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Auto buy keeps economy rolling

Local sale provides peek at money cycle

By Michael Booth
Denver Post Staff Writer

As Jessica Urban drove away in her new, snow-white Jeep Liberty earlier this month, she looked in the rearview mirror at the sales staff waving from the lot of Pro staff waving from the lot of Pro Chrysler Jeep and had a thought that would gladden the hearts of economists everywhere.

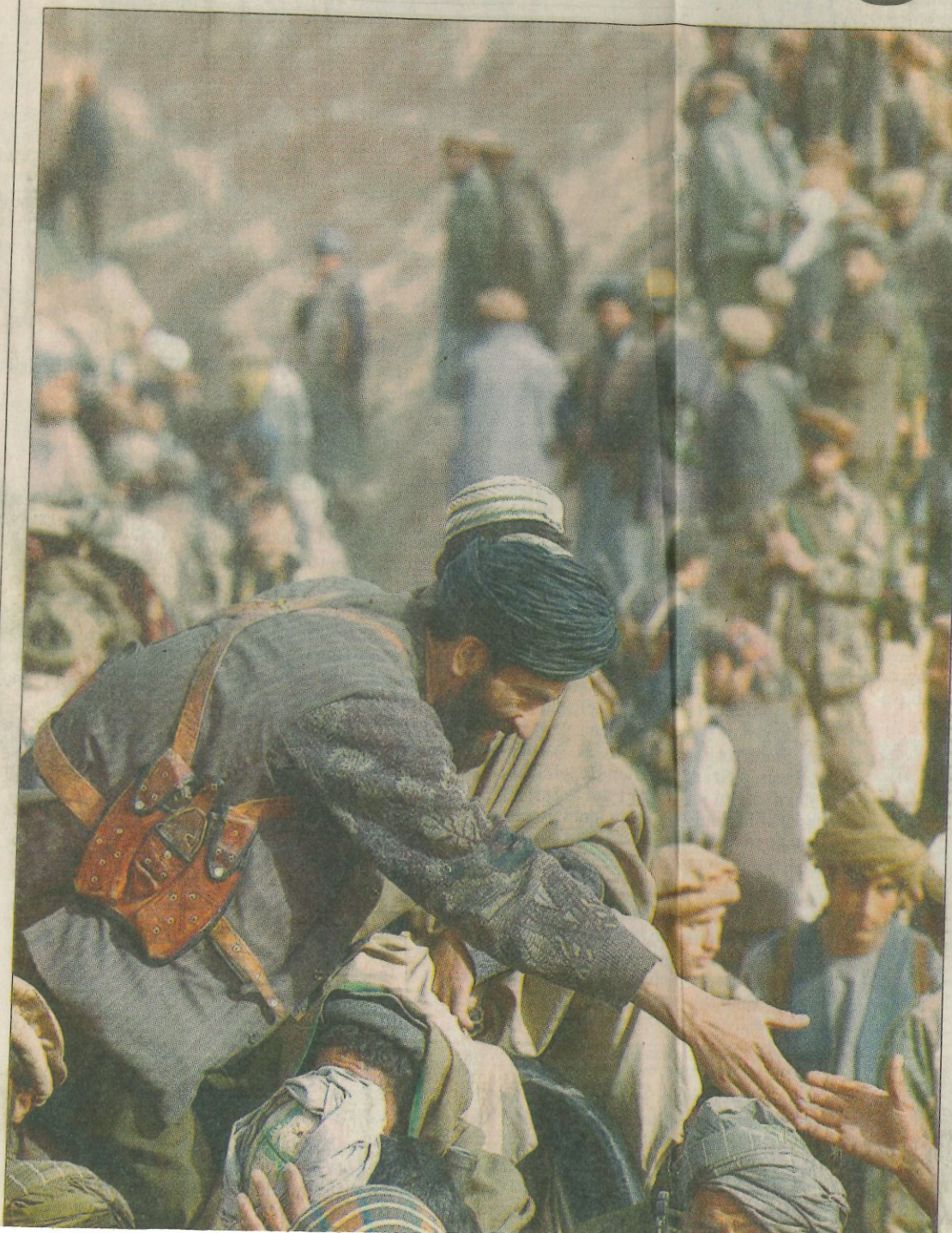
"Oh, how cool!" Urban thought. "I bought American and put some money back into the economy. That was a good feeling."

