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Barriers are placed at the closed Vaalimaa border checkpoint between Finland and Russia in Virolahti, Finland, in 2024.
LAURI HEINO/LEHTIKUVA VIA REUTERS FILE

Fearing war with Russia, Finland hardens NATO frontier

Anne Kauranen
REUTERS

LAPPEENRANTA, Finland – At a shooting range 10 miles from the Russian border, Finnish army reservist Janne Latto opened the trunk of his car and unpacked a small surveillance drone and controller, equipment he sees as vital for any future conflict with Finland’s neighbor.

Since the invasion of Ukraine prompted Helsinki to join NATO two years ago, tensions reminiscent of the Cold War have resurfaced along the forested 833-mile frontier, Europe’s longest with Russia. The Nordic nation is beefing up an already-sizeable reservist force and will host a new command for NATO.

Still under construction, an imposing barbed-wire-topped fence now dominates a once-bustling section of the border, closed by Finland after it accused Russia of weaponizing migration. On the other side, Russia has slowly begun dusting off Soviet-era military bases, satellite images show.

Kyiv’s June 1 attack on Russia’s strategic bomber fleet, including at the Olenya airfield near northern Finland, brought the war in Ukraine closer to home.

For this story, Reuters spoke to a dozen people in Finland’s border region, where the emerging divisions have left some unable to visit relatives and caused economic losses. Others supported the measures, citing a need to prepare for and deter future conflict.

At the shooting range – near the lakeside town of Lappeenranta, some 100 miles from Russia’s second city, St. Petersburg – Latto said the Lauritsala Reservists were training with three drones including the Parrot Anafi surveillance vehicle, used by the professional armies of several NATO members, including Finland.

See **FINLAND**, Page 6A



A Finnish guard works at the border between Russia and Finland in Lappeenranta, Finland, in 2023. The border was closed by Finland after it accused Russia of weaponizing migration. VESA MOILANEN/LEHTIKUVA VIA REUTERS FILE

“What if they decide to come and change the border, just like they went to Ukraine?”

Janne Latto, Finnish army reservist

Schools prep for ban on cellphones

Nancy Cutler
Rockland/Westchester Journal News
USA TODAY NETWORK

When schools open in September, New York state’s “bell-to-bell” ban on cell phones and other internet-enabled devices will be in place.

The state has mandated the ban but

isn’t saying how it should work at each school. Districts had to come up with plans and get them to the New York State Department of Education by Aug. 1.

Gov. Kathy Hochul baked the “Distraction Free Schools” policy into the state budget that passed the Legislature in May, about a month late.

As of July 28, about 400 of New York’s 731 school districts, nearly 55%, had already submitted their proposals to the state Education Department, according to the governor’s office.

More than three-quarters of public schools have some sort of cell phone

See **CELL PHONE BAN**, Page 5A

Winners selected for Tompkins ‘I Voted’ stickers

Jacob Mack
Ithaca Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Two young artists from Tompkins County have earned top honors in the 2025 “I Voted” sticker contests, a civic initiative aimed at inspiring youth engagement in local democracy.

The Tompkins County Board of Elections announced that nearly 1,300 votes were cast by the public to select the winning designs, both of which feature dogs in outdoor settings.

Sevy Stiglitz, a fourth-grade student at Belle Sherman Elementary, won with her “Future Voter” design—a hand-drawn dog wearing a hat, set against the backdrop of the American flag.

Olivia Casselberry, a seventh-grader at Boynton Middle School, created the winning “I Voted” sticker, which shows a dog sitting peacefully in the grass.

Both students bring a love of animals and the arts to their work.

Olivia, who enjoys theater, music, and drawing, often takes her family dog to the park. Sevy, who also loves reading, music, and sports, says animals of all kinds inspire her creativity.

Recognition for their work

The winning stickers will be distributed this fall. Voters heading to the polls in November will receive Olivia’s “I Voted” sticker, while Sevy’s “Future Voter” design will be handed out to children accompanying their families to the ballot box.

Later this year, both students will be recognized with official proclamations from the Tompkins County Legislature and receive copies of their winning designs.

Election board praises artwork

Republican Elections Commissioner Alanna Congdon praised the young artists and the community for their participation.

“Congratulations to both students for their amazing artwork and to everyone who participated in the contests this year,” she said in a statement. “The Board of Elections is so proud to be able to encourage civic engagement in this way.”

Democratic Elections Commissioner Steve DeWitt echoed the sentiment.

“This has been a great way to get the word out about elections,” he said in a statement. “We will be giving out two beautiful stickers this year to those who show up to the polls. Kudos to the artists and everyone, from teachers to family members, who helped encourage submissions this year.”

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