

NATION/WORLD DIGEST

Armed Man Fatally Shot At Tenn. High School

BLOUNTVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — An armed man was fatally shot by deputies Monday at an east Tennessee high school after he went inside and pointed a gun at the principal's head, a sheriff said.

"There's no doubt in my mind he went there to kill someone today," Sullivan County Sheriff Wayne Anderson said at a Monday afternoon news conference hours after the gunfire at Sullivan Central High School. "I don't know who, and I don't know why."

WJHL-TV reported that Anderson said a Tennessee Bureau of Investigation will likely determine the motive.

No students or teachers were hurt and school was dismissed at 10:30 a.m. EDT.

Anderson said Thomas Richard Cowan, 62, of Kingsport confronted a security officer Monday morning after entering the school about 9 a.m.

Cowan entered the school with a .380-caliber semiautomatic and a .25-caliber handgun in his back pocket, Anderson said. The sheriff said that after Cowan grabbed the principal, Melanie Riden, and pointed the semiautomatic at her head, student resource officer Carolyn Gudger pulled her gun on Cowan and moved the principal to safety.

Anderson said Gudger moved Cowan down the hall and away from the cafeteria to a science pod. When Sullivan County deputies arrived, they ordered the gunman to drop his weapon, and he allegedly pointed it in their direction. He then pointed it back toward the school resource officer, prompting deputies to fire, Anderson said.

Blountville is near the Virginia line, about 250 miles east of Nashville.

AK Sen. Hopeful Seeks Probe Of Observer

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski says Republican rival Joe Miller may be creating doubt in the minds of Alaskans about the integrity of the voting process by ratcheting up the hyperbole about possible election fraud.

Murkowski says the Miller camp seems to be paranoid in every step along the way.

Miller on Monday renewed accusations of campaign irregularities as the Alaska Division of Elections prepared to count outstanding ballots.

Miller holds a lead of fewer than 1,700 votes over Murkowski.

He says Murkowski campaign workers have contacted absentee voters to find out how they voted with the possible goal of challenging his votes. His camp also asked for an investigation into possible tampering.

Murkowski says she wants to see all votes counted, and there's no "nefarious plot."

Scientists: C-Section Rate To Keep Rising

WASHINGTON (AP) — More women will be giving birth by C-section for the foreseeable future, government scientists said Monday, releasing a study into the causes of a trend that troubles maternal health experts.

Overall, cesarean deliveries account for about a third of births in the U.S. While much attention has recently focused on women having repeat C-sections, researchers with the National Institutes of Health found that nearly one third of first-time moms delivered by cesarean.

That is "somewhat surprising," said Dr. Jun Zhang, lead author of a study that looked at nearly 230,000 deliveries in 19 hospitals around the country. "It has consequences for future pregnancies."

Many doctors and hospitals follow a policy of "once a cesarean, always a cesarean."

The study also suggested a link between chemically induced labor and higher likelihood of a C-section. Women whose labor was induced were twice as likely to have a cesarean. The authors said more research is needed to clarify if there's a cause-and-effect relationship.

Many medical experts consider cesarean deliveries to be a major component of "overtreatment" in the U.S. — procedures and tests that provide little or no benefit while subjecting patients to additional risks. Indeed, new clinical recommendations say vaginal birth is safe for most women who've had a first C-section.

But the trend does not appear likely to reverse. Since the mid-1990s, the C-section rate in the U.S. has increased by more than 50 percent.

How low should it be? In Scandinavian countries it hovers in the 20 percent range, with no evidence of ill-effects for mothers or babies, Zhang said. How high can it go? In some countries 60 percent to 70 percent of babies are now delivered surgically.

"I hope that we won't get there," said Zhang. "The upward trajectory seems likely to continue in the near future." Explaining the increase in C-sections is no simple matter. The study found a variety of reasons, some related, including heavier moms and babies, women giving birth later in life, an increase in the number of twins and multiple births, and evidence that doctors may be opting for a cesarean if women encounter difficulties in the early stages of labor.

One factor that made no difference was whether the mother had private health insurance or was covered through a government program like Medicaid.

Obama: GOP Should Let Business Bill Pass

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama exhorted Congress on Monday to make passage of a long-languishing small business aid package its first order of business when it returns next month from its summer break.

"I ask Senate Republicans to drop the blockade," Obama said in the Rose Garden after meeting with his economic advisers.

Acknowledging that the economy still remains extremely fragile, the president said he'd also have other specific ideas in the days ahead.

He mentioned extending Bush tax cuts due to expire this year for households making under \$250,000 a year, upping the nation's investment in clean energy, rebuilding more roads and highways and tax cuts designed to keep jobs in the United States.

