

Boehner Berates Obama's Stops

Political Battle Over Student Loans Heating Up

ALAN FRAM

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Speaker John Boehner accused President Barack Obama on Thursday of conduct “beneath the dignity of the White House.” The top House Democrat said Boehner considers the health of women “a luxury.”

In a measure of the sharp elbows both parties are throwing this election year, note that those words were exchanged over legislation whose basic purpose they say they agree on: preventing interest rates on millions of federal student loans from doubling to 6.8 percent this summer.

Their chief remaining dispute is how to pay for the \$5.9 billion cost of keeping those rates low. When it comes to that, each side has in effect taken a political hostage: House Republicans would cut spending from Obama's prized health care overhaul law, Senate Democrats would boost payroll taxes on owners of some private corporations and House Democrats would erase federal subsidies to oil and gas companies.

Thursday's partisan blasts were the latest, vivid example of how lawmakers are missing no chances this election season to portray themselves as seriously addressing voters' concerns about the economy and other issues while accusing the other side of blatantly playing political games.

The rhetoric intensified Thursday, a day before the House was set to vote on a GOP-written bill that would keep current 3.4 percent interest rates on subsidized Stafford loans intact for another year. The measure would be paid for by carving money out of a preventive health fund established by

Obama's health care overhaul law — a measure most Democrats consider a prized accomplishment worth fighting for.

Obama spent two days this week barnstorming through three college campuses in North Carolina, Colorado and Iowa, using campaign-style speeches before cheering throngs of students to complain that Republicans are dragging their feet on blocking the interest rate boosts.

By Thursday, Boehner, R-Ohio, had had enough, accusing Obama of using taxpayer money to launch political attacks on Republicans for a problem that GOP lawmakers were already working to address.

“Frankly, I think this is beneath the dignity of the White House,” Boehner told reporters. He added, “For the president to make a campaign issue and then to travel to three battleground states and go to three large college campuses on taxpayers money to try to make this some political issue is pathetic. And his campaign ought to be reimbursing the Treasury for the cost of this trip.”

Boehner also accused Obama of waging “a fake fight to try to game his own re-election.”

White House spokesman Jay Carney defended the travel as an effort to champion an important policy issue. He said by taking a high-profile stand in favor of extending the student loan rate, Obama succeeded in winning Republican support.

“It is eminently obvious that the president was out talking about a policy issue,” Carney said. “This is official business. And he did it effectively.”

The Pentagon says the Boeing 747 that is usually used as Air Force One costs \$179,750 an hour to operate.

Despite the party-line divisions, some



Boehner

members of each party were considering defecting in Friday's vote.

The conservative Heritage Action for America was lobbying Republicans to oppose the GOP bill and let interest rates rise, saying to do otherwise would burden taxpayers. And party leaders were pressuring Democrats to vote

against the Republican measure, with some Democrats eager to vote to keep student loan rates low despite the health care cuts.

Obama's budget would protect the 3.4 percent rates for a year. There are 7.4 million low- and middle-income students with subsidized Stafford loans, and the administration says the higher rates would cost each an average \$1,000 over the life of the loan.

Minutes before Boehner spoke, he was the focus of attacks by House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif.

She accused Republicans of paying for their student loan bill by raiding women's programs. That plays into a Democratic theme of recent weeks that Republicans are waging a war on women because of their stances on insurance coverage for contraception and other social issues.

The House GOP bill would cut a \$17 billion prevention and public health fund whose projects include breast cancer screening, childhood immunizations, research and wellness education. Boehner and other Republicans have called the program a “slush fund,” and Congress dipped into it earlier this year to prevent reductions in Medicare reimbursements for doctors.

“It may be a slush fund for him, but it's survival for women,” Pelosi told reporters. “That just goes to show you what a luxury he thinks it is to have good health for women.”

Analysts Say North Korea's New Missiles Are Fakes

BY ERIC TALMADGE

Associated Press

TOKYO — Analysts who have studied photos of a half-dozen ominous new North Korean missiles showcased recently at a lavish military parade say they were fakes, and not very convincing ones, casting further doubt on the country's claims of military prowess.

Since its recent rocket launch failure, Pyongyang's top military leaders have made several boastful statements about its weapons capabilities. On Wednesday, Vice Marshal Ri Yong Ho claimed his country is capable of defeating the United States “at a single blow.” And on Monday, North Korea promised “special actions” that would reduce Seoul's government to ashes within minutes.

