

Budget Talks Hit Snag Over Environment

WASHINGTON (AP) — Talks on a massive, government-wide spending bill hit a snag Wednesday as Republicans pressed demands to block new power plant rules, weaken financial services regulations and make it more difficult for Syrian and Iraqi refugees to enter the U.S.

Democrats, whose votes will be needed to carry the \$1.1 trillion measure through the House, flatly rejected the initial offer from top Republicans. With little more than a week to pass a measure to avert a government shutdown, it's likely that a short-term funding bill will be needed to keep the government open past the Dec. 11 deadline.

Republican aides characterized Tuesday night's offer from House Speaker Paul Ryan and top Senate Republican Mitch McConnell as an opening move, but the White House weighed in sharply, saying it threatened a government shutdown.

Many lower-tier items in the massive measure have been worked out, leaving numerous policy provisions, known as "riders" as the main unresolved items.

"The effort they're engaged in now is to lard the bill up with ideological riders," White House Press Secretary Josh Earnest told reporters.

Rewriting 'No Child Left Behind' Passes

WASHINGTON (AP) — After years of failed efforts, the House voted overwhelmingly Wednesday to sharply scale back the federal role in American education. But the bill would retain the testing requirement in the 2002 No Child Left Behind law that many parents, teachers and school districts abhor.

The legislation, approved 359-64, would return to the states the decision-making power over how to use students' test performance in assessing teachers and schools. The measure also would end federal efforts to encourage academic standards such as Common Core.

The 1,000-plus page measure was a compromise reached by House and Senate negotiators. The Senate is to vote on it early next week and President Barack Obama is expected to sign it.

Rep. John Kline, R-Minn., who led the House-Senate conference committee on the legislation, said Washington has been micromanaging the nation's classrooms for too long.

"Today, we turn the page on the failed status quo and turn over to our nation's parents and our state and local leaders the authority, flexibility and certainty they need to deliver children an excellent education," he said.

Ex-wife Says Suspect Vandalized Clinics

CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP) — The man accused of killing three people at a Colorado Planned Parenthood clinic left a decades-long trail of broken marriages, scant social connections and a reputation for religious zealotry that didn't match his yen for gambling and extramarital affairs.

New court documents and interviews reveal Robert Lewis Dear as an occasionally violent, fundamentalist loner who was known to nurse a grudge. He had one for at least 20 years against abortion providers, going so far as to put glue in the locks of a clinic in Charleston years earlier, a common protest technique among activists trying to shut down abortion clinics.

But still unknown is what caused Dear, 57, to escalate from petty vandalism to the fusillade he is accused of unleashing at the Colorado Springs office, where a law enforcement official said he rambled about "no more baby parts" after his arrest. Colorado Springs police have refused to disclose a motive for Dear's violence, but there's mounting evidence that Dear was deeply concerned about abortion.

Dear's ex-wife, Barbara Mescher Micheau, told The Associated Press on Wednesday that her former husband came home one day bragging about gluing the doors of a clinic. Micheau, who lives in Moncks Corner, South Carolina, said Dear never talked much about Planned Parenthood, although "obviously he was against abortion."

"He was always plotting revenge against people he felt did him wrong and you know it didn't take much for him to feel like somebody did him wrong," Micheau said. "So he would spend a lot of time trying to get back at people, trying to figure out ways to get back at people."

Lack Of Sound Raises More Questions

CHICAGO (AP) — A police dash-cam video that captures a white Chicago officer fatally shooting a black teenager 16 times has no sound, nor do videos from four other squad cars at the scene. But department protocol indicates all the cruisers should have been recording audio that night.

The silence is almost sure to figure into the ongoing federal investigation of the case, and it raises questions about whether officers were careless with the recording equipment or, worse, attempting a cover-up.

"When you've got a standup cop with nothing to hide, the dash-cam is his friend," said Gregg Stutchman, who has specialized in video forensics in California for 23 years. "But for cops who aren't quite as standup, it would make sense that they wouldn't want things recorded."

Several experts on the type of equipment commonly installed in police vehicles told *The Associated Press* that it's plausible for a single squad car to have a glitch preventing sound recording. But they could not imagine how an entire fleet of cars would ever lose audio at the same time and place by mere happenstance.

"I've never heard of it before," Stutchman said. "It raises a red flag." The more likely explanation is that audio was intentionally switched off, he said.

New Yorker Jailed In Peru Goes Home

LIMA, Peru (AP) — In the five years since she was paroled, Lori Berenson has lived in a limbo of sorts, trying to raise a young son in a society that largely refuses to forgive her for aiding Peru's No. 2 leftist rebel group in the 1990s.