Fall sales reports show buyers like Urban are propping up much of the U.S. economy, with a surge in consumer spending on autos keeping the recession from digging deeper into American life.

A close look at one car deal on one typical fall day in Colorado shows the system and its players to be both more simple and more complex than a pile of statistics. The auto industry directly supports 3.5 million U.S. jobs, and the spending it induces makes up 6 percent of all national wages. In Colorado, auto manufacturing and sales employ 30,000 to 40,000 people, comparable to all of agriculture, while pouring far more wages into the state economy.

But Urban had more personal issues in mind when she laid out \$23,495 for her Liberty. Urban favored the sleek new Liberty over her boxy, 5-year-old Cherokee in part because "it's a girl thing," she said. "It just seemed more, I'll say

Surrendering in droves



Taliban troops crossing lines are greeted warmly; hard-liners still in Kunduz

By Ellen Knickmeyer
The Associated Press

BANGI, Afghanistan — A trickle of surrendering Taliban became a flood Saturday, and those laying down arms were greeted like brothers by Northern Alliance fighters besieging Kunduz.

It was unclear whether a hard core of foreigners loyal to Osama bin Laden would opt to fight to the finish.

By nightfall Saturday, alliance officials said more than 1,100 Taliban and foreign fighters — mostly Arabs, Chechens and Pakistanis — had surrendered under a deal negotiated with the Islamic militia's senior commanders. Some Taliban fighters crossed the front and promptly joined the alliance.

However, thousands of other fighters were believed still in the city, including members of bin Laden's al-Qaeda terrorist network. When the siege began Nov. 12, alliance commanders estimated 10,000 Taliban and 3,000 foreigners were defending the city — the last Taliban stronghold in

northern Afghanistan.

The surrenders did not always go smoothly.

In the alliance-held northern city of Mazar-e-Sharif, a prisoner awaiting a search detonated a hand grenade, killing himself and two other Taliban soldiers and seriously injuring an alliance officer, according to Britain's ITN News and CNN.

ITN reporter Andrea Catherwood, who was hit in the knee with shrapnel, said the attacker was among 500 foreign fighters, mostly from Pakistan, who had driven overnight from Kunduz across the desert and were met by a key Northern Alliance commander, Rashid Dostum.

"They were disarmed, or so we thought. A lot of heavy arms were taken away in a truck," she said.

A former Taliban deputy interior minister who defected — the most senior Taliban defector thus far — held a news conference Saturday to say he blamed bin Laden and his foreign fighters as well as

Please see WAR on 20A

U.S. bombing near Jalalabad targets al-Qaeda

CU to play Texas

A day after Colorado shocked Nebraska 62-36, Oklahoma State ended Oklahoma's hopes of repeating as national champion with a 16-13 victory in Norman. CU, which had not beaten the Cornhuskers since 1990, will play Texas Saturday night in the Big 12 title game.

SPORTS, 1C

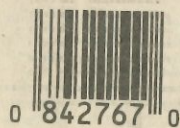
The gift of music

The Post's music critics offer advice on which of the new CD sets arriving on shelves are perfect for the music lovers on your holiday gift list.

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A Taliban fighter, left, from Kunduz is greeted by Northern Alliance soldiers Saturday after he surrendered at Amirabad. More than 1,100 Taliban and foreign fighters in Kunduz surrendered.

The New York Times / James Hill

Kabul women picking up threads of former lives

By Gwen Florio
Denver Post Staff Writer

KABUL, Afghanistan — Call it *burka burlesque*. Every day, the women of Kabul show a little bit more of themselves — a saucily patterned stocking here, a flouncy denim skirt there — from beneath the tentlike blue garments known as *burkas* that, by law, they've worn in public for the last five years.

Store windows display strappy slingbacks with spiked heels, and scarlet lipsticks in silver tubes sit brazenly upon glass counters.

But the most shocking sight of all has yet to be seen on the streets of Kabul:

Women's faces. "Everyone is waiting for someone else to be first," said Marzia Hakimi, 40, who readily admits to loathing the pleated head-to-toe *burka* with its mesh peephole over the eyes. "We are not 100 percent certain yet that it is safe."