But the weapons displayed April 15 appear to be a mish-mash of liquid-fuel and solid-fuel components that could never fly together. Undulating casings on the missiles suggest the metal is too thin to withstand flight. Each missile was slightly different from the others, even though all were supposedly the same make. They don't even fit the launchers they were carried on.

“There is no doubt that these missiles were mock-ups,” Markus Schiller, of Germany's Schmucker Technologie, wrote in a paper posted recently on the website Armscontrolwonk.com that listed those discrepancies. “It remains unknown if they were designed this way to confuse foreign analysts, or if the designers simply did some sloppy work.”

The missiles, called KN-08s, were loaded onto the largest mobile launch vehicles North Korea has ever unveiled. Pyongyang gave them special prominence by presenting them at the end of the parade, which capped weeks of celebrations marking the 100th anniversary of the country's founding father, Kim Il Sung.

The unveiling created an international stir. The missiles appeared to be new, and designed for long-range attacks.

Charles Taylor Conviction Sends Warning To Tyrants

BY MIKE CORDER

Associated Press

LEIDSCHEMENDAM, Netherlands — Former Liberian President Charles Taylor became the first head of state since World War II to be convicted by an international war crimes court, a historic verdict that sends a message that tyrants worldwide will be tracked down and brought to justice.

The warlord-turned-president was found guilty on Thursday of 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity for arming Sierra Leone rebels in exchange for “blood diamonds” mined by slave laborers and smuggled across the border.

Judges at the Special Court for Sierra Leone said Taylor played a crucial role in allowing the rebels to continue a bloody rampage during that West African nation's 11-year civil war, which ended in 2002 with more than 50,000 dead. Ten years after the war ended, Sierra Leone is still struggling to rebuild.

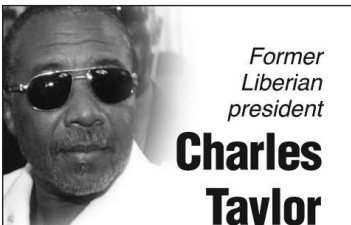
The rebels gained international notoriety for hacking off the limbs of their victims and carving their groups' initials into opponents and even children they kidnapped, drugged and turned into killers. The rebels developed gruesome terms for the mutilations that became their chilling trademark: They would offer their victims the choice of “long sleeves” or “short sleeves” — having their hands hacked off or their arms sliced off above the elbow.

The 64-year-old Taylor will be sentenced next month after a separate hearing.

The court has no death penalty and no life sentence. Judges have given eight other rebels as much as 52 years in prison.

The verdict was hailed by prosecutors, victims and rights activists as a watershed moment in efforts to end impunity for leaders responsible for atrocities.

The ruling “permanently locks in and solidifies the idea that heads of state are now accountable for what they do to their own people,” said David Crane, the former prosecutor who indicted Taylor in 2003 and is now a professor of international law at Syracuse University. “This is a bell that has been rung and clearly rings throughout the world. If you are a head of state and you are killing your own peo-



Former Liberian president

Charles Taylor

Early life

Born 1948 in Liberia, a descendant of freed U.S. slaves who founded country

Education B.A., Bentley College (Waltham, Mass.)

Career

Early 1980s Runs Liberia's General Service Administration

1984 Charged with embezzling government funds; flees to U.S., imprisoned, later escapes

1989 Launches rebellion in Liberia

1997-2003 President of Liberia; accused of supporting Sierra Leonean rebels

2001 U.N. imposes sanctions to punish Taylor for weapons-for-diamonds trade with Sierra Leonean rebels

June 2003 Indicted by U.N. for war crimes; seeks asylum in Nigeria after being forced from power

March 2006 Released by Nigeria; captured trying to flee and turned over to U.N.

June 2007 Trial opens at The Hague; pleads not guilty to charges

April 2012 Convicted of aiding and abetting the commission of war crimes

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ple, you could be next.”

U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon hailed the judgment as “a significant milestone for international criminal justice” that “sends a strong signal to all leaders that they are and will be held accountable for their actions,” said U.N. deputy spokesman Eduardo del Buey.

U.S. State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland said Taylor's prosecution “delivers a strong message to all perpetrators of atrocities, including those

in the highest positions of power, that they will be held accountable.”

Despite optimism over the verdict, international efforts to prosecute leaders have been spotty at best. Slobodan Milosevic died in his cell before a verdict could be reached on charges of fomenting the Balkan wars. Moammar Gadhafi was killed by rebels last year before he could be turned over for trial. Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir is openly defying attempts to arrest him on international genocide charges.

In one success story, prosecutors at the U.N.'s Yugoslav war crimes tribunal are close to wrapping up their case against former Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic — although it took more than a decade to have him arrested.

