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EU Commits Aid To Address Tragedy

BRUSSELS (AP) — Late to the rescue, European leaders came through Thursday with pledges of big ships, aircraft and a tripling in funds to save lives in the Mediterranean after the deaths at sea of more than 1,300 migrants over the past three weeks, and agreed to lay the groundwork for military action against traffickers.

Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, whose country has been faced with almost daily tragedy as rescuers plucked bodies from frigid waters, called it "a giant step forward."

Within days, Britain's aptly named HMS Bulwark and the German supply ship Berlin could be steaming to the heart of the Mediterranean in the biggest sign of the European Union's belated commitment to contain the tide of rickety ships making the perilous crossing.

The pledge of resources came as victims of the worstever migrant disaster in the Mediterranean were buried Thursday in Malta. Two dozen wooden caskets containing the only bodies recovered from a weekend capsizing off Libya that left at least 800 migrants feared dead were laid out for a memorial service.

None of the bodies was identified: One casket had "No. 132" scrawled on it, referring to the number of the DNA sample taken from the corpse in case a relative ever comes to claim it.

Few Vets Getting Care Through Program

NEW YORK (AP) — A new program that was supposed to get patients off waiting lists at Veterans Affairs medical centers by letting them switch to private-sector doctors is proving to be an even bigger disappointment than initially thought.

The Veteran's Choice program launched on Nov. 5 with \$10 billion in funding and the expectation that it would instantly relieve backlogs at VA hospitals and clinics. But after a hurried rollout that has led to confusion as to exactly who is eligible and what they need to do to coordinate treatment, officials now say only 37,648 medical appointments have been made through April 11.

That figure represents only a tiny fraction of eligible patients. The Choice plan is supposed to be open to patients who live more than 40 miles from a VA hospital or clinic or who have been told they would have to wait more than 30 days for VA care. As of April 1, there were nearly 432,000 appointments pending in the VA's scheduling system involving a wait that long.

VA leaders have previously acknowledged that few vets were successfully using the Choice program, but the new statistic came as a surprise — as of mid-March, officials were saying that more than 45,000 appointments had been completed and that participation had been rising.

A VA spokeswoman said data analysts recently cor-rected that count to exclude duplicate appointments and "incomplete transactions."

Gray Not Strapped in During Ride

BALTIMORE (AP) — No video captured what happened to Freddie Gray inside the police van where officers heaved him into a metal compartment after pinning him to a sidewalk. The cause of his fatal spine injury has not been revealed.

But a troubling detail emerged as hundreds of protesters converged on City Hall again Thursday: He was not only handcuffed and put in leg irons, but left without a seat belt during his trip to the station, a police union's lawyer said.

Unbelted detainees have been paralyzed and even killed by rough rides in what used to be called "paddy wagons." It even has a name: "nickel rides," referring to cheap amusement park thrills.

Police brutality against prisoners being transported was addressed just six months ago in a plan released by Baltimore officials to reduce this misconduct. Department rules updated nine days before Gray's arrest clearly state that all detainees shall be strapped in by seat belts or "other authorized restraining devices" for their own safety after arrest.

Gray was not belted in, said attorney Michael Davey, who represents at least one of the officers under investigation.





OLIVIER DOULIERY/TNS

U.S. President Barack Obama makes a statement about the two hostages killed by a U.S. drone strike targeted at an al-Qaida compound in the Press Briefing Room of the White House on Thursday, in Washington, D.C. The two hostages were Dr. Warren Weinstein, an American held by al-Qaida since 2011, and Giovanni Lo Porto, an Italian national who had been an al-Qaida hostage since 2012.

Experts Say Drone Strikes Appear In Bounds Of US Law

BY NEDRA PICKLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON - President Barack Obama said Thursday that recent U.S. strikes that killed Americans were consistent with guidelines for counterterrorism efforts, and experts say the attacks appear to have been within the bounds of Ú.Ś. law despite what the president called "deadly mistakes."

The White House said U.S. officials had been unaware that two hostages, an American and an Italian, or that two American al-Qaida operatives were present when the attacks were conducted in January. In a 2011 case, the United States specifically targeted an American, resulting in a lawsuit against the government that was later dismissed.

