

Obama Bashes Critics Of Iran Deal

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama assailed critics of his Iran nuclear deal Wednesday as “selling a fantasy” to the American people, warning Congress that blocking the accord would damage the nation’s credibility and increase the likelihood of more war in the Middle East.

Besides challenging opponents at home, Obama cast Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as an isolated international opponent of the historic accord, saying, “I do not doubt his sincerity, but I believe he is wrong.”

The agreement would require Iran to dismantle most of its nuclear program for at least a decade in exchange for billions of dollars in relief from international sanctions. But Netanyahu and some critics in the U.S. argue that it would not stop Iran from building a bomb.

The president’s blunt remarks, in an hour-long address at American University, were part of an intense lobbying campaign by the White House ahead of Congress’ vote next month to either approve or disapprove the international agreement. Opponents of the agreement have streamed to Capitol Hill, too, to make their case, and they have spent tens of millions of dollars on advertisements.

The stakes are high, Obama said, contending that it isn’t just Iran’s ability to build a bomb that is on the line but also “America’s credibility as the anchor of the international system.”

‘Ritualistic’ Killings Tied To Blue Moon

PENSACOLA, Fla. (AP) — More than a week after the gruesome deaths of an elderly Florida woman and her two adult sons — in what authorities suspect was a ritual killing — neighbors and family on Wednesday said they have many questions but few answers.

Meeks Willard, who lives in the rural, west Pensacola neighborhood where the Smith family was killed, said he is frightened and doesn’t sleep at night because of the crime.

“This is causing me a lot of stress,” said Willard, who never met the Smiths despite living on the same street for years.

Escambia County Sheriff David Morgan said Tuesday that authorities had identified a person of interest in the deaths of Voncile Smith, 77, Richard Smith, 49, and John Smith, 47.

All three victims were struck multiple times with a claw hammer and their throats were slit. Richard Smith was also shot in his right ear.

Wing Fragment Is From Missing Flight

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — A piece of a wing found washed up on Reunion Island last week is from Malaysia Airlines Flight 370 that vanished last year, Malaysia’s prime minister announced early Thursday, saying he hoped the news would end the “unspeakable” uncertainty of the passengers’ families.

The disappearance of the Boeing 777 jetliner 515 days ago while on a flight from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing on March 8, 2014, has been one of the biggest mysteries in aviation history. Officials believed it crashed in the southern Indian Ocean, killing all 239 people aboard, but it is still unknown why the plane went down.

“It is with a very heavy heart that I must tell you that an international team of experts has conclusively confirmed that the aircraft debris found on Reunion Island is indeed MH370,” Prime Minister Najib Razak told reporters. The French territory is thousands of miles from the area being searched for wreckage from the flight.

U.S. and French officials involved in the investigation were more cautious, stopping short of full confirmation but saying it made sense that the metal piece of the wing, known as the flaperon, came from Flight 370.

The Australian government, which leads the seabed search for wreckage west of Australia, was also less certain than Malaysia, saying in a statement that “based on high probability, it is MH370.”

Pope Welcomes Divorced Catholics

NEW YORK (AP) — Pope Francis’ call Wednesday for a church of “open doors” that welcomes divorced Catholics prompted speculation over whether he was signaling support for easing the ban on Communion for couples who remarry without a church annulment.

The issue is at the center of an extraordinarily public debate among cardinals from around the world who will gather this October at the Vatican for a synod, or meeting, on the family, where treatment of such couples will be a key topic.

“He wants the church to get over a psychology that if you’re divorced and remarried that you’re a lesser Catholic,” said Phillip Thompson, executive director of the Aquinas Center of Theology at Emory University in Atlanta. “But it doesn’t address the real issue of what is the path forward for Catholics who want to enter into full communion with the church.”

Under Catholic teaching, unless a marriage is annulled, or declared null and void by a church tribunal, those who remarry cannot receive Communion or other sacraments because they are essentially living in sin and committing adultery. Such annulments can take years to process — if they are granted at all — a problem that has left generations of Catholics feeling shunned by their church.

Catholics who divorce after a church marriage, but don’t remarry can receive Communion.

