

## NATION/WORLD DIGEST

## Note: Future Pope Resisted Defrocking Priest

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The future Pope Benedict XVI resisted pleas to defrock a California priest with a record of sexually molesting children, citing concerns including "the good of the universal church," according to a 1985 letter bearing his signature.

The correspondence, obtained by The Associated Press, is the strongest challenge yet to the Vatican's insistence that Benedict played no role in blocking the removal of pedophile priests during his years as head of the Catholic Church's doctrinal watchdog office.

The letter, signed by then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, was typed in Latin and is part of years of correspondence between the Diocese of Oakland and the Vatican about the proposed defrocking of the Rev. Stephen Kiele.

"The press office doesn't believe it is necessary to respond to every single document taken out of context regarding particular legal situations," the Rev. Federico Lombardi said.

## Palin Spars With Obama Over Nuclear Policy

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — President Barack Obama and Republican Sarah Palin sparred from a distance over nuclear policy with each questioning the other's experience on the issue in a potential preview of the 2012 White House race.

"Unbelievable," Palin said earlier this week after Obama rewrote the U.S. nuclear strategy, and she suggested the president was weak on nuclear defense.

Obama, in Prague to sign a nuclear reduction treaty with Russia, countered by deriding the former Alaska governor who resigned midway through her first term as "not much of an expert" on nuclear issues.

Palin then shot back Friday during a speech to the Southern Republican Leadership Conference in New Orleans with a reference to Obama's early career choice. Mocking the president, she dismissed "all the vast nuclear experience that he acquired as a community organizer."

Playing out over several days and across the globe, the spat foreshadowed what the country could see come the next presidential race should Palin run for president and win the GOP nomination.

## Stupak: No One Ran Me Out, Goal Completed

MARQUETTE, Mich. (AP) — Rep. Bart Stupak insists that tea party activists outraged over his crucial support of health care legislation didn't run him out of office, but his decision to retire gives conservatives a rallying point as they target Democrats in the midterm elections.

The congressman, an anti-abortion Democrat whose high-profile role in the "Obamacare" debate earned him enemies on the left and the right, said Friday that he's leaving because he's tired and has accomplished his No. 1 goal: improving health care.

"The tea party did not run me out," Stupak told The Associated Press in a phone interview. "If you know me and my personality, I would welcome the challenge."

Stupak had been a consistent landslide winner in his sprawling northern Michigan district, and the opening now offers Republicans a ripe opportunity to regain a seat they held for decades until Stupak prevailed in 1992.

His political foes — tea party activists and abortion opponents — both claimed credit for forcing him into retirement, and Michigan GOP Chairman Ron Weiser declared that the nine-term incumbent had become the first casualty of the battle over health care in Congress.

## Fort Hood Suspect Moved From Hospital

BELTON, Texas (AP) — The Army psychiatrist charged in a deadly shooting spree at Fort Hood will be kept isolated from other inmates at the Texas jail where he's been transferred.

Maj. Nidal Hasan was airlifted from a San Antonio military hospital to the Bell County Jail in Belton at about 4 a.m. Friday.

Sheriff Dan Smith says Hasan will be kept in a cell in the jail infirmary and will be under 24-hour watch. Smith did not say whether Hasan is under guard because of fears for his safety or others.

Hasan had been at the military hospital since shortly after the Nov. 5 shooting spree that left him paralyzed. He is charged with 13 counts of premeditated murder and 32 counts of attempted premeditated murder.

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## Clinton Urges Bipartisan Push On Nukes

LOUISVILLE, Ky. (AP) — Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton offered assurances Friday that a new nuclear arms control treaty enables the U.S. to maintain a "strong, flexible deterrent" as she urged divided Republicans and Democrats to ratify the pact signed by President Barack Obama and Russian leader Dmitry Medvedev.