My economic team is hard at work identifying additional measures that could make a difference in both promoting growth and hiring in the short term and increasing our economy's competitiveness in the long term," he said.

White House spokesman Robert Gibbs later said that in addition to initiatives already unveiled that are bogged down in Congress, the administration would roll out a variety of targeted measures designed to spur the economy and create an environment conducive to hiring.

None of the measures will be as major as last year's stimulus bill, Gibbs said. "There's only so much that can be done," he added.

"Those in America are frustrated. Those in the West Wing are frustrated" about the slow pace of recovery and an unemployment rate hovering near 10 percent, Gibbs said.

In a week likely to be dominated by foreign policy, Obama is trying to show he's still minding the economy after his 10-day vacation in Martha's Vineyard.

string of weak economic reports in recent weeks has fed fears that the economy would fall back into recession, only slightly offset by Monday's government report that consumer spending had increased in July after four down months.

"Every single day, I'm pushing this economy forward, repairing the damage that's been done to the middle class over the past decade and promoting the growth we need to get out people back to work," Obama said in his statement.

bama said action on the package of small business tax cuts and credit incentives is "one thing we know that we should do" as soon as possible. Republicans have been blocking the bill, calling it misguided.

However, Obama said it was being "held up by a partisan minority that won't even let it get to a vote."

"The bill is fully paid for. And there's no reason to block it besides pure partisan politics," he said.

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Obama: End Iraq War, Then Mideast Peace

BEN FELLER

AP White House Correspondent

WASHINGTON — Firmly and finally ending the U.S. combat mission in Iraq, President Barack Obama will have but a moment before trying to hasten peace nearby between Israelis and Palestinians. Left unclear is whether winding down the war that inflamed Arab passions will do anything to help long-shot Mideast talks.

From the Oval Office, a setting designed to command gravity and attention, Obama will declare Tuesday night that Iraqis are now the ones in charge of a war he had opposed. Within hours on Wednesday, he will be immersed in talks with Israeli and Palestinian leaders, underscoring the hopeful but precarious U.S. role as a middleman.

The White House is framing the two events as commitments kept by the president. But there is little excitement buzz and certainly no bold promises that capping the combat mission in Iraq will prod broader peace in the Middle East.

Tuesday night, Obama's emphasis will be to thank the troops and explain why the fight goes on in Afghanistan and beyond — and not so much about the potential for Iraq to be "a beacon of liberty in the Middle East" as President George W. Bush put it.

In a narrow sense, the peace talks convened by the White House have little to do with Iraq. The Middle East stalemate has to do with the borders of a potential Palestinian state, the fate of Palestinian refugees, the status of Jerusalem, the security of Israel — and trust on both sides. Making progress on those points, not the Iraq war, is at the core of renewed talks between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

Writ large, however, the fate of Iraq is indeed tied to prospects for peace for its neighbors in the region.

"There is no direct connection between the two issues, but I think together they tell the same story: the limits of U.S. power," said Marina Ottaway, director of the Middle East Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. "The U.S. can only go so far, and then it's in the hands of the regional actors."

Much depends on whether Iraq's leaders can form a lasting government, whether Iran will seek to exert added influence with a smaller U.S. presence in Iraq, and whether the United States will be perceived as the country that responsibly turned power back to Iraq or the one that left before the job was done.

"The more that Iraq emerges as a stable state after the Americans withdraw, the greater the chance for progress in the Middle East, the more it creates a stable environment for the peace process to move forward," said Robert Danin, an expert on Israeli-Palestinian affairs and senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations. "To the extent that there's bloodshed and instability in Iraq, that makes it harder for people to focus on peacemaking."

For now, a presidential speech about the changing of the U.S. mission in Iraq is as close to closure as the people of the United States will get.

All troops will not come home until the end of 2011 at the latest. The United States will still keep tens of thousands in a dangerous Iraq for support and counterterrorism missions in the meantime. More Americans are likely to die. As Obama has said: "We have not seen the end of American sacrifice in Iraq."

Most of the more than 4,400 U.S. military members who have died in the Iraq war have been killed since May 2003 — after Bush

declared the major combat operations over from the deck of a warship. His backdrop then was a now infamous banner that declared "mission accomplished."

"You won't hear those words coming from us," Obama spokesman Robert Gibbs said Monday.

The United States, too, is still absorbed with the widening war in Afghanistan, the base for the al-Qaida terrorists responsible for the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks. That conflict began in 2001, even before the Iraq war. Obama's stand is that the Iraq war, at a costly price, distracted from the cause in Afghanistan.

