

NATION/WORLD DIGEST

Cleanup Crews To Set Fire To Mass Oil Spill

OVER THE GULF OF MEXICO (AP) — It's a hellish scene: Giant sheets of flame racing across the Gulf of Mexico as thick, black smoke billows high into sky. This, though, is no Hollywood action movie. It's the real-life plan to be deployed just 20 miles from the Gulf Coast in a last-ditch effort to burn up an oil spill before it could wash ashore and wreak environmental havoc.

The Coast Guard planned to use hand-held flares to set fire to sections of the massive spill. Crews turned to the technique after failing to stop a 1,000-barrel-a-day leak at the spot where a deepwater oil platform exploded and sank.

A 500-foot boom was to be used to corral several thousand gallons of the thickest oil on the surface, which will then be towed to a more remote area, set on fire, and allowed to burn for about an hour.

The Coast Guard initially said the fires would be started by midday, but officials later postponed the operation until late afternoon or early evening.

About 42,000 gallons of oil a day are leaking into the Gulf from the blown-out well drilled by the Deepwater Horizon oil rig. Eleven workers are missing and presumed dead. The cause of the explosion has not been determined.

Dems Immigration Bill Calls For Benchmarks

WASHINGTON (AP) — An emerging immigration proposal by three Democratic senators calls for more federal enforcement agents and other border security-tightening benchmarks before illegal immigrants could become legal U.S. residents.

Those goals "must be met before action can be taken to adjust the status of people already in the United States illegally," according to a copy of the draft legislation, obtained Wednesday by The Associated Press, that Sens. Harry Reid of Nevada, Charles Schumer of New York and Robert Menendez are developing.

The benchmarks include additional Border Patrol officers and Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents to combat smuggling; more ICE inspectors at work sites; an increased number of ICE officers assigned to detect fraudulent documents, and better ways to determine fakes; more personnel to check for contraband at ports of entry; additional resources to prosecute drug and human smugglers and illegal border crossers, and for deportations.

An outline of the proposal does not specify the additional agents or resources required to meet the benchmarks. It does suggest a two-phase system for legalizing people who are in the U.S. illegally.

Before the benchmarks are met, the Department of Homeland Security could begin registering, fingerprinting and screening illegal immigrants, and considering them for an interim legal status. That would allow them to work in the U.S. and travel outside it.

UK's Brown Calls Voter A 'Bigoted Woman'

LONDON (AP) — Britain's Prime Minister blundered into the first major gaffe in his country's short campaign season Wednesday when an open microphone captured him slamming a voter he'd just been trying to win over.

Brown, apparently forgetting that he'd left a television microphone pinned to his chest, called 66-year-old Gillian Duffy a "bigoted woman" as he was being driven from a public meeting where she had needed him on immigration.

Within minutes the bad-tempered aside had exploded across the British media, and within a couple of hours Brown was rushing back to her home to beg Duffy's forgiveness and writing to his supporters to make clear he'd apologized.

All the rest of the country could do was look on as the cringe-inducing drama played out over television and radio. The debacle dealt Brown a big setback on the eve of the last TV debate ahead of the May 6 vote.

Duffy, a retired widow and a self-described supporter of Brown's Labour party, met with the prime minister at a campaign stop in the northern town of Rochdale and questioned him about the influx of eastern European immigrants who have come to Britain.

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FINANCIAL REGULATION

GOP Stops Blockade Of Measure

BY JIM KUHNHENN
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — The most sweeping new controls on financial institutions since the Great Depression are a big step closer to approval in Congress.

The changes, aimed at preventing a recurrence of the crisis that knocked the nation's financial system to its knees in 2008, advanced Wednesday when Republicans abandoned their blockade in the Senate. Now, the battle begins over crucial details and that could take at least two weeks. The House has already passed its version.

Democrats and Republicans agree the Senate will ultimately pass landmark changes.

Democrats said the Republicans had given in after three days of votes to block debate, realizing they were on the losing end of a battle for public opinion. GOP lawmakers said they would now switch to trying to change the bill on the Senate floor.

Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse, D-R.I., said, "There's been immense pressure bottled up inside the Republican caucus through these last three votes. A lot of their members have been very deeply unhappy with the direction their leadership has been taking them. Better heads prevailed."

Democrats had threatened to hold the Senate in session all night making their case that the Republicans were stalling legislation of importance to virtually every American. The Democrats also have been laying plans to make the legislation a major issue in midterm elections this summer and fall.

The Republican retreat came one day after senior executives of Wall Street giant Goldman Sachs were denounced by lawmakers from both parties at a marathon Senate hearing.

President Barack Obama, winding up a Midwest tour promoting the legislation, told reporters he was pleased the debate would proceed and that he hoped to sign a final version "very soon."

