

## NATION/WORLD DIGEST

### Rhetoric Dims Prospects For Compromise

WASHINGTON (AP) — Prospects are bleak for fixing Social Security's financial problems as the government retirement insurance program celebrates its 75th anniversary this week. Many Democrats adamantly oppose any cut in benefits to reduce cost and some won't accept a gradual increase in the retirement age, something that was done in the last overhaul in 1983. Republicans say an increase in Social Security taxes is out of the question, even for the wealthy. Unless Congress acts, Social Security's combined retirement and disability trust funds are expected to run out of money in 2037. At that point, Social Security will collect enough in payroll taxes to cover about three-fourths of the benefits. The rhetoric is creating a tough environment for President Barack Obama's bipartisan fiscal commission to come up with recommendations to improve the government's troubled finances. Obama says everything should be on the table, and the commission's co-chairmen — a Republican and a Democrat — have asked for civil discourse. Not likely.

### Gibbs Stands By 'Professional Left' Criticism

WASHINGTON (AP) — White House press secretary Robert Gibbs said Wednesday he might have said things differently when he lashed out at liberals he called the "professional left" and suggested some of them should be drug tested. But he told his daily White House briefing that he's certainly not leaving his job over the remark, as at least one Democratic congressman has suggested. And he stuck to his line that President Barack Obama has accomplished or made great strides on key goals and promises despite criticism from some liberals that he has not done enough. Gibbs found himself in hot water with some liberals after his remarks in an interview with "The Hill" newspaper. The spokesman said that liberals who likened Obama to former President George W. Bush on many policies should be "drug tested."

One Democratic congressman, Minnesota's Keith Ellison, suggested Gibbs resign.

### Fugitive Couple Eludes Capture

GENTRY, Ark. (AP) — They fancy themselves a modern-day Bonnie and Clyde who pulled off a brazen prison escape in Arizona and allegedly went on a bloody, multistate crime spree. They dyed their hair and stuck to out-of-the-way places to avoid drawing attention to themselves. John McCluskey and Casslyn Welch have become two of the most-wanted fugitives in America over the past two weeks as they traversed far-off towns across the West and eluded capture at every turn.

On Wednesday, the manhunt shifted from the wild, open lands of northern Montana near the Canadian border to a tiny town in the Arkansas Ozarks where McCluskey and Welch are suspected of robbing a beauty salon.

Investigators had thought they may have boxed in the escaped Arizona inmate and his fiancée — who is also his cousin — near Glacier National Park in recent days. Federal, state and local authorities began checking vehicles at the border and patrolling tiny towns near the park on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police were notified as well.

But the leads that put the couple in Montana have been getting stale, with the last possible sighting on Sunday. Then a beauty store owner hundreds of miles away in Gentry, Ark., got robbed at gunpoint and tied up by two people matching the couple's description.

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## U.N. Appeals For \$460 Mil. For Pakistan

BY EDITH M. LEDERER  
Associated Press Writer

UNITED NATIONS — The United Nations appealed for nearly \$460 million Wednesday to provide immediate help to millions of victims of the worst floods in Pakistan in living memory and said it will need millions more to help rebuild the devastated country.

"Make no mistake, this is a major catastrophe," U.N. humanitarian chief John Holmes told diplomats from several dozen countries in launching the appeal. "The affected population is estimated to be more than 14 million — almost one-tenth of Pakistan's population."

The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which Holmes heads, said at least six or seven million flood victims require immediate humanitarian assistance including shelter, food, clean water, sanitation and medical care.

Before the \$459.7 million appeal was launched, the U.N. already had pledges and commitments of more than \$150 million but some \$300 million is still needed, Holmes said.

He told reporters after Wednesday's pledging conference that he was encouraged by the turnout and generosity of donors, and the commitment of many countries to continue helping Pakistan.

The United States made the biggest pledge, \$71 million. Britain said it has given 5 million pounds (\$7.8 million) to the U.N. children's agency, UNICEF, for water and sanitation; 5 million pounds (\$7.8 million) to the Pakistani Emergency Response Fund; 10 million pounds (\$15.6 million) to rebuild bridges and 750,000 pounds (\$1.2 million) for emergency seed money as well as 2,500 tents, and 4,500 pounds (\$7,000) for Pakistan's emergency radio broadcast program.

Other donations included \$13 million from Germany, \$10 mil-

lion from Australia, \$5 million from Kuwait, \$3.5 million from Japan and \$3.3 million from Norway.

U.S. deputy ambassador Rosemary DiCarlo said the United States also has provided 40,000 prepackaged meals, 12 prefabricated steel bridges, and U.S. military helicopters which along with the Pakistani military have rescued approximately 2,300 people and transported over 200,000 pounds (90,700 kilograms) of relief supplies.

The U.S. aim is to support Pakistan's relief effort "to get aid as rapidly as possible to those in need," she said.

"We have a huge task in front of us," Holmes said. "The death toll has so far been relatively low compared to other major natural disasters, but the numbers affected are extraordinarily high. If we don't act fast enough, many more people could die of diseases and food shortages. ... The incidence of acute diarrhea and other waterborne disease is rising worryingly."

According to the U.N., over 1,200 people have died and at least 288,000 homes have been damaged or destroyed in the flooding.

Pakistan's U.N. Ambassador Abdullah Haroon called the floods a particularly "savagely attack by nature" and praised the United Nations for "assisting in every way possible."

But he said more help was needed and appealed especially for clean water to prevent cholera and assistance in dealing with snakebites, saying thousands of people have already been bitten.

