

# Obama Gets Worst Ratings Of His Presidency

BY DAVID LIGHTMAN  
 McClatchy Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — The American public is unusually pessimistic about the direction of the country and increasingly fed up with Washington gridlock, a sour mood reflected in the worst disapproval ratings for President Barack Obama since he took office nearly five years ago.

People give elected officials unusually low grades — 31 percent rated them "D" and 38 percent gave them an "F," according to a new McClatchy-Marist poll.

"The lack of confidence in Washington to right itself is showing up," said Lee Miringoff, director of the Marist Institute for Public Opinion in New York.

Obama's disapproval rating climbed to 53 percent — the worst in 29 polls since he took office in January 2009 — while 43 percent approved of his job performance. The disapproval number was up sharply from the 47 percent reading in September and tops the previous high of 52 percent in September 2011.

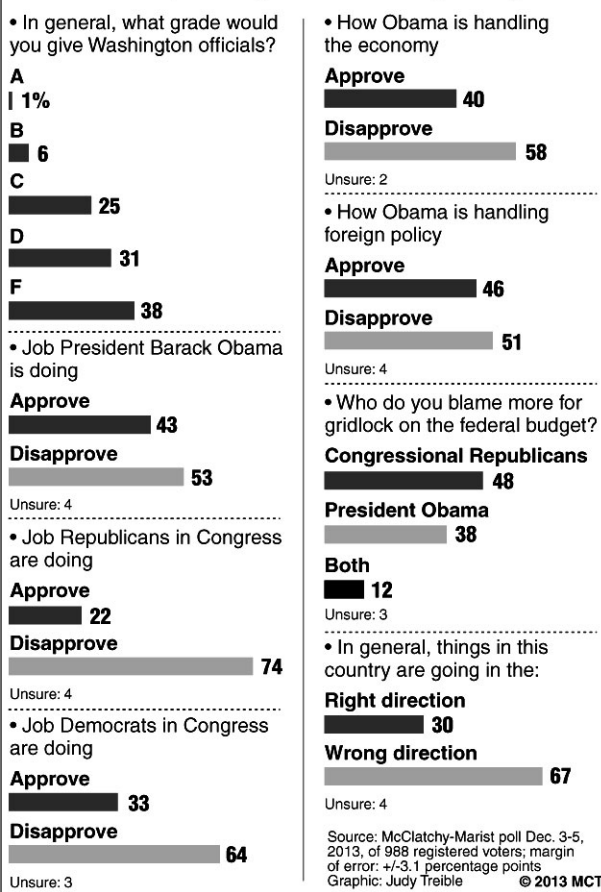
Obama retained strong support among Democrats — 77-18 percent approval — and disdain from Republicans — 90-8 percent disapproval. Independents disapproved 56 percent to 41 percent.

Obama's personal ratings were also down. By 52 percent to 46 percent, people had an unfavorable impression of him, the first time since November 2011 the negative number was higher. The unfavorable number was also the worst he has endured.

Obama in recent weeks has been battered by turmoil over his health care program. The highly touted website where people could sign up for coverage proved to be a dysfunctional embarrassment, and Obama had to backtrack from

## Failing grades for Washington

The public is fed up with Washington gridlock and gives low grades to elected officials, according to a new McClatchy-Marist poll.



his assertion that people could keep their plans if they wanted.

Congress fared even worse. By 74 percent to 22 percent, voters disapprove of the Republicans' performance, the highest since the question was first asked in April 2011. Republicans control the House of Representatives and 45 of the Senate's 100 seats.

People soured on Democrats, too. Sixty-four percent disapproved of congressional Democrats, who control the Senate. Both Republican and Democratic disapproval numbers were up sharply from the last poll in July.

The numbers show that "the unshures have cast their vote with the negatives," Miringoff said.

The key reason for the glut ratings is the economy. Though indicators suggest a healthy rebound, people aren't feeling it. Instead, said Miringoff, the two Washington stories that have dominated headlines in recent months were the 16-day October government shutdown and the health care chaos.

That helped create pessimism that found two-thirds seeing things going in the wrong direction, while 30 percent felt matters were heading

in the right direction. Democrats were more optimistic, with the right-wrong direction split 57 percent to 40 percent. Republicans overwhelmingly saw the country moving the wrong way — 95 percent to 4 percent — and independents saw matters heading in the wrong direction, 69 percent to 26 percent.

The federal budget drama is the most obvious symbol of Washington inertia. Lawmakers have wrangled all year, passing stopgaps after extended, often bitter debate. Negotiators this week are said to be close on a deal that will avoid another shutdown when money again runs out Jan. 15.

Obama gets low marks for his handling of the economy. Fifty-eight percent disapproved of how he's dealing with it, while 40 percent approved.

More people blame Republicans for the budget mess — 48 percent said it's their fault while 38 percent named Obama.

Obama suffered in two other areas where he had shown some strength, foreign policy and personal appeal.

The latest poll was conducted after the administration announced a pact with Iran that eases some sanctions on that country, in exchange for some limits on Iran's nuclear program.

That plan has won little congressional support, as lawmakers from both parties have expressed doubts. Forty-six percent approved of Obama's handling of foreign policy, while 51 percent did not.

Voters have mixed views about how all this will translate in next year's elections. Equal numbers — 43 percent — said they would vote for a Republican or a Democratic candidate. Independents preferred Republicans, 41 percent to 34 percent, while moderates favored Democrats, 49 percent to 35 percent.

## NSA, GCHQ Spy On Virtual Worlds

LONDON (AP) — American and British intelligence operations have been spying on gamers across the world, media outlets reported, saying that the world's most powerful espionage agencies sent undercover agents into virtual universes to monitor activity in online fantasy games such as "World of Warcraft."