"We'll end up having a safer, more secure financial system," Obama said, "and I think banks and other financial institutions can get back to making money the old-fashioned way by lending it to companies to build business and create jobs and do all the things we want our financial system to do."

In the debate that now can proceed, both Democrats and Republicans will attempt to change the underlying bill. Republicans will take particular aim at the magnitude of consumer-protection provisions that Obama says are vital. Liberal Democrats are expected to seek to limit the size of banks.

The GOP decision to relent came after Sen. Richard Shelby, the top Republican on the Senate Banking committee, told his colleagues that he could win no further concessions from Banking Committee Chairman Chris Dodd in private talks. He said Dodd did agree to adjust some provisions that Republicans had complained would permit further bank bailouts.

But there were already signs that some Republicans were growing weary of continuing to block the bill after Obama and other Democrats accused them of siding with Wall Street, an institution that rivals Congress in its unpopularity.

How the debate unfolds will determine whether the legislation achieves significant bipartisan support. Democrats still need 60 votes to get past procedural obstacles, a number they can't reach without at least one Republican on their side.

The bill would establish a nine-

member Financial Services Oversight Council, including the treasury secretary, Federal Reserve chairman and the heads of regulatory agencies to monitor markets for threats, such as the bubble in housing prices and mortgage-backed securities that preceded the financial near-collapse two years ago.

The Federal Reserve would begin policing large bank holding companies and interconnected nonbank institutions whose collapse might pose a threat to the economy. With approval of the council, the Fed could even break up complex companies that posed

a grave threat. Most investment derivatives — such as the hundreds of billions of dollars in complex instruments blamed for accelerating the crisis two years ago — would have to be traded on regulated exchanges.

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AN OPEN LETTER TO DENNIS DAUGAARD

Dear Dennis:
I am terribly disappointed to see you taking credit for work you did not do. Your most recent fundraising letter noted that the 2010 Legislature was able to balance our state budget without raising taxes or spending reserves. Your letter goes on to state "I was proud to help craft this balanced budget compromise that spent no reserves. The Republicans in the Legislature, led by House Majority Leader Bob Faehn and me, held a press conference Jan. 14, 2010, the third day of the legislative session, to announce our No. 1 goal of the session — a budget that included:

- No deficit spending
- No new taxes
- No use of reserve funds
- No shift of state responsibilities to local taxpayers

The governor opposed that goal and continued to urge spending our reserves. The ultimate budget adopted by the Legislature exactly mirrored the goals established by the Rounds-Daugaard administration. Changes were made during the final negotiations between the Legislature and the governor, but these boiled down to: (1) cutting the budget for technical institutes by \$1.4 million; (2) eliminating the Legislature's proposed across the board cuts which I proposed and strongly supported; and (3) replacing those cuts with savings from a revised estimate of Medicaid expenses, a revised estimate of the savings from changes in our K-12 funding formula made by the already passed House Bill 1258, and finding \$2 million in K-12 state aid carryover funds from the current year. I am curious exactly what part of the outlined changes you crafted? Are you claiming credit for the technical education cut or merely for revising estimates?

South Dakota faces a genuine budget crisis. We have been given a \$40 million deficit for this year and an estimated \$100 million deficit for next year. To say there is "NO budget crisis" in South Dakota, as you did in your fundraising letter, is naively ignoring reality and merely hoping for better times. This is no plan or solution. Rather than fixing our budget problem or offering new, innovative ideas to address the situation, you deny that a problem even exists. South Dakota deserves better.

In contrast, I lead the successful effort to eliminate the budget deficit for the upcoming year. I am proud to have my fellow Republican legislators join with me to establish this zero deficit budget goal on Day 3 of our legislative session. I shepherded this no new taxes budget through to its successful passage and adoption. I worked hard to identify cuts and savings in order to slash \$40 million from the budget — without help from the Executive Branch — without a single suggestion from you.

Unlike you, I recognize the reality of the situation — South Dakota does face a budget crisis! My budget-cutting work with other Republican legislators this year will flow through and reduce next year's budget deficit from its initial estimate of \$100 million down to around \$60 million. This is still a staggeringly large deficit. I have demonstrated my problem-solving abilities and am equipped to meet the coming challenges head-on.

Denying that a budget crisis exists is not a solution. Like last year, solving next year's \$100 million budget deficit will require the leadership and hard work that comes with an experienced conservative problem solver, not from those who watch and claim credit later.

South Dakotans want and deserve a governor in these challenging economic times who has the proven experience to solve problems. That is the kind of leadership I will provide as governor, and that is a major difference between you and me.

Sincerely,
Dave
Dave Knudson

Paid for by Knudson for Governor

Dave Knudson
Mr. Fix It!
A conservative problem solver...
A better governor!

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