

NATION/WORLD DIGEST

Ruling Expected In Calif. Gay Marriage Case

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — A federal judge in San Francisco has reached a decision in a landmark case on whether California's same-sex marriage ban violates the constitutional rights of gay men and lesbians.

Chief U.S. District Judge Vaughn Walker will issue his ruling Wednesday, said Lynn Fuller, a U.S. District Court spokeswoman. The decision came in a lawsuit brought by two same-sex couples seeking to overturn California's voter-approved Proposition 8, which outlaws gay marriage.

Both sides previously said an appeal was certain if Walker did not rule in their favor. The case would go first to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals then the Supreme Court if the high court justices agree to review it.

Walker presided over a 13-day trial that was the first in federal court to examine if states can prohibit gays from getting married. Supporters argued the ban was necessary to safeguard the traditional understanding of marriage and to encourage responsible childbearing.

Opponents said that tradition or fears of harm to heterosexual unions were legally insufficient grounds to discriminate against gay couples.

Obama Freezes Bonuses For Appointees

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama on Tuesday froze any cash bonuses or similar discretionary pay boosts for political appointees, calling it a prudent example of cost-cutting at a time when many families are just trying to get by financially.

The move is expected to affect at least 2,900 people on the federal payroll and save about \$1.9 million a year. Obama has also suggested a salary freeze for senior political appointees throughout the government, but that move would take the approval of Congress.

Obama spelled out his directive on the bonuses in a memo to agency and department directors. The freeze takes effect immediately and lasts through the budget year ending September 2011.

"I appreciate the hard work of our federal work force, and understand how important these payments can be to many workers and their families," Obama said. "Yet like households and businesses across the country, we need to make tough choices about how to spend our funds."

The move does not apply to federal workers who are not political appointees.

Ginsburg Says No Plans To Leave Court

WASHINGTON (AP) — Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg is looking forward to being one of three women on the Supreme Court for the foreseeable future.

The 77-year-old Ginsburg told The Associated Press on Tuesday she has no plans to retire anytime soon and still wants to match Justice Louis Brandeis, who stepped down at age 82.

Ginsburg says the court's demanding work helped her cope with the death of her husband, Martin, in June.

She says she showed up in court the day after his death to read her opinion in a closely divided case because their children said their father would have wanted her there. Ginsburg agreed he would.

Ginsburg talked with the AP as the Senate began debate on the all-but-assured confirmation of high court nominee Elena Kagan.

Hackers Look To Take Over Power Plants

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. officials say computer hackers are targeting power plants and other critical infrastructure around the world in bold new efforts to seize control of operations.

For the first time, cyber experts have discovered a malicious computer code that was specifically created to take over systems that control the inner workings of industrial plants.

As much as 85 percent of the nation's critical infrastructure is owned and operated by private companies, ranging from nuclear and electric power plants to transportation and manufacturing systems.

The Department of Homeland Security is creating new specialized teams to confront the threat.

Interior Official: Drill Ban May Be Lifted Early

WASHINGTON (AP) — The nation's top drilling regulator says the Obama administration hopes to lift a freeze on deepwater drilling well before its scheduled Nov. 30 expiration date.

Michael Bromwich, who is director of the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement, said he and Interior Secretary Ken Salazar are gathering information to decide whether to revise or even lift the ban, which has shut down drilling at 33 ocean wells in the wake of the BP spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

Bromwich said Tuesday that officials hope to feel comfortable enough with safety improvements so the moratorium can be lifted "significantly in advance of November 30."

Bromwich is hosting a series of public forums on the Gulf Coast starting Wednesday in New Orleans.

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OBITUARIES

Rev. O.K. Anderson

SIoux FALLS — The Rev. O.K. Anderson, 68, of Sioux Falls died Sunday (Aug. 1, 2010) at Good Samaritan Village after a long battle with Primary Progressive M.S. Funeral services are at 2 p.m. Saturday at Gloria Dei Lutheran Church.

The family will be present to greet friends from 5-7 p.m. Friday at Miller West Funeral Chapel, Sioux Falls.

For obituary and on-line registry, visit www.millerfh.com.

Rose Hefner

ARLINGTON, Tex. — Rose V. Hefner, 88, of Arlington, Texas,

died Sunday (Aug. 1, 2010). She is the wife of the late Wilfred Hefner.

