

Filner Ends Troubled Tenure As Mayor

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Bob Filner ended his brief but tumultuous tenure as mayor Friday amid allegations that he sexually harassed women, making no public appearances on a final day that came one week after a defiant farewell speech in which the onetime civil rights activist called himself the victim of a “lynch mob.”

Interim Mayor Todd Gloria said Filner’s last act as mayor was to halt a controversial remodeling of a neighborhood Jack in the Box restaurant. Gloria immediately overturned the decision, saying it exposed the city to litigation.

The former 10-term congressman kept a low profile on last final day, ceding media attention to a mock celebration by accusers who gave him several parting gifts, including a mirror that attorney Gloria Allred said he can look at when asking who’s to blame for his resignation.

Employees in the City Hall lobby said they didn’t see the 70-year-old mayor on his last day. An office receptionist had no comment.

Before the scandal, Filner was true to his reputation as a workaholic. Followers adopted a Twitter hashtag — (hash)filnereverywhere — to chronicle his nonstop pace riding a bicycle to school with children, crashing the podium at the city attorney’s news conference to denounce the speaker’s positions, and marching to protest violence against women.

Progress Seen In Sierra Nevada Wildfire

FRESNO, Calif. (AP) — Nearly a third of the huge forest fire burning in and around Yosemite National Park was contained Friday and some small communities in the mountainous area were no longer under evacuation advisories, but smoke descending down into San Joaquin Valley cities was becoming a problem.

Nearly 5,000 firefighters were battling the blaze, but in a sign of progress some were expected to be released to go home, said Daniel Berlant, spokesman for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection.

“We continue to gain the upper hand, but there’s still a lot of work to be done,” he said.

The 2-week-old blaze burning in the Sierra Nevada northeast of Fresno has scorched 315 square miles of brush, oaks and pine, making it the largest U.S. wildfire to date this year and the fifth-largest wildfire in modern California records. Containment was estimated at 32 percent.

Winds had been blowing dense smoke plumes northeast into the Lake Tahoe area and Nevada but a shift Friday brought them west down to the San Joaquin Valley floor.

Ex-Janitor At Megachurch Pleads Guilty

TULSA, Okla. (AP) — An ex-janitor at a 17,000-member Tulsa megachurch pleaded guilty Friday to making a lewd proposal to a 14-year-old girl, less than a week before his trial was set to begin.

Israel Castillo, an ex-janitor at the 600-employee Victory Christian Center in south Tulsa, pleaded guilty to a charge alleging he sent lewd Facebook messages to a 14-year-old girl. Up until Friday, Castillo had repeatedly pleaded not guilty, saying that he didn’t know the girl who received the messages was underage — a claim refuted by prosecutors.

Castillo’s case was part of a scandal involving the megachurch that broke last summer. Five Victory employees — including the son and daughter-in-law of ministry co-founder and head pastor Sharon Daugherty — were charged with waiting two weeks to report the rape of a 13-year-old girl to authorities. Another ex-janitor, Chris Denman, was sentenced to 55 years in prison last December for the 13-year-old’s rape in a ministry stairwell and other sex crimes.

A barely-audible Castillo acknowledged to the judge during Friday’s hearing that he was making the plea without any pre-arranged agreement with prosecutors or the judge. Castillo’s trial was set to begin Tuesday.

Tulsa District Judge William Kellough accepted the plea and set sentencing for Oct. 18. Castillo, who has been free on bond pending trial, faces up to 20 years in prison, and Kellough ordered that the 24-year-old be immediately taken into custody.

Ginsburg To Officiate Same-Sex Wedding

WASHINGTON (AP) — Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg will officiate at a same-sex wedding this weekend in what is believed to be a first for a member of the nation’s highest court.

Ginsburg will officiate Saturday at the marriage of Kennedy Center President Michael Kaiser and John Roberts, a government economist.

“Michael Kaiser is a friend and someone I much admire,” Ginsburg said in a written statement Friday. “That is why I am officiating at his wedding.”

The private ceremony will take place at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts, a national memorial to President John F. Kennedy. The 80-year-old Ginsburg, an opera lover, is a frequent guest at the center.

Same-sex marriage is legal in the District of Columbia and 13 states.

Clinton Gets Gifts From World Leaders

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton outpaced President Barack Obama last year in receiving lavish gifts from foreign leaders.

Clinton received gold jewelry worth half a million dollars from King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia. The State Department said the gift included a necklace, bracelet, ring and earrings. The white gold was adorned with teardrop rubies and diamonds. Clinton also got gold, sapphire and diamond jewelry worth \$58,000 from Brunei’s queen.

Obama’s most expensive gift was a \$16,500 gold-plated clock from Crown Prince Salman bin Abdulaziz al-Saud, the Saudi defense minister.

Obama, a big sports fan, scored a red, white and blue basketball from — and autographed by — Chinese President Xi Jinping. British Prime Minister David Cameron and his wife, Samantha, gave Obama a customized Dunlop table tennis table with United States and United Kingdom decals and paddles worth \$1,100.