Stories carried Monday by The New York Times, the Guardian, and ProPublica said U.S. and U.K. spies have spent years trawling online games for terrorists or informants. The stories, based on documents leaked by former National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden, offer an unusual take on America's world-spanning surveillance campaign, suggesting that even the fantasy worlds popular with children, teens, and escapists of all ages aren't beyond the attention of the NSA and its British counterpart, GCHQ.

Virtual universes like "World of Warcraft" can be massively popular, drawing in millions of players who log months' worth of real-world time competing with other players for online glory, virtual treasure, and magical loot. At its height, "World of Warcraft" boasted some 12 million paying subscribers, more than the population of Greece. Other virtual worlds, like Linden Labs' "Second Life" or the various games hosted by Microsoft's Xbox — home to the popular science fiction-themed shoot-em-up "Halo" — host millions more.

Spy agencies have long worried that such games serve as a good cover for terrorists or other evildoers who could use in-game messaging systems to swap information. In one of the documents cited Monday by media outlets, the NSA warned that the games could give intelligence targets a place to "hide in plain sight."

Linden Labs and Microsoft Inc. did not immediately return messages seeking comment. In a statement, Blizzard Entertainment said that it is "unaware of any surveillance taking place. If it was, it would have been done without our knowledge or permission."

## Congress Set To Renew Gun Ban

WASHINGTON (AP) — Racing a midnight deadline, Congress is ready to renew the expiring ban on plastic firearms that can evade airport detection machines. But lawmakers are sure to reject toughening those restrictions — the latest defeat for gun-control forces in the year since the grade school massacre in Newtown, Conn.

The Senate planned to give final congressional approval Monday evening to a 10-year extension of the prohibition against guns that can slip past metal detectors and X-ray machines. The quarter-century-old ban has been renewed twice and would expire Tuesday without action.

But first, senators were set to defeat an effort by Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., to strengthen the ban by requiring that such weapons contain undetachable metal parts. Some plastic guns meet the letter of current law with a metal piece that can be removed, making them a threat to be slipped past security screeners at schools, airports and elsewhere.

"Who in God's name wants to let plastic guns pass through metal detectors at airports or stadiums?" Schumer said in an interview Monday.

The National Rifle Association, which has been instrumental in blocking gun restrictions, has expressed no opposition to renewing the law. But the gun lobby said it would fight any expanded requirements, including Schumer's, "that would infringe on our Second Amendment rights" to bear arms.

# Dempsey Presses Congress To Act On Defense Bill

BY DONNA CASSATA  
 Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The nation's top military leader pleaded with Congress on Monday to complete the defense bill before year's end as Democrats and Republicans on the Armed Services committees reached agreement on compromise legislation to pay for warfighters, ships and aircraft.

Ramping up the pressure on House and Senate leaders, the panels' top members unveiled a comprehensive, \$632.8 billion bill that increases personnel pay by 1 percent, covers the cost of the war in Afghanistan and takes steps to address the epidemic of sexual assault in the military.

The legislation — a fall-back plan to a measure stalled in the Senate — does not include a contentious proposal from Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., to give victims of rape and sexual assault in the military an independent route outside the chain of command for prosecuting attackers.

That plan drew strong opposition from the Pentagon as well as several men and women in the Senate.

Amy Gen. Martin Dempsey, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the committee leaders insisted that the bill was imperative and the compromise the only path forward for a measure that Congress has passed every year since the Kennedy administration.

"Allowing the bill to slip to January adds yet more uncertainty to the force and further complicates the duty of our commanders who face shifting global threats," Dempsey wrote to House and Senate leaders.

The House plans to

adjourn by week's end and the Senate is scheduled to leave town Dec. 20.

With a few legislative days remaining, Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., the Armed Services Committee chairman, and the panel's top Republican, Sen. Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma, along with their House counterparts, Rep. Howard "Buck" McKeon, R-Calif., and Rep. Adam Smith of Washington state, reconciled differences between the House-passed bill and the Senate committee measure.

The fate of the bill now rests with Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., and whether they will allow the measure to sail through without amendments.

McConnell would prefer if Boehner does not allow a vote

in the House as he pushes for Senate Republicans to get a vote on their amendments.

Several Senate Republicans and some Democrats would like to vote on new sanctions on Iran, a prospect that unnerves the Obama administration amid fears it would undermine a new agreement with Iran on nuclear weapons. Other lawmakers want to offer amendments on Syria, Afghanistan and reining in spying by the National Security Agency.

McKeon and Inhofe, who stood with Levin at the news conference, said they considered 87 amendments from Democrats and Republicans that were pending in the Senate and incorporated 79 in the compromise.

The two said they had talked to their respective leaders, but couldn't offer

anything definitive on whether the House and Senate will vote. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., is willing to press ahead with a vote but must get members of the Senate to agree.

Echoing Dempsey, the committee leaders said failure to act by Dec. 31 would cost billions while various programs would expire, including combat pay, hardship duty pay, re-enlistment bonuses and access to military training ranges.

The bipartisan defense authorization bill typically enjoys overwhelming support, but it has been caught up in the Senate fight between Reid and Republicans over procedure. Reid sought to finish the bill before the Thanksgiving break; Republicans objected that he had tried to limit their ability to offer amendments to

a measure that represents more than half the nation's discretionary budget.

The compromise bill contains several provisions dealing with sexual assault in the ranks.

The bill would strip commanders of their ability to overturn jury convictions and mandate that any individual

convicted of sexual assault would face a dishonorable discharge or dismissal. The bill also would require a civilian review when a decision is made not to prosecute a case, provide a special counsel for victims and eliminate the statute of limitations for courts-martial.

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