Now a 46-year-old single mother, the woman who arrived in Peru two decades ago bent on revolutionary change has finally gone home to her native New York.

Berenson was officially expelled late Wednesday. With her 6-year-old son Salvador in her arms, she passed quickly through Lima's airport terminal ringed by police officers and followed by reporters. Recognizing her, some people shouted "get out of here, terrorist!" Her flight to New York was scheduled to leave at midnight.

Berenson was allowed to leave the South American country after her 20-year sentence for "collaboration with terrorism" for her role in the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement lapsed.

Before her departure, in an interview granted on condition it not be published until she was gone, Berenson had harsh words for Peru's economic and political elite. She accused it of being unwilling to confront the open wounds of the country's 1980-2000 internal conflict.

14 Dead, More Than A Dozen Wounded In California Shooting

BY AMANDA LEE MYERS
Associated Press

SAN BERNARDINO, Calif. — As many as three heavily armed attackers opened fire on a banquet at a social services center for the disabled Wednesday, killing 14 people and seriously wounding more than a dozen others "as if they were on a mission," authorities said.

The attackers escaped, setting a large region east of Los Angeles on edge, but about four hours later police riddled a black SUV with gunfire two miles from the late-morning carnage.

A man and woman in the SUV with assault rifles, handguns and "assault-style clothing" were killed, Police Chief Jarrod Burguan said. A third person who was spotted running away near the scene of the gunbattle was detained, but Burguan said it was unclear if that person had anything to do with the crime.

It was the deadliest mass shooting in a nation all too familiar with them since 2012, when a man killed 26 children and adults at a school in the Newtown, Connecticut.

Police shed no light on a motive for Wednesday's massacre, which came just five days after a gunman opened fire at Planned Parenthood in Colorado, killing three.

In what authorities described as a precision assault, the gunmen invaded the Inland Regional Center and began shooting around 11 a.m. They opened fire in a conference area that the San Bernardino County Department of Public Health had rented out for a banquet, said Marybeth Feild, president and CEO of the center.

"They came prepared to do what they did, as if they were on a mission," the police chief said.

Authorities also found a potential explosive device found at the social service center.

That the violence happened at a place dedicated to helping people with developmental disabilities made it even harder for some to comprehend.

"These are all disabled kids, very disabled," said Sherry Esquerra, who was searching for her daughter and son-in-law, both of whom work at the center. "She gets all the services she possibly could for these kids. So I just don't understand why somebody would come in and start shooting."

FBI agents and other law enforcement authorities



GINA FERAZZI/LOS ANGELES TIMES/TNS
San Bernardino County Sheriff John McMahon speaks during a news conference following a mass shooting at the Inland Regional Center in San Bernardino, Calif., on Wednesday, Dec. 2.

converged on the center and searched room to room for the attackers, but they had apparently escaped. Cervantes, the police spokeswoman, said there were reports from witnesses of one to three gunmen.

Several people locked themselves in their offices, desperately waiting to be rescued by police, after the gunfire erupted. Some texted their loved ones or telephoned them and whispered to them what was going on.

"People shot. In the office waiting for cops. Pray for us. I am locked in an office," Terry Petit's daughter texted him.

Petit, choking back tears as he read the text for reporters at the shooting scene, said his daughter works at the center, where social workers find jobs, housing and transportation and provide other services to people with disabilities such as autism, cerebral palsy and epilepsy.

Ten of the wounded were hospitalized in critical condition, and three were in serious condition, San Bernardino Fire Chief Tom Hannemann said. Police cautioned that the numbers of dead and wounded were early estimates that could change.

No weapons were found at the center, though authorities were investigating unidentified items in the building and brought in bomb squads, Burguan said.

As the manhunt went on, stores, office buildings and at least one school were locked down in the city of 214,000

people about 60 miles east of Los Angeles, and roads were blocked off.

Triage units were set up outside the center, and people were seen being wheeled away on stretchers. Others walked quickly from a building with their hands up. They were searched by police before being reunited with loved ones.

One witness, Glenn Willwerth, who runs a business across the street, said he heard 10 to 15 shots and then saw an SUV with blacked out windows pull "very calmly, very slowly."

Hours later, with police looking for a dark-colored SUV, an officer in the nearby city of Redlands saw a suspect vehicle and tried to pull it over, a law enforcement official speaking on condition of anonymity said. The SUV crashed, and a gunbattle broke out around 3 p.m.