"That's where 9/11 was planned," Gibbs said. "This is not an Afghanistan speech, but he will mention that."

Obama is giving the combat troop withdrawal from Iraq a big spotlight.

He dispatched Vice President Joe Biden to Iraq on Monday to mark the moment and push Iraqi leaders for resolution of their political divisions. On Tuesday, Obama will fly to sprawling Fort Bliss in Texas, home of tens of thousands of service members who fought in the Iraq war.

And then he will give just his second prime-time address from the Oval Office.

The Iraq war once filled the streets of some American cities with protest and, over time, generated much resentment in the Arab world. A lot of the heat at home has subsided, partly in response to an improving situation in Iraq that was aided when Bush ordered in more troops in 2007.

Obama declared the war wrong and said he would end it, a mission a U.S. president actually could accomplish. He also promised to be deeply engaged in working for Middle East peace. His name is now prominently associated with that latter, more difficult goal.

Earl Batters Caribbean, Threatens U.S. East Coast

MIKE MELIA

Associated Press Writer

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico — Hurricane Earl battered tiny islands across the northeastern Caribbean with heavy rain and roof-ripping winds Monday as it rapidly intensified into a major Category 4 storm taking a path projected to menace the United States.

Already dangerous with sustained winds of 135 mph (215 kph), Earl was expected to gain more strength before potentially brushing the U.S. East Coast this week and bringing deadly rip currents.

The U.S. National Hurricane Center in Miami warned coastal residents from North Carolina to Maine to watch the storm closely.

"Any small shift in the track could dramatically alter whether it makes landfall or whether it remains over the open ocean," said Wallace Hogsett, a meteorologist at the center. "I can't urge enough to just stay tuned."

In the Caribbean, Earl caused flooding in low-lying areas and damaged homes on islands including Antigua and Barbuda, Anguilla and St. Maarten. Several countries and territories reported power outages. Cruise ships were diverted and flights canceled across the region.

The storm's center passed just north of the British Virgin Islands on Monday afternoon. By nighttime, the hurricane was pulling away from the Caribbean, but heavy downpours still threatened to cause flash floods and mudslides in Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands by drenching already saturated ground.

Earl was forecast to approach the U.S. Mid-Atlantic region around Thursday, before curving back out to sea, potentially swiping New England or far-eastern Canada.

The Hurricane Center said it was too early to say what effect Earl would have in the U.S., but warned it could at least kick up dangerous rip currents. A surfer died in Florida and a Maryland swimmer had been missing since Saturday in waves spawned by former Hurricane Danielle, which weakened to a tropical storm Monday far out in the north Atlantic.

Craig Fugate, administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, said Earl's approach ought to serve as a reminder for Atlantic coastal states to update their evacuation plans.

"It wouldn't take much to have the storm come ashore somewhere on the coast," Fugate said. "The message is for everyone to pay attention."

U.S. Grapples With Bedbugs, Pesticides

MATT LEINGANG

Associated Press Writer

COLUMBUS, Ohio — A resurgence of bedbugs across the U.S. has homeowners and apartment dwellers taking desperate measures to eradicate the tenacious bloodsuckers, with some relying on dangerous outdoor pesticides and fly-by-night exterminators.

The problem has gotten so bad that the Environmental Protection Agency warned this month against the indoor use of chemicals meant for the outside. The agency also warned of an increase in pest control companies and others making "unrealistic promises of effectiveness or low cost."

Bedbugs, infesting U.S. households on a scale unseen in more than a half-century, have become largely resistant to common pesticides. As a result, some homeowners and exterminators are turning to more hazardous chemicals that can harm the central nervous system, irritate the skin and eyes or even cause cancer.

Ohio authorities, struggling against widespread infestations in Cincinnati, Columbus, Dayton and other cities, are pleading with EPA to approve the indoor use of the pesticide

propoxur, which the agency considers a probable carcinogen and banned for in-home use in 2007. About 25 other states are supporting Ohio's request for an emergency exemption.

The EPA rejected the request in June but said it would consider new information on it. An agency spokesman, Dale Kemery, said the EPA has pledged to find new, potent chemicals to kill bedbugs, which can cause itchy, red bites that can become infected if scratched.

In the meantime, authorities around the country have blamed house fires on people misusing all sorts of highly flammable garden and lawn chemicals to fight bedbugs. Experts also warn that some hardware products — bug bombs, cedar oil and other natural oils — claim to be lethal but merely cause the bugs to scatter out of sight and hide in cracks in walls and floors.

A pest control company in Newark, N.J., was accused in July of applying chemicals not approved for indoor use throughout 70 homes and apartments units, even spraying mattresses and children's toys. No illnesses were reported.

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