Hillary Tries To Break Through Trump

WASHINGTON (AP) — Ten Republican candidates for president in 2016 will debate Thursday for first time. Spend any time listening to Democratic frontrunner Hillary Rodham Clinton this past week, though, and it would seem like only one really matters: Jeb Bush.

As billionaire businessman Donald Trump thunders his way to the top of the summertime polls, Clinton is instead focused on the former Florida governor as one of the most likely — and potentially threatening — Republican nominees.

Clinton repeatedly slammed Bush by name on Tuesday after he questioned spending public money on women’s health issues, a more direct attack after she slyly stung him last Friday by using the name of his super PAC and slogan of his campaign — Right to Rise — to paint him as setting back the cause of black Americans.

“People can’t rise if they can’t afford health care. They can’t rise if the minimum wage is too low to live on,” Clinton told the annual meeting of the National Urban League, as Bush waited in the wings to take his turn on stage.

“They can’t rise if their governor makes it hard for them to get a college education and you cannot seriously talk about the right to rise and support laws that deny the right to vote,” she said.



Charred hillside is covered in ash in Lake County south of Clearlake, Calif., on Wednesday, Aug. 5. GENARO MOLINA/LOS ANGELES TIMES/TNS

California Meets Drought-Fueled Fire Season With Extra Crews

BY JANIE HAR
Associated Press

LAKEPORT, Calif. — The firefighters come from near and far, working 24-hour shifts to snuff out an unpredictable blaze that has burned more than 100 square miles in Northern California near a major recreational lake.

They bunk in tight sleepers and eat in a big mess hall. They depart in the mornings with enormous high-calorie sack lunches of sandwiches and cookies as others come back tired, footsore and hungry to their makeshift base at the Lake County fairgrounds.

The National Interagency Fire Center in Idaho has listed the fire 110 miles north of San Francisco as the nation’s highest priority for crews and equipment. It is the largest of 23 fires statewide and takes up nearly a third of the 10,000 firefighters dispatched in California, which has become tinder box amid years of drought.

The good news is state fire officials prepared for a drought-fueled fire season and staffed up early with several hundred more firefighters than previous years, Cal Fire spokesman Daniel Berlant said.

“We’re definitely at a medium to high level of activity but we’re not at extreme, where we are low on resources by

any means,” he said. “That helps us out if there are new fires.”

Across the U.S., 118 fires are burning on 2,757 square miles, according to the Idaho fire center. About 17,200 people are fighting those fires, but resources are not tapped out yet, center spokeswoman Robyn Broyles said. If civilian crews run low, officials can call on national guard and military crews.

August is the height of fire season, and while the number of fires nationally is below average, the 9,361 square miles burned to date is about 50 percent above average. Most of that — 7,731 square miles — has been in Alaska.

On Wednesday, evacuation orders for a small Washington town were lifted after a fast-growing wildfire bypassed the community.

Fire spokesman Ron Fryer said people were being allowed back into their homes in Roosevelt, about 120 miles east of Portland, Oregon. He said the grass fire that began Tuesday has grown to 26 square miles.

In California, the Department of Fire and Forestry Protection has responded to 4,200 fires this year — 1,500 more than average, Berlant said.

The biggest is in rugged terrain in Lake, Yolo and Colusa counties, and its cause is under investigation. More than 13,000 people have been re-

quired or urged to leave their homes, cabins and campsites, and at least 39 homes have been destroyed.

Some of the 3,400 firefighters on the blaze have been here since it started a week ago. The fire isn’t expected to be fully corralled until at least Monday.

As much as crews love the work, fatigue inevitably sets in.

“This is our seventh day,” said Seaton King, a battalion chief with the Pasadena Fire Department. He returned from a shift protecting structures and cutting low tree limbs.

“You kind of get used to it, but it’s still taxing in terms of being up and available for those 24-hour work cycles.”

California fire officials say their biggest concern is that forecasts call for lightning that could spark more blazes.

Since July 1, when the new fiscal year started, Cal Fire estimates it has spent \$63 million battling large wildfires. Last fiscal year, it spent an estimated \$434 million.

