning also got rid of the ball quicker than Osweiler, although he did sustain a vicious hit from Damien Square that left him wondering how his body would feel this week.

Kubiak gave the players three days off, so they won’t reconvene until Thursday, when he’ll likely make his QB choice known. The longer this drags out, the bigger the distraction for a team that doesn’t need any more drama.

Manning was certainly sore Monday. Kubiak said he isn’t worried Manning’s health, saying, “I think he’s OK.”

Nor was he concerned about Osweiler’s confidence being churned.

“Oh, I guarantee you he knows I’ve got confidence in him. And he knows his team has confidence in him,” Kubiak said. “He’s a tough young man and I know he’s done a great job. Everybody knows we wouldn’t be in the position we’re in had he not done the job he’s done.”

Officially, Osweiler went 5-2 as the starter and Manning 7-2. Sunday’s win went on Osweiler’s record, so Manning remains tied with Brett Favre for most wins in the regular season by a starting QB at 186.

“I’m proud of both of them,” Kubiak said. “Peyton did a great job earlier this season before he went through the injury. Brock did a great job with this football team. Yesterday it took both of them. It’s taken all of us all year long.”

Kubiak played a hunch Sunday so it follows that he’ll go with his gut again for the playoffs rather than go over stats sheets and all the analytics over the next 72 hours.

“I’ll do what I think is best for the football team,” Kubiak said.

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