

## NATION/WORLD DIGEST

### Pentagon Takes Aim At China Cyber Threat

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. is warning about the Chinese military's use of civilian computer experts in clandestine cyber attacks repeatedly aimed at American companies and government agencies. The Pentagon says the People's Liberation Army is using "information warfare units" to develop viruses to attack enemy computer systems and networks. Those units include civilian computer professionals. The assertion was made in a report this week. It illustrates the difficulties in dealing with cyber espionage that officials believe but can't always prove is coming from China.

### US Officials: Mideast Talks Starting Soon

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Obama administration says it is near to securing an agreement between Israel and the Palestinians to resume direct peace talks and U.S. officials say an announcement could be imminent. The State Department said Thursday that an agreement was "very, very close" but that details were still being worked out. Administration officials familiar with the matter said an announcement could come as early as Friday or Saturday. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity due to the delicacy of the ongoing diplomacy. Under a scenario now being finalized, the officials said Israel, the Palestinians, the "Quartet" of Mideast peacemakers and the United States would release separate but near simultaneous statements saying the stalled talks will resume early next month in either the U.S. or Egypt.

### Obama To GOP: Stop Blocking Business Bill

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama is urging Republican congressional leaders to stop blocking a bill aimed at helping small businesses hire more people. Speaking at the White House, Obama said there would be plenty of time for politics but that the bill should not fall victim to partisanship. His brief remarks Thursday followed more bad economic news. Jobless claims have risen and the Federal Reserve in Philadelphia reports that manufacturing in the mid-Atlantic states has dropped. It is the fourth rise in jobless claims in the past five weeks and reaches the highest level since November. Obama said that 60 percent of job losses are coming from small businesses, the sector that under a strong economy hires the most workers.

### Obama Makes Four Recess Appointments

VINEYARD HAVEN, Mass. (AP) — President Barack Obama is once again bypassing the Senate to install some of his long-blocked nominees. Obama announced Thursday he's using his power to act while Congress is in recess to install officials at the Agriculture Department, the Health and Human Services Department, the Small Business Administration and the U.S. Embassy in El Salvador. He said all four are highly qualified but have been forced to wait for Senate confirmation because of partisan obstruction. The White House disclosed Obama's move soon after he arrived on Martha's Vineyard to begin a 10-day vacation.

### BP Accused Of Withholding Spill Data

WASHINGTON (AP) — The owner of the Deepwater Horizon rig is accusing BP of withholding critical evidence needed to identify the cause of the worst maritime oil spill in history. In a sternly worded letter obtained by The Associated Press, Transocean says that lack of information is preventing the company from informing state and federal investigators, and the families of those killed on the rig, about what happened. According to the rig's owner, BP appears to be preventing any other entity from investigating the blowout. Transocean also reveals that it reluctantly signed a confidentiality agreement at BP's request to obtain some limited data. BP didn't immediately return calls for comment.

### Spokesman: Iraqi Security Up To The Task

WASHINGTON (AP) — The spokesman for U.S. forces in Iraq says Iraqi police and military are up to the task of keeping the country secure after U.S. troops end their combat mission next week. Maj. Gen. Stephen Lanza adds that the sooner the Iraqi government is seated, the calmer the country will be. Lanza told CBS' "The Early Show" that Iraqi security forces have shown professionalism and the will to improve and have made strong progress since 2003. Lanza said that fewer than 6,000 U.S. troops are set to leave Iraq by the Aug. 31 deadline set by President Barack Obama as part of an end to all unilateral combat missions. The 50,000 U.S. troops that will remain in Iraq will focus on training Iraqi security forces.

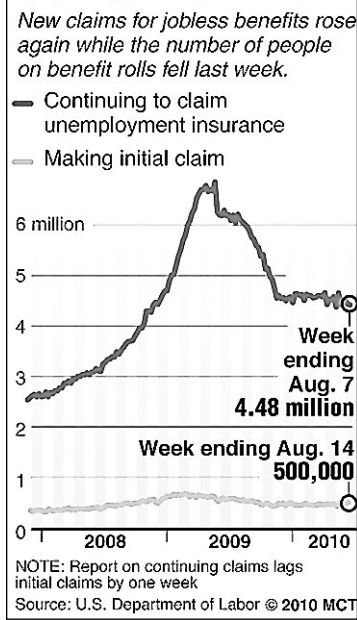
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# Layoffs Feeds Fear Of Faltering Recovery

BY CHRISTOPHER S. RUGABER  
AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON — Layoffs are back, and that's bad news for the fragile economic recovery. New applications for unemployment benefits hit a nine-month high last week — a spike that suggests private employers may shed jobs this month for the first time this year. Workers are losing construction jobs in Georgia and manufacturing jobs in Indiana. Some of the layoffs are coming as stimulus money dries up and public works projects come to a halt. Government employees are being let go, too, as states and cities grapple with budget crises. Without more jobs, consumers will not feel secure enough to spend much money, further slowing the economy. The grim outlook has economists lowering their estimates for growth in the second half of the year. And on Thursday it led to a sell-off on Wall Street led by investors worried that the United States could tumble back into recession. "Today's news on the econo-