In a speech delivered in Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell's hometown, Clinton hailed the treaty signed by U.S. and Russian leaders on Thursday as the "latest chapter in a history of American nuclear responsibility" supported by presidents of both parties and strong majorities in Congress.

The nuclear arms pact now faces a ratification vote in the U.S. Senate, which is near gridlock on many issues, and the Russian legislature.

"There are times when people of good will and great intellect have diverging views on how to deal with complex issues. But I don't think this is one of those times," Clinton said in a speech at the University of Louisville.

"We believe strongly that this is in our nation's best interest and I am confident that once senators have the chance to study this new treaty, we will have the same high levels of bipartisan support as the agreements that this one builds upon," she said.

The pact commits the U.S. and Russia to slash the number of strategic nuclear warheads by one-third and more than halve the number of missiles, submarines and bombers carrying them.

The two countries would still be left with enough nuclear might to ensure mutual destruction several times over, but both sides already are pursuing

potentially deeper reductions. "We are determined to see that nuclear weapons are never used again," Clinton said. "But the new START Treaty will enable us to retain a strong, flexible deterrent. Our military will continue to deploy every leg of our nuclear triad — land-based missiles, submarine-based missiles and bombers."

"The treaty will enable us to maintain this arsenal, and also provide strong verification provisions."

Some Senate Republicans are reserving judgment on the deal

## W. VA MINE EXPLOSION

## Search Continues For Missing Miners

BY DENA POTTER  
AND PETER PRENGAMAN  
Associated Press Writers

MONTCOAL, W.Va. — Grieving relatives began burying victims of the Upper Big Branch coal mine disaster Friday as crews neared a refuge chamber deep underground where they had faint hope that survivors might be awaiting rescue.

It was their fourth try to find the four miners missing since Monday's explosion killed 25 others in the nation's worst underground disaster since at least 1984. During the previous rescue attempt, searchers were forced to withdraw by dangerous gases and the risk of fire or explosion.

Gov. Joe Manchin promised families they should have answers by midnight.

"They just want to take their fathers and their husbands and their sons and their uncles, they want to take them home," he said. "They just want to bring them home."

Rescuers hoped the miners might have made it to the chamber stocked with food, water and enough oxygen for several days.

Late Friday, officials said their fourth try to check the chamber was progressing better than previous ones and crews were within 2,000 feet of where they needed to be. They expected an answer by midnight and said they hoped to start recovering bodies even if no one was in the chamber, an expandable box activated by opening a door and pulling a lever.

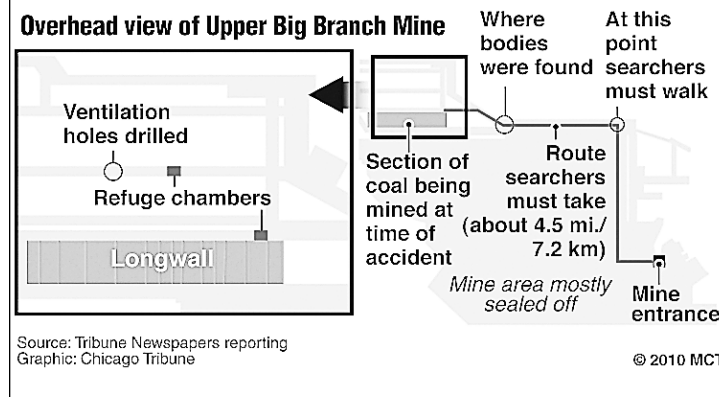
"We are praying for a miracle," President Barack Obama said in Washington.

Of the 25 confirmed dead, 18 bodies remained inside the mine.

"We believe that without any unforeseen problems ... (we) will

## Search setback

Rescuers searching for four missing miners had to evacuate after encountering smoke. Before retreating, rescue workers found one of the two airtight refuge chambers, which had not been deployed.



Source: Tribune Newspapers reporting Graphic: Chicago Tribune

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be able to bring some finality to it tonight," Manchin said.