Perhaps nothing more symbol-

izes the harshness of the ultraconservative Islamist Taliban regime in Afghanistan than its treatment of women. They were expelled from schools, fired from their jobs, forbidden even from walking alone outdoors. And, most obviously, they were compelled to wear the *burka* — traditional in the countryside, but frequently abandoned in onces-cosmopolitan Kabul — so that no man other than a husband or relative would ever see their faces.

To defy any of these rules risked at best a public beating; at worst, imprisonment or death.

Men had to wear traditional tunics and turbans, and grow long beards and keep their hair cut short. They were, however, allowed to continue their schooling and careers.

The loss of education and income was felt profoundly by women. Hakimi, for instance, was fired from her job as an administrative

Please see BURKAS on 23A



The Denver Post / Karl Gehring
Hidden but for her fingers, a woman crosses the plains of northern Afghanistan.

this city Saturday, the third attack in as many days that has rocked neighborhoods.

U.S. military leaders said the bombings around the city, and in the broad swath between Jalalabad and Kandahar in the south, are aimed at the leadership of the Taliban and the al-Qaeda terrorist group.

Osama bin Laden was seen last week at a large and well-fortified encampment 35 miles southwest of Jalalabad, a minister of the self-proclaimed government in Jalalabad said Saturday.

The official, Hazarat Ali, law and order minister for the Eastern Shura, which claims dominion over three major provinces in eastern Afghanistan, said trusted informants had told him that bin Laden was spotted near Tora Bora, a village where two valleys meet in deep mountains in Nangarhar Province.

"We have some people who told us that three or four days ago, Osama bin Laden was in Tora Bora," Ali said. "I trust them like my mother or father."

"He is moving at night on horseback," he said, citing his informants.

The U.S. is continuing to put pressure on the leadership of al-Qaeda and the Taliban in and around the area between Jalalabad and Kandahar, said Maj. Brad Lowell of the U.S. Central Command, which is headquartered at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Fla., and is overseeing the military operations in Afghanistan.

"The targets include their command-and-control centers, facilities and tunnels," Lowell said.

The bombing outside Jalalabad involved targets south and west of the city where intelligence officials

Please see BOMBS on 20A

■ **U.S. airstrikes** pound suspected terrorist hide-outs in Afghan tunnels and caves.

■ **President Bush** says the war against terrorism will take time and may expand to more countries.

■ **At least eight U.S. bombs** reportedly explode on Pakistani territory during a raid on Taliban positions near the border.

■ **The most senior Taliban member** to defect so far blames Osama bin Laden and Taliban hard-liners for transforming Afghanistan into a terrorist haven.

■ **The European Union** and Pakistan agree that no multinational force will be deployed in Afghanistan until a government has been agreed upon.

Coverage begins on 11A

Customer service on slippery slope

By Jennifer Beauprez
Denver Post Business Writer

Deborah Barton knows what it's like to sit on hold for 30 minutes at a time.

The Littleton massage therapist also knows what it's like to be routed to multiple operators who don't have answers, to get stuck in endless mazes of recorded telephone prompts, and to write complaint letters to no avail.

And she knows all too well what it's like to fight the same wrongful charge of \$2-0 on a Qwest wireless phone bill for seven months — an

Companies cut costs as economy falters

error admitted by the company but yet to be fixed.

Like Barton, most Americans have their own horror stories about customer service: the impersonal telephone recordings, the grumpy and unknowledgeable sales clerk, the "tough luck" attitude of customer support lines.

And they're not crazy. Consumer satisfaction has gradually worsened over the past several years, ac-

ording to the Customer Satisfaction Index, a quarterly survey conducted by the University of Michigan. The index is based on 50,000 consumer interviews and financial analysis of 164 companies, including their stock prices, profits and return on customer-service investments.

Satisfaction for all industries has slipped to a score of 72 out of 100 possible points — down from a score of 74.5 in 1994. The index took its sharpest drop in 1997, to 70.7, as companies struggled to

Please see SERVICE on 25A

A SEASON TO SHARE

Offering the right ingredients

Like many chefs, Kendra Wilcox teaches cooking classes on the side. But her students aren't interested in the latest high-end cuisines. Wilcox is a volunteer with Share Our Strength's Operation Frontline, which teaches people in low-income households how to prepare nutritious meals through smart shopping and stove-top savvy.



The Denver Post / John Prieto

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