## Out of work



my has been nothing but awful," Paul Ashworth, an economist at Capital Economics, wrote in a note to clients. "The recovery is clearly slowing." The Labor Department announced Thursday that initial claims for jobless benefits rose

by 12,000 last week to 500,000 — the highest level since November and the third straight increase. As the economy recovered from the worst downturn since the 1930s, jobless claims declined steadily from a peak of 651,000 in March 2009 to a low of 427,000 in July before rising steadily over the past six weeks. In a healthy economy, jobless claims usually drop below 400,000. "This is obviously a disappointing number that shows ongoing weakness in the job market," said Robert Dye, senior economist at the PNC Financial Services Group. Dye said claims showed a similar pattern in the last two recoveries, but eventually began to fall again. The current elevated level of claims is a sign that employers are reluctant to hire until the rebound is well under way. That's what happened after the 1991 and 2001 recessions, which were dubbed "jobless recoveries." Economists caution that more than 350,000 temporary census jobs ended in recent months, and those workers could be applying for benefits. Congress also recent-

ly restored an extended unemployment benefits program, which can sometimes spike claims. The jobless report and a separate report showing that manufacturing activity in the mid-Atlantic declined in August sent stock markets tumbling. The Dow Jones industrial average closed down 144 points for the day. Interest rates dropped sharply as investors flocked to the safety of Treasury bonds. A rush to move money into Treasuries in recent months has sent mortgage rates to the lowest level in decades. They dipped for the eighth time in nine weeks. Also Thursday, the Congressional Budget Office said the deficit is on pace to exceed \$1.3 trillion for the budget year that ends in September. That would be the second-largest ever, just below the record of more than \$1.4 trillion in the last fiscal year. Partially fueling the deficit was hundreds of billions of dollars in stimulus spending intended to help lift the country out of recession. But many of the programs are now ending, taking jobs with them.

# White House Says Obama Is Christian, Prays Daily

BY ALAN FRAM  
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama is a Christian who prays daily, a White House official said Thursday, trying to tamp down growing doubts about the president's religion. A new poll showed that nearly one in five people, or 18 percent, believe Obama is Muslim. That was up from 11 percent who said so in March 2009. The survey also showed that just 34 percent said Obama is Christian, down from 48 percent who said so last year. The largest share of people, 43 percent, said they don't know his religion. White House spokesman Bill Burton said most Americans care more about the economy and wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and "they are not reading a lot of news about what religion the president is." He commented on Air Force One as Obama headed for a vacation in Massachusetts on Martha's Vineyard. Burton added, "The president is obviously a Christian. He prays everyday." The survey, conducted by the nonpartisan Pew Research Center and its affiliated Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, is based on interviews conducted before the controversy over whether Muslims should be permitted to construct a mosque near the World Trade Center site. Obama has said he believes Muslims have the right to build an Islamic center there, though he's also said he won't take a position on whether they should actually build it. In a separate poll by Time magazine/ABT SRBI conducted Monday and Tuesday — after Obama's comments about the mosque — 24 percent said they

think he is Muslim, 47 percent said they think he is Christian and 24 percent didn't know or didn't respond. In addition, 61 percent opposed building the Muslim center near the Trade Center site and 26 percent said they favor it. The Pew poll found that about three in 10 of Obama's fiercest political rivals, Republicans and conservatives, say he is a Muslim. That is up significantly from last year and far higher than the share of Democrats and liberals who say so. But even among his supporters, the number saying he is a Christian has fallen since 2009, with just 43 percent of Democrats saying he is Christian. Among independents, 18 percent say Obama is Muslim — up from 10 percent last year. Pew analysts attribute the findings to attacks by his opponents and Obama's limited attendance at religious services, particularly in contrast with Presidents George W. Bush and Bill Clinton, whose worship was more public. Andrew Kohut, the Pew

Research Center's director, said the confusion partly reflects "the intensification of negative views about Obama among his critics." Alan Cooperman, the Pew Forum's associate director for research, said that with the public hearing little about Obama's religion, "maybe there's more possibility for other people to make suggestions that the president is this or he's really that or he's really a Muslim." Obama is the Christian son of a Kenyan Muslim father and a Kansas mother. From age 6 to 10, Obama lived in predominantly Muslim Indonesia with his mother and Indonesian stepfather. His

full name, Barack Hussein Obama, sounds Muslim to many. On Wednesday, White House officials did not provide on-the-record comments on the survey but prompted Pastor Kirbyjon Caldwell of Houston to call The Associated Press. Caldwell, who said he has known Obama for years, said the president is a Christian who prays every day. He said he was not sure where the public confusion about the president's religion came from, but he called false media reports about it "a 24-hour noise box committed to presenting the president in a false light."

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