

### Senate Finally Approves ATF Nominee

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate voted in dramatic fashion Wednesday to approve one of President Barack Obama's nominees. For Democrats to prevail, all it took was a last-ditch vote switch by one senator, a flight back from North Dakota by another and an afternoon roll call that stretched into the evening.

Five hours after the balloting started, the Senate voted to end Republican delaying tactics against B. Todd Jones, Obama's pick to head the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. It then voted in a comparatively instantaneous 29 minutes for his final confirmation, 53-42.

A defeat would have been a setback for Obama, who is trying to plug gaps in his second-term administration's lineup, and dealt a blow to the recent cooperation between the two parties over allowing votes on the president's nominees.

The lengthy roll call and the theatrics accompanying it nearly obscured that Jones' approval marked a rare congressional victory for gun-control forces. His confirmation came three months after the Senate rejected Obama's drive to expand background checks for firearms buyers.

In a written statement, Obama applauded senators of both parties for confirming ATF's first director in seven years — gridlock, he said, caused by Senate Republicans who "put politics ahead of the agency's law enforcement mission."

### Pro-Morsi Protesters Dig In Their Heels

CAIRO (AP) — Protesters holding sticks and wearing helmets and makeshift body armor stand behind mounds of sandbags, tires and brick walls. They change guards every two hours to ensure they stay alert.

With Egypt's military-backed government signaling a crackdown is imminent, supporters of ousted Islamist President Mohammed Morsi are taking no chances with security at their two protest camps in Cairo.

On Wednesday, the Cabinet ordered the police to break up the sit-ins, saying they pose an "unacceptable threat" to national security.

Interior Minister Mohammed Ibrahim said the order will be carried out in gradual steps according to instructions from prosecutors. "I hope they resort to reason" and leave without authorities having to move in, he told The Associated Press in a telephone interview.

Ahmed Sobaie, spokesman for the Muslim Brotherhood's political arm, the Freedom and Justice party, derided the Cabinet decision as "paving the way for another massacre."

### Ex-Army Gen.: Leaks Hurt Relations

FORT MEADE, Md. (AP) — The classified information Pfc. Bradley Manning revealed through WikiLeaks fractured U.S. military relationships with foreign governments and Afghan villagers, a former general said Wednesday at the soldier's sentencing hearing.

It was the first time testimony about the actual damage the leaks may have caused has been allowed at trial.

Retired Army Brig. Gen. Robert Carr said the material Manning leaked identified hundreds of friendly Afghan villagers by name, causing some of them to stop helping U.S. forces.

"One of our primary missions is to protect the population over there," said Carr, who led a Defense Department task force that looked at the risks of the leaks. "We had to get close to the population, had to understand that population and we had to protect them. If the adversary had more clarity, as to which people in the village were collaborating with the U.S. forces, then there is a chance that those folks could be at greater risk."

The former intelligence analyst was convicted of 20 of 22 charges for sending hundreds of thousands of government and diplomatic secrets to WikiLeaks and faces up to 136 years in prison. He was found not guilty of aiding the enemy, which alone could have meant life in prison without parole.

### Syrian President Turns To Instagram

BEIRUT (AP) — Syria's embattled president already has a Facebook page, Twitter account and a YouTube channel. Now Bashar Assad is turning to the popular photo-sharing service Instagram in the latest attempt at improving his image as his country burns, posting pictures of himself and his glamorous wife surrounded by idolizing crowds.

The photos show a smiling Assad among supporters, or grimly visiting wounded Syrians in the hospital. He is seen working in his office in Damascus, an Apple computer and iPad on his desk. His wife, Asma, who has stayed largely out of sight throughout the conflict, features heavily in the photos, casually dressed and surrounded by Syrian children and their mothers.

The sophisticated PR campaign is striking for an isolated leader who has earned near pariah status for his military's bloody crackdown on dissent.

It is also in stark contrast to the machinations of other dictators at the center of Arab Spring revolts. While the ousted Egyptian and Libyan leaders relied on antiquated methods such as state-run media to transmit stilted propaganda, Assad — a 47-year-old British-trained eye doctor — has increasingly relied on social media to project an image of confidence to the world.

The result is an efficient, modern propaganda machine in keeping with the times — but one that appears completely removed from the reality on the ground.

### House OKs Lower Student Loan Rates

WASHINGTON (AP) — A bill that would lower the cost of student loans has passed the House and is heading to President Barack Obama for his signature.

The House on Wednesday gave final congressional approval to a bipartisan measure that links student loan interest rates to the financial markets. Most students would see lower interest rates in time for classes this fall.