The gifts were among a bounty of vases, watches, artwork and other items given to the Obama family and top U.S. officials in 2012, according to the department’s Office of Protocol, which catalogs the gifts and publishes an annual listing.

Syria: World Braces For Possible US Strike

■ Washington Weighing ‘Limited’ Action In Dealing With Assad ■ France Is Only Major Ally To Back Possible Punitive Attack

BY DAVID ESPO AND
ELAINE GANLEY
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Edging toward a punitive strike against Syria, President Barack Obama said Friday he is weighing “limited and narrow” action as the administration bluntly accused Bashar Assad’s government of launching a chemical weapons attack that killed at least 1,429 people — far more than previous estimates — including more than 400 children.

No “boots on the ground,” Obama said, seeking to reassure Americans weary after a decade of war in Iraq and Afghanistan.

With France as his only major public ally, Obama told reporters he has a strong preference for multilateral action. He added, “Frankly, part of the challenge we end up with here is a lot of people think something should be done but nobody wants to do it.”

Halfway around the world, U.S. warships were in place in the Mediterranean Sea. They carried cruise missiles, long a first-line weapon of choice for presidents because they can find a target hundreds of miles distant without need of air cover or troops on the ground.

In what appeared increasingly like the pre-attack endgame, U.N. personnel dispatched to Syria carried out a fourth and final day of inspection as they sought to determine precisely what happened in last week’s attack. The international contingent arranged to depart on Saturday and head to laboratories in Europe with the samples they have collected.

Video said to be taken at the scene shows victims writhing in pain, twitching and exhibiting other symptoms associated with exposure to nerve agents. The videos distributed by activists to support their claims of a chemical attack were consistent with Associated Press reporting of shelling in the suburbs of Damascus at the time, though it was not known if the victims had died from a poisonous gas attack.

The Syrian government said administration claims were “flagrant lies” akin to faulty Bush administration assertions before the Iraq invasion that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. A Foreign Ministry statement read on state TV said that “under the pretext of protecting the Syrian people, they are making a case for an aggression that will kill hundreds of innocent Syrian civilians.”



AUDE GUERRUCCI/POOL/ABACA PRESS/MCT
President Barack Obama talks to the press before meeting with Baltic leaders in the Cabinet Room of the White House Friday.

Residents of Damascus stocked up on food and other necessities in anticipation of strikes, with no evident sign of panic. One man, 42-year-old Talal Dowayih, said: “I am not afraid from the Western threats to Syria; they created the chemical issue as a pretext for intervention, and they are trying to hit Syria for the sake of Israel.”

Obama met with his national security aides at the White House and then with diplomats from Baltic countries, saying he has not yet made a final decision on a response to the attack.

But the administration did nothing to discourage the predictions that he would act — and soon. It was an impression heightened both by strongly worded remarks from Secretary of State John Kerry and the release of an unclassified intelligence assessment that cited “high confidence” that the Syrian government carried out the attack.

In addition to the dead, the assessment reported that about 3,600 patients “displaying symptoms consistent with nerve agent exposure” were seen at Damascus-area hospitals after the attack. To that, Kerry added that “a senior regime official who knew about the attack confirmed that chemical weapons were used by the

regime, reviewed the impact and actually was afraid they would be discovered.” He added for emphasis: “We know this.”

The assessment did not explain its unexpectedly large casualty count, far in excess of an estimate from Doctors Without Borders. Not surprisingly — given the nature of the disclosure — it also did not say expressly how the United States knew what one Syrian official had allegedly said to another.

Mindful of public opinion, Kerry urged Americans to read the four-page assessment for themselves. He referred to Iraq — when Bush administration assurances that weapons of mass destruction were present proved false, and a U.S. invasion led to a long, deadly war. Kerry said this time it will be different.

“We will not repeat that moment,” he said.

Citing an imperative to act, the nation’s top diplomat said “it is directly related to our credibility and whether countries still believe the United States when it says something. They are watching to see if Syria can get away with it because then maybe they, too, can put the world at greater risk.”

The president said firmly that the attack “threatens our national security interest by vi-

olating well-established international norms.”

While Obama was having trouble enlisting foreign support, French President Francois Hollande was an exception. The two men spoke by phone, then Hollande issued a statement saying they had “agreed that the international community cannot tolerate the use of chemical weapons, that it must hold the Syrian regime responsible and send a strong message to denounce the use of (such) arms.”

The day’s events produced sharply differing responses from members of Congress — and that was just the Republicans.

Sens. John McCain of Arizona and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina said Obama needed to go further than he seems planning. “The goal of military action should be to shift the balance of power on the battlefield against Assad and his forces,” they said in a statement.

But a spokesman for House Speaker John Boehner, Brendan Buck, said if the president believes in a military response to Syria, “it is his responsibility to explain to Congress and the American people the objectives, strategy, and legal basis for any potential action.”

Clinic closed. Labor Day Sept. 2nd



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