

Delay In Health Law Feature For Small Firms?

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Obama administration is proposing a one-year delay in a feature of the new health care law intended to give workers at small companies health plan choices similar to what employees of large businesses enjoy.

Starting Jan. 1 small companies with up to 100 workers will be able to buy coverage through new health insurance marketplaces called exchanges. These exchanges are the small business version of new markets also opening up for individuals.

As originally envisioned, employees would have been the ones to pick their plans. But now, for the first year, the employer will choose for the entire company.

Officials say the transition period is needed to smooth the introduction of the program.

Texas: Killing Of DA Puts Others On High Alert

KAUFMAN, Texas (AP) — Deputies escorted some Kaufman County employees into the courthouse Monday, two days after the district attorney and his wife were found shot to death in their home in an attack that stirred fears that other public employees could be targeted by assassins.

Law enforcement officers were seen patrolling one side of the courthouse, one holding a semi-automatic weapon, while others walked around inside.

Authorities have said little about the investigation into the deaths of Kaufman County District Attorney Mike McLelland and his wife, whose bodies were found Saturday.

The couple's slayings came less than two weeks after Colorado's prison chief was shot to death at his front door, apparently by an ex-convict, and a couple of months after Kaufman County Assistant District Attorney Mark Hasse was killed in a parking lot near his courthouse office. No arrests have been made in Hasse's Jan. 31 killing.

"I don't want to walk around in fear every day ... but on the other hand, two months ago, we wouldn't be having this conversation," County Judge Bruce Wood, the county's top administrator, said Monday at a news conference.

Syrian Goup: More Than 6,000 Killed In March

BEIRUT (AP) — March was the bloodiest month yet in Syria's 2-year-old conflict with more than 6,000 documented deaths, a leading anti-regime activist group said Monday, blaming the increase on heavier shelling and more violent clashes.

Rami Abdul-Rahman, who heads the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, said the increased toll is likely incomplete because both the Syrian army and the rebel groups fighting the government often under-report their death in the civil war.

"Both sides are hiding information," Abdul-Rahman said by phone from Britain, where his group is based. "It is very difficult to get correct info on the fighters because they don't want the information to hurt morale."

Myanmar Police Say 13 Children Die In Fire

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) — A fire engulfed a mosque housing orphans in Myanmar's largest city Tuesday morning, killing at least 13 children in the blaze that police blamed on an electrical short.

Riot police were deployed nearby as some Muslims gathering outside the charred building feared the fire was linked to sectarian violence that has shaken the nation.

Police officer Thet Lwin said the fire was triggered by an overheated inverter "and not due to any criminal activity."

Myanmar has been on edge after sectarian violence between Buddhists and Muslims erupted in the central city of Meiktila in March, killing dozens of people and displacing more than 10,000. The violence that has largely targeted Muslims has since spread to several other towns where extremist Buddhist mobs have torched or ransacked mosques and Muslim-owned property.

The mosque is in eastern Yangon.

Thet Lwin said about 75 orphans lived there and most escaped safely by running out of a door police knocked open. It was not immediately clear how the 13 victims became trapped.

City Council Votes To Require Gun Ownership

NELSON, Ga. (AP) — The city council in a small north Georgia town voted Monday night to make gun ownership mandatory — unless you object.

Council members in Nelson, a city of about 1,300 residents that's located 50 miles north of Atlanta, voted unanimously to approve the Family Protection Ordinance. The measure requires every head of household to own a gun and ammunition to "provide for the emergency management of the city" and to "provide for and protect the safety, security and general welfare of the city and its inhabitants."

Not that every household must go out and purchase a firearm.

The ordinance exempts convicted felons and those who suffer from certain physical or mental disabilities, as well as anyone who objects to gun ownership. The ordinance also doesn't include any penalty for those who don't comply.

But backers said they wanted to make a statement about gun rights at a time when President Barack Obama and some states are pushing for more restrictions in the wake of the Connecticut elementary school massacre in December that left 20 children and six educators dead.

Councilman Duane Cronin, who sponsored the measure, said he knows the ordinance won't be enforced but he still believes it will make the town safer.

"I likened it to a security sign that people put up in their front yards. Some people have security systems, some people don't, but they put those signs up," he said. "I really felt like this ordinance was a security sign for our city. Basically it was a deterrent ordinance to tell potential criminals they might want to go on down the road a little bit."

Aurora Shootings

Death Penalty Sought In Attack

BY DAN ELLIOTT
Associated Press

CENTENNIAL, Colo. — For James Holmes, "justice is death," prosecutors said Monday in announcing they will seek his execution if he is convicted in the Colorado movie theater attack that killed 12 people.

The decision — disclosed in court just days after prosecutors publicly rejected Holmes' offer to plead guilty if they took the death penalty off the table — elevated the already sensational case to a new level and could cause it to drag on for years.

"It's my determination and my intention that in this case, for James Eagan Holmes, justice is death," District Attorney George Brauchler said, adding that he had discussed the case with 60 people who lost relatives in the July 20 shooting rampage by a gunman in a gas mask and body armor during a midnight showing of the latest Batman movie.