President Barack Obama was briefed on the attack by his homeland security adviser.

He said it was too early to know the shooters' motives, but urged the country to take steps to reduce the frequency of mass shootings. He told CBS that stricter gun laws, including stronger background checks, would make the country safer.

"The one thing we do know is that we have a pattern now of mass shootings in this country that has no parallel anywhere else in the world, and there's some steps we could take, not to eliminate every one of these mass shootings, but to improve the

odds that they don't happen as frequently," Obama said.

The shooting sounded like "an organized plot," and preliminary information seems to indicate that "this is personal, and there seems to suggest some element of revenge and retaliation," said Erroll G. Southers, director of Homegrown Violent Extremism Studies at the University of Southern California and a former FBI agent.

"What it says to me, it's someone who's familiar with the facility, it's someone who knew exactly what room they were going to go to, they knew exactly which way they needed to escape," Southers said. "They've done their homework, they know what the response time in this jurisdiction."

Marcos Aguilera's wife was in the building when the gunfire erupted. He said a shooter entered the building next to his wife's office and opened fire.

"They locked themselves in her office. They'd seen bodies on the floor," Aguilera told KABC-TV, adding that his wife was able to get out of the building unharmed.

The social services center has two large buildings that require a badge to get in, said Sheila Stark, an Inland Regional Center board member. However, the conference room where many public events take place — including the banquet on Wednesday — is usually left open when visitors are expected.

UK Must Attack IS In Syria To Deny Group Safe Haven

BY JILL LAWLESS
Associated Press

LONDON — British Prime Minister David Cameron urged skeptical lawmakers to back airstrikes on the Islamic State group in Syria, saying Thursday that the Paris attacks have given the fight new urgency and Britain owes it to key allies to act.

Cameron told the House of Commons that President Barack Obama and French President Francois Hollande had urged Britain to join the military campaign in Syria. "These are our closest allies and they want our help," he said.

"We have to hit these terrorists in their heartlands. We have not and we must not shirk our responsibility for security or hand it to others."

Some previously skeptical lawmakers said they were convinced, but Cameron has not yet announced a date for a House of Commons vote on airstrikes.

The Royal Air Force is

part of a U.S.-led coalition attacking IS militants in Iraq, but not in Syria. Cameron has been reluctant to seek backing for strikes in Syria since lawmakers voted down his 2013 plan to launch RAF strikes against the forces of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

Many Britons are wary of getting drawn in to another Middle Eastern conflict after messy, bloody wars in Iraq and Libya.

Earlier this month, Parliament's Foreign Affairs Select Committee said British airstrikes would be "incoherent" and ineffective without a plan to end Syria's four-year civil war.

Cameron replied Thursday with a 36-page letter, arguing that Britain should act to deny the Islamic State group a "safe haven" from which to plot mass-casualty attacks like the Nov. 13 rampage that left 130 dead and hundreds wounded in Paris.

He said airstrikes should be part of a "comprehensive overall strategy" to destroy IS, end the Syrian war and

help rebuild the country.

Attempting to allay legislators' concerns, Cameron answered questions for more than two hours in the House of Commons.

He argued that military action was legal under the U.N. charter's right to self-defense. And he said while ground forces would also be needed, they would not be British.

Cameron said airstrikes would not increase the already-high risk of an attack in Britain. He said British authorities have foiled seven attacks in the past year either planned or inspired by IS.

Cameron said he would only seek a vote in Parliament if "there is a clear majority for action," so as not to hand IS "a publicity coup."

The main opposition Labour Party remains divided. Leader Jeremy Corbyn, whose left-wing views are at odds with some of his lawmakers, said military action could have "unintended consequences" — as it did in Iraq, Libya and Afghanistan. He wrote Thursday to Labour legislators to say he wouldn't

back airstrikes because Cameron had not set out "a coherent strategy" to defeat IS.

Labour's leadership in Parliament met Thursday, but didn't decide whether to allow the party's lawmakers a free vote. Another meeting is scheduled for Monday.

The Scottish National Party's Angus Robertson said his legislators would not support airstrikes without effective ground support and "a fully costed reconstruction and stability plan."

The debate is shadowed by the legacy of Parliament's divisive 2003 decision to join the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq. That decision was made on the basis of flawed intelligence about Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein's alleged weapons of mass destruction, and without an adequate plan for postwar reconstruction.

"This is about learning the lessons of Iraq," Cameron said, adding that — unlike in Iraq — "we are not taking or proposing to take military action to achieve regime change in Syria."

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