The global implications meant little to survivors of the war in Sierra Leone who celebrated Taylor's conviction.

“I am happy that the truth has come out ... that Charles Taylor is fully and solely responsible for the crimes committed against the people of Sierra Leone,” said Jusu Jarka, who had both his arms hacked off by rebels in 1999 and who now runs a support group for fellow amputees.

Crowds that gathered to watch the verdict live on television in the Sierra Leone capital, Freetown, sighed with relief when the conviction was announced. Some carried posters that exposed still-simmering anger. “Shame on you Charles Taylor. Give us your diamonds before going to prison,” one read.

Prosecuting Taylor proved how hard it is to bring leaders to justice. He fled into exile in Nigeria after being indicted in 2003 and wasn't arrested for three years. And while the Sierra Leone court is based in that country's capital, Taylor's trial was staged in the Netherlands for fear it could destabilize the region.

There was no clear paper trail linking Taylor to rebels, and the three-judge panel wound up convicting him of aiding and abetting the fighters. He was cleared of direct command responsibility over the rebels.

Secret Service Investigating Another Trip

WASHINGTON (AP) — Expanding the prostitution investigation, the Secret Service acknowledged Thursday it is checking whether its employees hired strippers and prostitutes in advance of President Barack Obama's visit last year to El Salvador.

The disclosure came not long after the Homeland Security secretary assured skeptical senators that the recent prostitution scandal in Colombia appeared to be an isolated incident.

A spokesman for the Secret Service, Edwin Donovan, said the agency was investigating allegations raised in news reports about unprofessional behavior that have emerged in the aftermath of the Colombia incident. The latest, by Seattle television station KIRO-TV, quoted anonymous sources as saying that Secret Service employees received sexual favors from strippers at a club in San Salvador and took prostitutes to their hotel rooms ahead of Obama's visit to the city in March 2011.

Prostitution is legal in both Colombia and El Salvador.

Separately, *The Washington Post* this week cited unnamed “confidants” of the Secret Service officers implicated in Colombia saying senior managers had tolerated similar behavior during previous official trips. The *Post* described a visit to Buenos Aires in 2009 by former President Bill Clinton, whose protective detail it said included agents and uniformed officers. During that trip, the *Post* said, members of the detail went out for a late night of partying at strip clubs.

Pakistani Authorities Deport Bin Laden's Family

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Pakistani authorities deported Osama bin Laden's three widows and his children to Saudi Arabia early Friday, less than a week before the first anniversary of the unilateral American raid that killed the al-Qaida leader in his hideout in a military town.

The departure of the family closed another chapter in an affair that cemented Pakistan's reputation as a hub of Islamist extremism and cast doubt on its trustworthiness as a Western ally.

Once outside Pakistan, the wives may be willing to share any information they have about how bin Laden managed to evade capture in the country for nearly a decade following the Sept. 11, 2001 terror attacks in the United States.

The U.S. commandos took bin Laden's body, which they later buried at sea, but left his family behind. His wives and children were detained by Pakistani authorities immediately after the pre-dawn raid on May 2, 2011.

Two of the widows are from Saudi Arabia, and the third is from Yemen.

EPA Official Apologizes For Using Word 'Crucify'

HOUSTON (AP) — A top administrator for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has apologized for using the word “crucify” two years ago when describing the agency's enforcement policies, and for saying it makes examples of bad players in the oil and gas industry.

EPA Region 6 administrator Al Armendariz, who oversees Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Louisiana and New Mexico, issued a written apology Wednesday after video surfaced of him at a meeting in May 2010 in the tiny town of Dish.

The video shows Armendariz answering a question about the agency's enforcement policies. He tells the audience he is going to share an analogy with them that he believes may be “crude.” In the Middle Ages, he told the crowd, the Romans would enter a troublesome village, “take the first five guys they saw and crucify them.” Then the town would be “really easy to manage for the next few years,” he said.

The EPA also makes “examples of people who are not complying with the law, you make examples out of them, use it as a deterrent method,” Armendariz continued. “Companies that are smart see that and they don't want to play that, and they decide at that point that it's time to clean up.”

To some Republicans and conservatives, the comments justified their long-standing allegation that the EPA under President Barack Obama has stepped up enforcement to a point where it is harming the economy and the energy industry. The agency has become a popular target on the campaign trail, and Republican presidential contender Mitt Romney has in the past called for EPA chief Lisa P. Jackson to be fired.

Remember when you felt safe enough to laugh at a silly joke?



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