Funeral services are at 10:30 a.m. Monday, Aug. 9, at Immanuel Lutheran Church, Coleridge, Neb., with the Rev. Katie Russell officiating. Burial will be in the Lawn Ridge Cemetery, Coleridge. Visitation is Monday one hour prior to services at church.

Services are under the direction of Wintz Funeral Home, Coleridge.

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Conn. Beer Deliveryman Kills Eight, Self

BY STEPHEN SINGER
Associated Press Writer

MANCHESTER, Conn. — A driver caught stealing beer from the warehouse where he worked agreed to resign his job Tuesday and then as "cold as ice," one of his victims said, went on a shooting rampage, killing eight people and injuring two before committing suicide.

Omar Thornton pulled out a handgun after a meeting in which he was shown video evidence of the thefts and was offered the chance to quit or be fired.

"Then he went out on this rampage," company vice president Steve Hollander told The Associated Press. "He was cool and calm. He didn't yell. He was cold as ice. He didn't protest when we were meeting with him to show him the video of him stealing. He didn't contest it. He didn't complain. He didn't argue. He didn't admit or deny anything. He just agreed to resign. And then he just unexplainably pulled out his gun and started blasting."

Hollander said he thinks Thornton, 34, had guns stashed in his lunch box. The executive said two people standing near him were shot in the head and killed, but he was only grazed in the jaw and the arm.

"He shot at me twice and hit me a couple times," he said. "By just the grace of God, I don't know how he missed me."
About 50 to 70 people were in the Hartford Distributors warehouse about 10 miles east of Hartford during a shift change when the gunman opened fire around 7 a.m., said Brett Hollander, Steve Hollander's cousin and a member of the family that owns the distributorship.

"I was on the phone with 911 and then I saw him running outside of my office window, shooting his gun, carrying his lunch box, which must have had his weapons in it," Steve Hollander said. "It doesn't seem real to me now, it seems like I'm watching a movie."

The shooting was over in a matter of minutes. The victims were found all over the complex, and authorities said they didn't know if Thornton fired randomly or targeted specific co-workers.

After shooting his co-workers, Thornton called his mother, said Joanne Hannah, the mother of Thornton's girlfriend.

"He wanted to say goodbye and that he loved everybody," she said.

Thornton was alive when police got to the scene but killed himself before officers got to him, Manchester police Chief Marc Montminy said. A police sharpshooter had approval to fire on Thornton when he killed himself, an official with knowledge of the scene told the AP on condition of anonymity.



A man wipes his eyes while walking with a Manchester Police officer in the aftermath of a shooting at Hartford Distributors, a family-owned beer and wine wholesaler, that left nine people dead in Manchester, Connecticut, on Tuesday, August 3, 2010.

because he was not authorized to discuss it.

Workers had flooded out of the building as three teams of police officers raced into it, Montminy told the town's board of directors Tuesday evening.

"Some were hiding in the woods and some were hiding under cars," he said.

State police found weapons in the suspect's car, Montminy said, without providing details.

Steve Hollander said Thornton killed "many good people today for absolutely no reason at all, people who've never said an unkind word to him.... He was just shooting at anyone that was near him and just cruelty beyond cruelty."

Hannah said her daughter, Kristi, had dated Thornton for the past eight years. Kristi Hannah did not return calls for comment.

"Everybody's got a breaking point," Joanne Hannah said.

Thornton, who was black, had complained of racial harassment and said he found a picture of a noose and a racial epithet written on a bathroom wall, Hannah said. Her daughter told her that Thornton's supervisors told him they would talk to his co-workers.

Annette Levine, cousin of Thornton's mother, says Omar Thornton's last words to his mother were he loved her and the Hartford Distributors warehouse where he

worked had "pushed him over the edge."

"He said the company was prejudiced and they pushed him," Levine said. "Those were the last words he told his mom: He loved her and they pushed him over the edge."

But Levine said the shooting was not justified.

Thornton's uncle Henry Holliday said Thornton's mother was crying all day and was too distraught to talk. He called the shooting a tragedy for everyone involved.

Holliday described his nephew as quiet and hardworking, saying he had two jobs. He said he had a daughter.

"Right now there are no words," Holliday said of Omar's mother. "It's all tears. It's a tragedy all around for everybody."

Brett Hollander said, "I can assure you there has never been any racial discrimination at our company." A union official said Thornton had not filed a complaint of racism with the union or any government agency.