Haroon said the number of people affected could rise further because the floods are spreading and a week of further rains is predicted. He worried that as many as 16 million could be affected.

Noting that the Asian tsunami in 2004 displaced less than 2 million people, Haroon said, "This is seven times the amount. This is horrendous."

## Blagojevich Jurors May Be Deadlocked

BY MICHAEL TARM  
Associated Press Writer

CHICAGO — Jurors deliberating for an 11th day in the corruption trial of former Gov. Rod Blagojevich suggested Wednesday they may be deadlocked on at least some counts.

The jury sent a note to Judge James B. Zagel saying they have made "a reasonable attempt" to reach a unanimous decision and did so without rancor, but asked for guidance if they can't reach a unanimous decision on any given count.

Zagel, who read the note aloud in court, said he would send note back to jurors asking them to be clearer about what they meant so that he could advise them. He said he would tell them it was OK to agree on some counts but not others.

Michael Ettinger, the attorney for Rod Blagojevich's brother — co-defendant Robert Blagojevich — said neither the judge nor

attorneys in court understood exactly what the note meant.

"We don't know what it means. The judge doesn't know what it means," Ettinger said. He said the jurors had gone home for the day, and the judge would have another hearing at 11 a.m. Thursday.

Ettinger said he doesn't believe the jury is confused about the law or about the jury instructions. He believes they're hung, he said.

"A hung jury is better than a conviction," he said. Blagojevich attorney Sam Adam Sr. said he couldn't comment because Zagel told attorneys not to discuss the case.

Joel Levin, a former federal prosecutor in Chicago, said it's likely that jurors have reached a verdict on at least some counts.

"If they hadn't reached a verdict on anything I would have expected some language saying that," he said.

Since the jury began deliberations, they've sent two previous

notes to the judge. Blagojevich and his co-defendant brother haven't been asked to attend court when previous notes were read. But they were asked to show up because of the potential importance of this note.

Rod Blagojevich smiled but seemed more tense as he arrived at the courtroom — not stopping, as he'd often done during much of the trial, to chat with spectators or sign autographs.

As Zagel spoke, Blagojevich looked on with his hands folded. Before proceeding started he walked over to hug his brother Robert's adult son. He left the courtroom without speaking.

Blagojevich, 53, has pleaded not guilty to 24 counts, including charges of trying to sell or trade an appointment to President Barack Obama's vacated Senate seat for a Cabinet post, private job or campaign cash, and of pressuring people for campaign donations. If convicted, he could face up to \$6 million in fines and a sentence of 415 years in

prison, though he is sure to get much less time under federal guidelines.

His brother, Nashville, Tenn., businessman Robert Blagojevich, 54, has also pleaded not guilty to taking part in that alleged scheme.

At the trial, prosecutors relied heavily on wiretap tapes in which Blagojevich spewed profanity and speculated about getting a Cabinet job in exchange for the Senate seat. Defense attorneys argued that Blagojevich was a big talker, but never committed a crime.

Not much is known about the jurors, because Zagel prohibited the release of their names until after the verdict. There is a math teacher, a retired public health official, a former Marine injured serving in the Middle East, a Navy veteran, an avid marathon runner and a man born in a U.S. internment camp for Japanese-Americans during World War II.

## Obama: U.S. On Track To End Iraq Combat Role

BY TOM RAUM  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama is satisfied that the United States can safely end its combat role in Iraq at the end of this month and meet the deadline for removing all U.S. troops from the country by the end of 2011, White House officials said Wednesday.

Obama was briefed on the status of the withdrawal from Iraq by his national security team and the top U.S. commander in Iraq. White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said the president was also brought up to date on so far unsuccessful efforts by Iraq to form a new government five months after national elections.

Obama met with Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton, Defense Secretary Robert Gates, national security adviser James Jones and, by videoconference, the U.S. commander in Iraq, Gen. Ray Odierno.

"The president heard directly from General Odierno, who said that we were on target to complete our drawdown by the end of August. Already we have removed over 80,000 troops from Iraq since President Obama took office," Gibbs said.

Gibbs and other U.S. officials said an uptick in violence as August 31 draws nearer was expected. They blamed it on the start of the monthlong Islamic observance of Ramadan, and on attempts by factions to further complicate efforts to form a coalition government and by some militants to create the appearance that they were running the U.S. out of the country.

Ongoing attacks against Iraq's security forces come as the U.S. is moving to reduce its troop levels to 50,000 by the end of August.

"There continue to be terrorists in Iraq. There continue to be acts of violence," Deputy National Security Adviser Ben Rhodes told a group of

reporters. "They have not affected the positive trends" happening in Iraq and the overall level of violence is lower than it has been in the past, Rhodes said.

Gibbs said Odierno told Obama the security situation has continued to improve and that Iraqi forces are fully prepared to take over.

Obama has vowed both to end the official U.S. combat mission on schedule and to move all remaining U.S. troops off Iraqi soil by the end of 2011, a timetable set in an agreement with the Iraqi government.

The president also received an update from Vice President Joe Biden and Christopher Hill, the U.S. ambassador to Iraq, on Iraq's troubled efforts to form a new government.

Biden's national security adviser, Tony Blinken, said frustration is building among the Iraqis over failure to form a coalition government. "There is a sense of urgency to move forward and get a government formed," he said. "We really believe there is forward movement. But it's not up to us."

In a National Public Radio interview from Baghdad earlier in the day, Hill said the pace of political progress has quickened in recent weeks and that "things may be heading in the right direction" even though "more needs to be done."

White House officials sought to blunt suggestions that the end of 2011 deadline for removing all remaining troops might be impossible to meet.

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