"I don't initially see legal problems," said Chris Edelson, an assistant professor of government at American University and author of "Emergency Presidential Power: From the Drafting of the Constitu-tion to the War on Terror." "If the attacks were carried out against al-Qaida, they were legitimate under U.S. law.

Congress gave the president authority to carry out military action against al-Qaida in 2001, after the September 11 attacks. The attacks revealed Thursday were carried out in Pakistan by the CIA, and some have long questioned whether the CIA can impose lethal force.

But the bigger questions the deaths raise are about the quality of U.S. intelligence surrounding drone strikes and whether Obama is living up to his standards for avoiding the loss of innocent lives. "Before any strike is taken, there

must be near-certainty that no civilians will be killed or injured — the highest standard we can set," Obama said in a May 2013 speech at National Defense

University. At least 20 civilians, including six chil-dren, have reportedly died in U.S. drone strikes since that speech, according to the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, a London-based group that has been critical of drone strikes. The group says all were in Yemen, as part of at least 31 U.S. drone strikes that have killed at least 153 people.

After Obama announced the near-certainty standard, the frequency of strikes dropped sharply and the use of so-called signature strikes — attacks aimed at large groups of armed men who fit the profile of militants but whose names were not all known to the CIA - was curtailed. But White House press secretary Josh Earnest said the targets in January were the compounds used by al-Qaida leaders, not any individuals specifically.

Obama said he took "full responsibility" for the counterterror missions that took the lives of hostages Warren Weinstein and Giovanni Lo Porto, both captured years ago by al-Qaida while working on aid missions in Pakistan. Obama promised a full review to try to prevent similar deaths in the future.

"Our initial assessment indicates that this operation was fully consistent with the guidelines under which we conduct counterterrorism efforts in the region, which has been our focus for years because it is the home of al-Qaida's leadership," Obama said. "And based on the intelligence that we had obtained at

the time, including hundreds of hours of surveillance, we believed that this was an al-Qaida compound; that no civilians were present; and that capturing these terrorists was not possible. And we do believe that the operation did take out dangerous members of al-Qaida. What we did not know, tragically, is that al-Qaida was hiding the presence of Warren and Giovanni in this same compound."

The White House also said the administration was not aware that the al-Qaida leaders that were the targets of the strikes included two Americans, Ahmed Farouq and Adam Gadahn.

Jameel Jaffer, American Civil Liber-ties Union deputy legal director, said it's remarkable that "the U.S. quite literally didy'i more use is used billing and didn't know who it was killing

"Everybody understands that if you are going to use lethal force, there are going to be civilian casualties," Jaffer said in a telephone interview. "When in strike after strike after strike there are civilian casualties, it's very hard to understand how that record can be squared with what the president described in 2013."

Jaffer represented the families of two other Americans killed in 2011 by U.S. drone strikes in the lawsuit alleging top U.S. national security officials violated constitutional rights to due process by authorizing the strikes without a trial. A strike successfully targeted Anwar al-Awlaki, a radical Muslim cleric born in New Mexico, and also killed American Samir Khan. Another strike killed Awlaki's teenage son, Abdulrahman al-Awlaki, The administration said the deaths of the teenager and Khan were unintentional.

Michael Brown's Parents Sue Ferguson

CLAYTON, Mo. (AP) — Michael Brown's parents filed a wrongful-death lawsuit against the city of Ferguson on Thursday, opening a new chapter in the legal battle over the shooting that killed their son and sparked a national protest movement about the way police treat blacks.

Attorneys for Brown's parents promised the case would bring to light new forensic evidence and raise doubts about the police version of events. Some of that evidence, they said, had been overlooked in previous investigations.

The narrative of the law enforcement all across the country for shooting unarmed people of color is the same: That they had no other choice," attorney Benjamin Crump said. "But time and time again, the objective evidence contradicts the standard police narrative.

Brown's parents, Lesley McSpadden and Michael Brown Sr., attended a news conference announcing the lawsuit outside the St. Louis County Courthouse. A tear rolled down McSpadden's cheek as Crump spoke.