"This is a disgruntled employee who shot a bunch of people," Teamsters official Christopher Roos said.

Thornton was not a problem employee and had not had any previous disciplinary issues, said Gregg Adler, a lawyer for the Teamsters Local 1035. His debts were discharged in March 2001 and the case was closed the following month.

NYC Panel Clears Way For Mosque Near Ground Zero

BY KAREN MATTHEWS AND
BETH FOUHY
Associated Press Writers

NEW YORK — A city panel Tuesday cleared the way for the construction near ground zero of a mosque that has caused a political uproar over religious freedom and Sept. 11 even as opponents vowed to press their case in court.

The Landmarks Preservation Commission voted unanimously to deny landmark status to a building two blocks from the World Trade Center site that developers want to tear down and convert into an Islamic community center and mosque. The panel said the 152-year-old lower Manhattan building isn't distinctive enough to be considered a landmark.

The decision drew praise from Mayor Michael Bloomberg, who stepped before cameras on Governor's Island with the Statue of Liberty as a backdrop shortly after the panel voted and called the mosque project a key test of Americans' commitment to religious freedom.

"The World Trade Center site will forever hold a special place in our city, in our hearts," said Bloomberg, a Republican turned independent. "But we would be untrue to the best part of ourselves, and who we are as New Yorkers and Americans, if we said no to a mosque in lower Manhattan."

The vote was a setback for

opponents of the mosque, who say it disrespects the memory of those killed at the hands of Islamic terrorists on Sept. 11, 2001. Jeers and shouts of "Shame on you" could be heard after the panel's vote.

The American Center for Law and Justice, a conservative advocacy group founded by the Rev. Pat Robertson, announced it would challenge the panel's decision in state court Wednesday. ACLJ attorney Brett Jospe said the group would file a petition alleging that the landmarks panel "acted arbitrarily and abused its discretion."

The proposed mosque has emerged as a national political issue, with prominent Republicans from former Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin to former House Speaker Newt Gingrich lining up against it. The Anti-Defamation League, the nation's most prominent Jewish civil rights group, known for advocating religious freedom, shocked many groups when it spoke out against the mosque last week.

The League said building the Islamic center "in the shadow of the World Trade Center will cause some victims more pain — unnecessarily — and that is not right."

Bloomberg said Tuesday that denying religious freedom to Muslims would play into terrorists' hands. He said firefighters and other first responders who died in the Sept. 11 attacks had done so to protect the U.S. Constitution.

Obama Runs Risk By Withdrawing Troops

BY BARRY SCHWEID
AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama's decision to stick to a promise to withdraw all but 50,000 U.S. troops from Iraq by the end of August, despite a surge in violence, gives more weight to domestic dismay at American losses than to countering political unrest in the U.S.-liberated country.

As a senator, Obama called the war to free oil-rich Iraq from Saddam Hussein's cruel reign a "dumb war, a rash war." As president, though, he continued the fight to stabilize Iraq, where at least 4,413 members of the U.S. military have died since the 2003 U.S.-led invasion.

Now with public sentiment rising against the growing U.S. death toll in Afghanistan, Obama says he will make good on a pledge to remove all designated combat forces from Iraq by Sept. 1 — despite the threat of growing unrest in that country and 16 months before the Bush administration's total withdrawal deadline at the end of 2011, which remains intact.

As president, Obama ordered a nearly threefold increase in U.S. troops in Afghanistan to battle al-Qaida and the Taliban. There have been 1,128 U.S. military deaths in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Uzbekistan, by Associated Press count, since fighting began in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the United States.

With the boost, however, the White House calculates the total number of troops committed to the two conflicts will have been reduced next month from 177,000 in January 2009 to roughly 146,000 — 50,000 in Iraq and 96,000 in Afghanistan.

"This is exactly the wrong moment to complete the withdrawal of combat forces, given the uncertainty in Iraq and Iran's increased involvement in trying to cause trouble in Iraq," John Bolton, former U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and a scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, said Tuesday.

"I think it is related to Afghanistan," Bolton said in an interview. "He is looking to the dissatisfaction from the Democratic left on Afghanistan. I think he is going to pursue withdrawal in Iraq and signal it in Afghanistan, as well," Bolton said.

"The trouble is al-Qaida and Taliban are reading the same speech, and I think it endangers us in both Iraq and Afghanistan."

And, the former senior official said, "I think he has been a complete failure in articulating the reasons why Americans are deployed."

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