Undergraduates this fall would borrow at a 3.9 percent interest rate for subsidized and unsubsidized loans. Graduate students would have access to loans at 5.4 percent, and parents would borrow at 6.4 percent. The rates would be locked in for that year's loan, but each year's loan could be more expensive than the last. Rates would rise as the economy picks up.

### Obama Aims To Calm Jittery Democrats

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama sought to calm jittery Democrats Wednesday as they prepared to head home to face voters, assuring them they're "on the right side of history" despite problems with the launch of his massive health care overhaul and an immigration fight with Republicans.

In back-to-back closed sessions with House and Senate Democrats, Obama delivered his broad message about economic prosperity and expanding the middle class. But in return he was confronted with questions from Democrats who are nervous about implementation of the health care law as they look ahead to town hall meetings during the August recess — and to midterm elections next year.

The meetings at the Capitol offered a rare chance for the party's rank and file to press the president about budget talks with Republicans, the next chairman of the Federal Reserve and local jobs projects, as well as to appeal to him for help in next year's campaigns. In a lighter moment, House Democrats presented Obama with a birthday cake. He turns 52 on Sunday.

The White House is seeking to keep up enthusiasm among Democrats following a rough start to Obama's second term.

### Simpson Gets Small Win In Release Bid

CARSON CITY, Nev. (AP) — O.J. Simpson won a small victory Wednesday in his bid for freedom as Nevada granted him parole on some of his 2008 convictions for kidnapping and armed robbery involving the holdup of two sports memorabilia dealers at a Las Vegas hotel room.

But the decision doesn't mean Simpson will be leaving prison anytime soon. The former NFL star was convicted on multiple charges and still faces at least four more years behind bars on sentences that were ordered to run consecutively.

The Nevada Board of Parole Commissioners released its decision in favor of Simpson's parole request Wednesday. Commissioners noted Simpson's "positive institutional record" and his participation in programs addressing "behavior that led to incarceration."

### NSA Controversy

# With 3 'Hops,' NSA Gets Millions Of Phone Records

BY PETE YOST AND MATT APUZZO  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama's national security team acknowledged for the first time Wednesday that, when investigating one suspected terrorist, it can read and store the phone records of millions of Americans.

Since it was revealed recently that the National Security Agency puts the phone records of every American into a database, the Obama administration has assured the nation that such records are rarely searched and, when they are, officials target only suspected international terrorists.

Meanwhile, at a hacker convention in Las Vegas on Wednesday, the head of the NSA said government methods used to collect telephone and email data helped foil 54 terror plots — a figure that drew open skepticism from lawmakers back in Washington. "Not by any stretch can you get 54 terrorist plots," said the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt.

More than a decade after the terror attacks of 2001, the phone-record surveillance program has stirred deep privacy concerns on Capitol Hill, where Leahy said Wednesday during an oversight hearing: "If this program is not effective, it has to end," adding that, "So

far I'm not convinced by what I've seen."

In the House earlier this month, lawmakers said they never intended to allow the NSA to build a database of every phone call in America, and they threatened to curtail the government's surveillance authority. "You've got a problem," Rep. James Sensenbrenner, R-Wis., told top intelligence officials weeks ago.

Sensing a looming shift in the privacy-versus-security cultural calculus, the White House responded: It has ordered the director of national intelligence to recommend changes that could be made to the phone-surveillance program, and Obama invited a bipartisan group of lawmakers to the White House on Thursday to discuss their concerns about the National Security Agency's surveillance programs.

A White House official says the top Democrats and Republicans on the House and Senate intelligence panels will attend. So will Democratic Sens. Mark Udall of Colorado and Ron Wyden of Oregon, two lawmakers who raised the alarm about the NSA's sweeping domestic programs. Two others calling for more NSA oversight, Sen. Dick Durbin of Illinois and Sensenbrenner, will also attend.

The administration has emphasized what it describes as oversight of its activities by the secretive Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court, by congressional committees and by inter-

nal auditors. It has said, for example, that under rules approved by the court, only 22 people at NSA were allowed to approve searches of the phone database, and only seven positions at NSA, a total of 11 people, were authorized to disclose any results believed to be associated with persons in the United States.

Testimony before Congress on Wednesday showed how easy it is for Americans with no connection to terrorism to unwittingly have their calling patterns analyzed by the government.

It hinges on what's known as "hop" or "chain" analysis. When the NSA identifies a suspect, it can look not just at his phone records, but also the records of everyone he calls, everyone who calls those people and everyone who calls those people.

If the average person called 40 unique people, three-hop analysis would allow the government to mine the records of 2.5 million Americans when investigating one suspected terrorist.

The NSA has said it conducted 300 searches of its telephone database last year. Left unsaid until Wednesday was that three-hop analysis off those searches could mean scrutinizing the phone records of tens or even hundreds of millions of people.

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