There was no audible reaction from the 25-year-old former neuroscience graduate student, who sat with his back to reporters, or from vic-



Holmes

tims' families in the courtroom. Holmes' parents sat side by side in the gallery, clutching hands with fingers intertwined.

The decision had been widely predicted by legal analysts.

Within minutes of its becoming official, the trial was pushed back from August to next February and Judge William B. Sylvester removed himself from

the case, saying that now that the charges carry the death penalty they will take years to resolve and he does not have the time to devote to such a drawn-out matter.

Despite the potential for more delays, some of those who lost loved ones were happy with prosecutors' decision.

"I had a huge adrenaline rush," said Bryan Beard, whose best friend Alex Sullivan was killed in the attack. "I love the choice. I love it, I love it." He added: "I hope I'm in the room when he dies."

But the prospect of a longer legal battle trou-

bles others such as Pierce O'Farrill, who was shot three times.

"It could be 10 or 15 years before he's executed. I would be in my 40s and I'm planning to have a family, and the thought of having to look back and reliving everything at that point in my life, it would be difficult," he said.

Legal observers said Holmes' lawyers publicly offered a guilty plea in what may have been a bid to gain support among victims' families for a deal that would spare them a painful trial and lengthy appeals.

The prosecution and the defense could still reach a deal before the case goes to trial.

Holmes' lawyers have indicated in court papers that they may instead pursue a defense of not guilty by reason of insanity. But that carries great risk: Prosecutors could argue that Holmes methodically planned his attack, casing the theater, stockpiling weapons and booby-trapping his apartment with explosives.

If he is found not guilty by reason of insanity, he will be sent to the state mental hospital, then returned to prison after treatment.

ON A ROLL IN WASHINGTON



Participants roll eggs during the White House Easter Egg Roll on the South Lawn of the White House Monday. Thousands of people attended the 134-year-old tradition of rolling colored eggs down the White House lawn that was started by President Rutherford B. Hayes in 1878.

NKorea Taps Reformist Premier

BY FOSTER KLUG
AND HYUNG-JIN KIM
Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea — North Korea's parliament approved the appointment of a new premier seen by outside experts as an economic reformer one day after top party officials adopted a declaration making nuclear arms and a stronger economy the nation's top priorities.

The U.S., meanwhile, made its latest conspicuous display of firepower, announcing it had sent F-22 stealth fighter jets to participate in annual U.S.-South Korean war games that Pyongyang calls preparation for an invasion. The new South Korean president, who has a policy meant to re-engage Pyongyang with talks and aid, told her top military leaders Monday to set aside political considerations and respond strongly should North Korea attack.

The re-emergence of Pak Pong Ju as premier at an annual spring parliamentary session is seen by

analysts as a clear signal that leader Kim Jong Un is moving to back up recent vows to focus on strengthened economic development. The U.N. says two-thirds of the country's 24 million people face regular food shortages.

Pak was the North's premier in 2003-2007, according to Seoul's Unification Ministry. He was sacked initially because of a proposal for an incentive-based hourly, rather than monthly, wage system deemed too similar to U.S.-style capitalism. Japan's *Mainichi Shimbun* newspaper reported in 2007. Pak replaces Choe Yong Rim, who is 82.

"Pak Pong Ju is the face of economic reform, such as it exists — reform with North Korean characteristics as they say," said John Delury, a professor and North

Korea analyst at Seoul's Yonsei University.

Any economic changes won't be radical, Delury said, and, for the time being, they're mostly aspirational. One possible change could entail a shift of part of the country's massive military spending into the economy as a whole, he said.

Pak is widely known for spearheading reforms in 2002, when the government began allowing some markets, although it later backtracked, said Koh Yu-hwan, a North Korea analyst at Seoul's Dongguk University. His appointment could be a message to the outside world that North Korea wants to calm tension and focus more on economic revitalization, Koh said.

Connecticut Strikes Deal On Tough Gun Laws

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — Connecticut lawmakers announced a deal Monday on what they called some of the toughest gun laws in the country that were proposed after the December mass shooting in the state, including a ban on new high-capacity ammunition magazines like the ones used in the massacre that left 20 children and six educators dead.

The proposal includes new registration requirements for existing magazines that carry 10 or more bullets, something of a disappointment for some family members of Newtown victims who wanted an outright ban on the possession of all high-capacity magazines and traveled to the state Capitol on Monday to ask lawmakers for it.

The package also creates what lawmakers said is the nation's first statewide dangerous weapon of-fender registry, creates a new "ammunition eligibility certificate," imposes immediate universal background checks for all firearms sales, and extends the state's assault weapons ban to 100 new types of firearms and requires that a weapon have only one of several features in order to be banned.

The newly banned weapons could no longer be bought or sold in Connecticut, and those legally owned already would have to be registered with the state, just like the high-capacity magazines.

"No gun owner will lose their gun," said House Minority Leader Lawrence Cafero Jr., a Norwalk Republican. "No gun owner will lose their magazines."

The bill also addresses mental health and school security measures.

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