Bills for firefighting are adding up across the country. On Wednesday, the U.S. Forest Service released a report showing rising firefighting costs are affecting national forest conservation, restoration, recreation and management programs.

Firefighting costs now

consume more than 50 percent of the Forest Service’s budget, compared with just 16 percent in 1995. They are expected to comprise two-thirds of its budget in 10 years if left unaddressed.

At the fire camp here Wednesday, freshly returned firefighters in blue sat at long tables and dug into bowls of fruit, corned beef hash and fried eggs. They told jokes and drank coffee named after Justin Bieber, Johnny Cash and Metallica, to indicate strength.

Fire trucks parked outside hailed from Long Beach, Los Angeles and Riverside. Nearby were large white mobile sleepers that could fit 45 weary firefighters. Some preferred to pitch a tent.

“It’s tiring work, no doubt about it. But most of these guys are in really great shape, and they thrive in this environment,” said Hugo Patino, Modesto Fire Department battalion chief.

Mike Burt with the Glendale Fire Department in Los Angeles County said his crew received a call to help last Thursday morning and was in Lakeport that afternoon.

“I’d like to put my feet in an ice chest basically, but I won’t do that,” he said, laughing. “That would feel pretty good.”

GOP Debate: Trump & Bush In, Fiorina & Perry Out

BY STEVE PEOPLES
Associated Press

CLEVELAND — It’s the first really good news — and really bad news — for Republicans seeking the presidential nomination: Who’s in the first prime-time debate and who’s not.

In: billionaire businessman Donald Trump, former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush, Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, Kentucky Sen. Rand Paul, Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson, former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie and Ohio Gov. John Kasich.

Out: former tech executive Carly Fiorina, former Texas Gov. Rick Perry, Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal, South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham, former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum, former New York Gov. George Pataki and former Virginia Gov. Jim Gilmore.

The largest field of contenders in modern memory challenged debate organizers, who wanted to ensure that the event Thursday night in Cleveland didn’t turn into a 17-ring circus. Fox News relied on an average of five national polls to decide the lineups for the prime-time debate and the consolation prize, a forum four hours earlier.

“We never ever envisioned we’d

have 17 major candidates,” said Steve Duprey, New Hampshire’s representative to the Republican National Committee who helped craft the debate plan. “There’s no perfect solution.”

Republican officials were particularly concerned about Fiorina’s status, hoping she would help balance Democratic front-runner Hillary Rodham Clinton’s push to rally women to her side. Trump’s recent surge in the polls, a surprise to many Republican officials, damaged her chances to make the cut.

Some Republicans fear that Trump’s rhetoric on immigration and other divisive issues could hurt the party, but the reality TV star says he’s been defying expectations all his life. Asked to explain his rise, he told MSNBC’s “Morning Joe” Tuesday, “I think people are tired, they’re sick and tired of incompetent politicians.”

While Trump was far and away the front-runner in the five most recent national polls that determined the debate lineup, several candidates were grouped together in the single digits, most separated by a number smaller than the margin of error.

For example, in a Monmouth University survey released Monday, Kasich was the 10th candidate with the support of 3.2 percent of voters. But after taking the margin of error into account, Monmouth noted that Kasich’s support

could be as low as 1.5 percent, while almost any of the candidates who polled lower could be that high or higher.

Some candidates looked at the polls on Tuesday, and then looked past the Cleveland debate. Five more party-sanctioned debates are scheduled before primary voting begins in February.

“This first debate is just one opportunity of many,” Amy Frederick, an aide to Fiorina, wrote to supporters. “With many more debates to come, we fully expect that Carly will soon stand on the stage and show America what real leadership looks like.”

Jindal spokeswoman Shannon Dirmann issued a challenge of sorts: “The governor will debate anyone anywhere at any time.”

Candidates have already begun to turn their attention toward Trump, considered the ultimate wildcard on the debate stage.

Asked about Trump while courting religious conservatives on Tuesday, Bush said the businessman’s rhetoric on immigrants is “wrong.” “We have a different tone and a different view,” he said.

“I respect the fact that he’s the front-runner for the Republican nomination,” Bush continued. “This is a serious thing. But I think to win and govern the right way — we have to unite rather than divide.”

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