

Court To Review State Immigration Laws

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court stepped into the fight Monday over a tough Arizona law that requires local police to help enforce federal immigration laws — pushing the court deeper into hot, partisan issues of the 2012 election campaign.

The court's election-year docket now contains three politically charged disputes, including President Barack Obama's health care overhaul and Texas redistricting.

The debate over immigration already is shaping presidential politics, and now the court is undertaking a review of an Arizona law that has spawned a host of copycat state laws targeting illegal immigrants.

The court will review a federal appeals court ruling that blocked several provisions in the Arizona law. One of those requires that police, while enforcing other laws, question a person's immigration status if officers suspect he is in the country illegally.

The case is the court's biggest foray into immigration law in decades, said Temple University law professor Peter Spiro, an expert in that area.

Romney And Gingrich Trade Barbs On Trail

MANCHESTER, N.H. (AP) — Trading accusations of greed, Mitt Romney and Newt Gingrich challenged each other Monday to return millions made in private business as the race for the GOP presidential nomination turned increasingly acerbic and personal at the start of a three-week sprint to the Iowa caucuses.

Far from Iowa, the two men campaigned miles apart from each other in next-up New Hampshire, where Romney has long dominated in polls but where Gingrich is aggressively working to make inroads.

Romney called on Gingrich to return the estimated \$1.6 million he received for providing strategic advice to Freddie Mac, the quasi-government agency that guarantees home mortgages. Gingrich has said he acted as a historian, not a lobbyist.

"That would make him the highest paid historian in history," Romney told Fox News Channel during an interview from the Chez Vachon diner, a regular New Hampshire stop for presidential candidates. He suggested that Gingrich was an ultimate insider who leveraged his position as a former House speaker to line his pockets when he left office. Said Romney: "One of the things that I think people recognize in Washington is that people go there to serve the people and then they stay there to serve themselves."

Gingrich, campaigning in nearby Londonderry, countered quickly, saying that Romney should give back the millions he made working at Bain Capital, a venture capital firm that sometimes laid people off as part of its efforts to make businesses more efficient.

\$1T-Plus Spending Bill Is Taking Shape

WASHINGTON (AP) — Weary after a year of partisan bickering, lawmakers tried Monday to wrap up a sprawling \$1 trillion-plus spending bill that chips away at military and environmental spending but denies conservatives many of the policy changes they wanted on social issues, government regulations and health care.

The measure implements this summer's hard-fought budget pact between President Barack Obama and Republican leaders. That deal essentially freezes agency budgets, on average, at levels for the recently-completed budget year that were approved back in April.

Drafted behind closed doors, the proposed bill would pay for the war in Afghanistan but give the Pentagon just a 1 percent boost in annual spending, while the Environmental Protection Agency's budget would be cut by 3.5 percent.

The bill also covers everything from money to combat AIDS and famine in Africa, patrolling the U.S.-Mexico border, operations of national parks, and budget increases for veterans' health care.

Negotiators on the appropriations committees hope to get a final agreement from top leaders like House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev. — and the White House — and officially unveil the measure by late tonight in preparation for House and Senate votes before a midnight deadline on Friday, when a stopgap funding measure expires.

Study: Gingrich Tax Plan Would Help Rich

WASHINGTON (AP) — The tax plan by GOP presidential hopeful Newt Gingrich would provide big tax breaks to the rich and blow a huge hole in the federal budget deficit, according to an independent study released Monday.

The analysis by the Tax Policy Center says households making more than \$1 million a year would see their taxes drop by an average of 62 percent. Overall, federal tax revenues would drop by an estimated \$850 billion in 2015, a figure that would dramatically worsen the budget deficit unless it is offset by unprecedented spending cuts, the study said.

"The revenue losses are enormous," said Robertson Williams, a senior fellow at the Tax Policy Center.

Gingrich proposes an optional 15 percent flat tax on income. Under the plan, taxpayers could stay in the current system, which has a top tax rate of 35 percent on taxable income above \$379,150, or switch to the new 15 percent tax. The new tax would apply to income at all levels, but there would be a variety of tax deductions and credits.

Gingrich would eliminate taxes on capital gains, dividends and interest, and reduce the corporate income tax rate from 35 percent to 12.5 percent. The plan would provide a personal deduction of \$12,000 for every American, while maintaining the \$1,000 per-child tax credit and the Earned Income Tax Credit, which benefits low-income people. Deductions for mortgage interest and charitable donations would also be maintained.

Occupy Protesters Blocking Gates At Ports

OAKLAND, Calif. (AP) — Hundreds of Wall Street protesters blocked gates at some of the West Coast's busiest ports on Monday, causing the partial shutdown of several in a day of demonstrations they hope will cut into the profits of the corporations that run the docks.

The closures affected some of the terminals at the ports in Oakland, Calif., Portland, Ore., and Longview, Wash., though it was not immediately clear how much the shutdowns would affect operations and what the economic loss would be.

From California to as far away as Vancouver, British Columbia, protesters picketed gates, beating drums, carrying signs such as "Shutdown Wall St. on the Waterfront" and causing longer wait times for trucks.

There were a handful of arrests so far, but no major clashes with police.

Obama Lauds End Of Iraq War

BY BEN FELLER

AP White House Correspondent

WASHINGTON — Eager to put the long and divisive Iraq war to rest, President Barack Obama declared Monday "those days are over" with the last American troops heading home, but he pledged the U.S. would remain committed to the fledgling government they leave behind. He and Iraq's leader somberly saluted America's war dead at Arlington National Cemetery.