"It's all part of the journey," she said.

Petraeus Gets 2 Years' Probation, Fine

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) - Former CIA Director David Petraeus, whose career was destroyed by an extramarital affair with his biographer, was sentenced Thursday to two years' probation and fined \$100,000 for giving her classified material while she was working on the book.

The sentencing came two months after he agreed to plead guilty to a federal misdemeanor count of unauthorized removal and retention of classified material.

The plea agreement carried a possible sentence of up to a year in prison. In court papers, prosecutors recommended two vears' probation and a \$40,000 fine. But Judge David Keesler increased the fine to "reflect seriousness of the offense." He said Petraeus committed a "grave and uncharacteristic error in judgment.'

Appearing calm and wearing a business suit, Petraeus made a brief statement before he was sentenced, apologizing "for the pain my actions have caused."

Petraeus attorney Jake Sussman said this was not a case about the public dissemination of classified information, but the wrongful removal of materials.

Clinton Gives Glimpse Of How She'll Run

WASHINGTON (AP) - Hillary Rodham Clinton's passionate speech Thursday appealing for expanded rights and opportunities for women in the U.S. and around the world wasn't supposed to be a campaign event. But it might as well have been.

Addressing the annual Women in the World summit. Clinton made a forceful case for protecting women's health care choices and expanding paid family leave. The front runner for the Democratic nomination, Clinton criticized "those who offer themselves as leaders" but oppose equal pay for women or want to defund Planned Parenthood - a veiled reference to some of her Republican rivals.

The speech in New York provided one of the first glimpses of how Clinton will seek to tout her gender as an asset in the 2016 campaign. Her advisers have long said they regret downplaying the history-making potential of her candidacy during her failed 2008 White House bid and have vowed to not make the same mistake this time around.

Still, that doesn't mean Clinton herself will be talking explicitly about the prospect of being the first woman to occupy the Oval Office. She made only veiled references to her candidacy Thursday, including saying she had wanted to be at the event "regardless of what else I was doing."

Loretta Lynch Wins Confirmation As Attorney General

BY ERICA WERNER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) -Loretta Lynch won confirmation as the nation's first black female attorney general Thursday from a Senate that forced her to wait more than five months for the title and remained divided to the end

The 56-43 vote installs Lynch, now U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of New York, at the Justice Department to replace Eric Holder. Holder has served in the job throughout the Obama administration, becoming a lightning rod for conservatives who perceived him as overly political and liberal, and even getting held in contempt of Congress.

Lynch, 55, is seen as a no-nonsense prosecutor, and has wide law enforcement support. The issue that tore into her support with Republicans was immigration, and her refusal to denounce President Barack Obama's executive actions limiting deportations for millions of people living illegally in this country. Questioned on the issue at her confirmation hearing in January, she said she believed Obama's actions were reasonable and lawful.

Democrats angrily criticized Republicans for using the issue against her, saying an executive branch nominee could not be expected to disagree strongly with the president who appointed her, but Republicans were unapologetic.

Announced GOP presidential candidate Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, said Lynch's comments rendered her "unsuitable for confirmation as attorney general of the United States. That was a shame.'

Yet after returning from the campaign trail to rail against Lynch on the Senate floor Thursday, Cruz was the only senator absent when the vote was called. He

voted "no" on a procedural vote earlier in the day, which

spokeswoman Amanda Carpenter insisted "was the vote that mattered." She did not explain why Cruz missed the confirmation vote, but an invitation on his campaign website showed he had a fundraiser in Dallas to attend.

Still, Lynch won the sup-

port of 10 Republicans, more than expected in the days heading into the vote. In a surprise, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., was among those voting "yes." Obama said the U.S.

would be better off with Lynch.

In a speech to his advocacy group, Organizing for

Action, Obama said Lynch had established credibility with both law enforcement and civil rights groups, adding that he wanted to work with her to rebuild trust between police and communities in the U.S.

'She's spent her life fighting for the fair and equal justice that's the foundation of our democracy," Obama said.



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