About a dozen people huddled around a television set at a pizza place near the mines to listen to Manchin speak, and many flashed smiles Manchin said he anticipated the rescue mission would end soon.

"We just keep hoping we'll have closure soon — good or bad, as long as it ends soon," said Sarah James, a 23-year-old whose husband is a surface miner.

In the earlier try Friday, rescuers made it 1,000 feet underground and five miles into the mine to examine one of the chambers, but no one was inside and smoke forced them to turn back before they could check a second one that would represent the last hope the four were alive.

"We're confident that if they got in there, and they were alive, that we would be able to still rescue them," said Kevin Stricklin of the federal Mine Health and Safety Administration.

Crews were able to flush the chamber with nitrogen to put

out whatever was creating the smoke that had forced rescuers to turn back.

Officials had hoped to lower a camera into the mine to see if the chamber had been used, but the hole was drilled slightly off target, and Stricklin said they would not have been able to see anything.

More than 300 people packed the Mullens Pentecostal Holiness Church for the funeral of Benny Willingham, a 61-year-old miner who was five weeks from retiring when he died.

He was saved 19 years ago this week, said Rev. Gary Pollard, pastor of the Mullens Family Worship Center, where Willingham was a deacon. The two had weekly 45-minute talks — about God, about Christian living, about their families and friends — every Sunday morning for the past five years.

Pollard said the last time he saw Willingham, the miner's words were almost prophetic: "If I die tomorrow, I've lived a good life."

"He wasn't the biggest man in town. He didn't have the stature

of some of you sitting here," said Pollard, whose own church across town was too small for the crowd. "But if you could see the size of this man's heart, you'd see a giant."

Willingham was dressed in a red shirt in the open coffin, jet-black hair and mustache neatly combed, family snapshots tucked in the satin around his head and shoulders. The image of a pick, shovel and miner's helmet was embroidered in the fabric along with his name, and a flag draped the lower half of his coffin in a nod to his service during the Vietnam era in the Air Force.

Three Air Force veterans, friends of his for more than 40 years, traveled with their wives from Ohio, California and North Carolina to say goodbye.

"That's astonishing," said the Rev. Lewis Arnold, pastor of the host church, "but that is Benny Willingham."

Officials suspect the blast was caused by a buildup of methane gas. In the nation's capital, Obama said he asked federal mine safety officials to give him a report on the disaster next week, and the House and Senate said they would hold hearings.

In the days since the explosion, details have emerged about a long list of safety violations at the mine. The owner, Massey Energy Co., has been repeatedly cited and fined for problems with the system that vents methane and for allowing combustible dust to build up. CEO Don Blankenship has strongly defended the company's record and disputed accusations from miners that he puts coal profits ahead of safety.

Even after the blast, MSHA spokeswoman Amy Louviere said Massey dragged its heels getting nitrogen to the site. Rescuers eventually pumped about five truckloads into the mine.

## F-16s Neared Commercial Jet Over Ohio

CINCINNATI (AP) — Two military fighter jets apparently flew higher than allowed and came so close to a commercial flight over southern Ohio this week that they triggered a cockpit alarm in the commuter plane, authorities said Friday.

Atlantic Southeast Airlines Flight 5202, a 70-seat commuter jet, was flying from Cleveland to Atlanta on Thursday when its two pilots saw the F-16s nearby at 10 a.m., the airline said.

The commercial planes "had a near-miss incident," said Federal Aviation Administration spokesman Tony Molinaro.

Radar showed the Ohio National Guard F-16s were flying at 30,000 feet when they should have been no higher than 29,000 feet, Molinaro said. The commercial plane was flying as planned at 30,000 feet, he said.

The F-16s are from the 180th Fighter Wing, based at the Toledo Express airport and were on normal training flights, said Mark Wayda, a spokesman for the Columbus-based Guard. The Guard is investigating, he said.

"It does appear they were above their ceiling, but we are not sure by how much at this point," he said.

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