"A war is ending," the president said, standing with Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki at the White House. U.S. troops are leaving "with honor and with their heads held high," said Obama, who strongly opposed the war as a candidate for the White House.

The last American troops are to be out of Iraq by Dec. 31. Thousands of others are still in Afghanistan.

Just 6,000 remain in Iraq, down from 170,000 at the war's peak in 2007.

The withdrawal will cap a war in which nearly 4,500 Americans were killed, roughly 32,000 were wounded, hundreds of billions of dollars were spent and the American political debate was consumed until economic woes brought attention back home.

Obama had already said weeks ago that he was pulling all troops by year's end, leaving his appearance with al-Maliki to focus instead on what's next — a relationship both leaders described as rich in shared interests, from education to oil, politics to security.

To the Iraqi people, who still face massive challenges in rebuilding a society ripped apart by nearly nine years of war, Obama said: "You will not stand alone."

The United States, in fact, needs the help of Iraq in dealing with the volatile Middle East and two of neighbors in particular, Iran and Syria. In getting out of Iraq, Obama emphasized that "our strong presence in the Middle East endures" and the United States won't soften in its defense of its interests.



OLIVIER DOULIERY/ABACA PRESS/MCT

President Barack Obama and Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki participate in a wreath laying ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery Monday in Arlington, Va.

In the midst of a re-election run, Obama is using the war's end to both honor the military's sacrifice and to remind the nation the unpopular war is ending on his watch. He is to deliver his war-is-over message in TV interviews on Tuesday and then again on Wednesday in remarks to troops at Fort Bragg, N.C.

Obama opposed the war from the start and eventually rode that stand to the White House.

In a 2002 speech during the months before the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq began, when Obama was a U.S. senator from Illinois, he that "What I am opposed to is a dumb war. What I am opposed to is a rash war."

On Monday, speaking as a commander in chief, Obama put the focus on Iraq's future.

"I think history will judge the original decision to go into Iraq," Obama said. What's clear, he added, is that because of the huge sacrifices by American soldiers and civilians and the courage of the Iraqi people, "we have now achieved an Iraq that is self-governing, that is inclusive and that has enormous potential."

Said al-Maliki: "Anyone who ob-

serves the nature of the relationship between the two countries will say that the relationship will not end with the departure of the last American soldier."

Early signs of how Iraq may orient itself could come from how it handles troubles in Syria, where the United Nations says 4,000 people have been killed in a government crackdown. The crisis has exposed differences in the U.S. and Iraqi positions: Obama says Syrian President Bashar Assad must step down. Al-Maliki has not.

"I do not have the right to ask a president to abdicate," said al-Maliki. He suggested anew that Assad's removal could lead to a civil war in Syria that could spread across the region and be difficult to control, calling for some other solution that would "avoid all the evils and the dangers."

Obama said he and al-Maliki had "tactical disagreements" on Syria but shared the goals of free expression there without violence. Obama said he had no doubt that Iraq was acting in its own interests and not under the meddling influence of Iran. Tehran is Syria's main backer.

House Gives Its OK To Pipeline Safety Bill

BY JOAN LOWY

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House passed a bill Monday that doubles the maximum fine for pipeline safety violations, but ignores several key recommendations arising from investigations of deadly natural gas explosions and high-profile oil spills over the past two years.

The compromise bill was passed by a voice vote. Senate action is expected this week, perhaps as early as Tuesday.

The bill extends federal safety oversight of 2.3 million miles of gas, oil and other liquid pipelines through 2015. It also doubles the maximum fine for safety violations to \$2 million and authorizes the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration to hire 10 more safety inspectors. That's far fewer new inspectors than most safety experts say the agency needs.

The bill also doesn't include several safety recommendations made by the National Transportation Safety Board in response to a Sept. 9, 2010 gas pipeline explosion in San Bruno, Calif., that killed eight people, injured 58 others and damaged or destroyed more than

100 homes. The board blamed the accident on a series of failures by one of the nation's largest natural gas companies, Pacific Gas & Electric Co., but it also said weak federal and state oversight contributed to the tragedy.

The bill would allow the transportation secretary to require that newly constructed pipelines include automatic shutoff valves that isolate a section of pipe in event of a rupture, preventing further gas or liquid from escaping. But NTSB said the valves are especially needed on aging pipelines in highly populated areas. Pipeline operators don't want to be forced to install valves in those areas because it costs significantly more to install valves on lines already in place than lines being newly laid.

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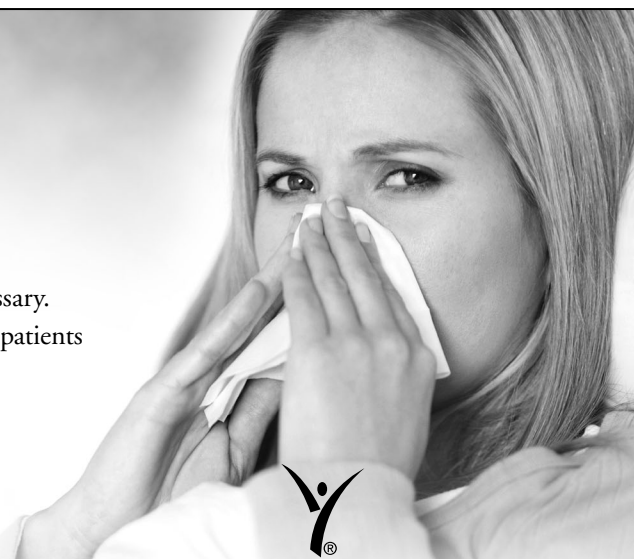
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