

NATION/WORLD DIGEST

U.S. Envoy: Iraq Election Must Look Fair

BAGHDAD (AP) — The U.S. ambassador to Iraq outlined twin challenges Monday to the unsteady democracy's elections next month: assuring that voters and rival factions accept the result and then making sure the losers step aside quietly.

Christopher Hill said the March 7 parliamentary balloting will likely shape Iraq's path long after the U.S. military pullout. It also will test Sunni-Shiite cooperation to quell violence — which struck again Monday as a suicide bomber killed at least 54 Shiite pilgrims.

The vote, delayed from January, will be the last major election in which the U.S. military is helping with security. At stake are some of the country's most ambitious goals, including political and sectarian reconciliation and finalizing a law governing the oil industry, on which Iraq's economy is almost solely dependent.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Hill said he was confident Shiite political leaders would soon settle a seething debate over the purge from the ballot of about 450 candidates accused of being loyalists to Saddam Hussein's Baathist regime. The blacklist is widely seen as targeting Sunnis, even though Shiite candidates are also on the list.

He predicted the Iraqi government would fully explain the reasons for banning each of the candidates because "there should be a situation where people don't scratch their heads at why certain people have been included on the list."

Some Nuke Plants Leaking Radioactive Tritium

MONTEPELIER, Vt. (AP) — Radioactive tritium, a carcinogen discovered in potentially dangerous levels in groundwater at the Vermont Yankee nuclear plant, has now tainted at least 27 of the nation's 104 nuclear reactors — raising concerns about how it is escaping from the aging nuclear plants.

The leaks — many from deteriorating underground pipes — come as the nuclear industry is seeking and obtaining federal license renewals, casting itself as a clean-green alternative to power plants that burn fossil fuels.

Tritium, found in nature in tiny amounts and a product of nuclear fusion, has been linked to cancer if ingested, inhaled or absorbed through the skin in large amounts.

The Nuclear Regulatory Commission said Monday that new tests at a monitoring well on Vermont Yankee's site in Vernon registered 70,500 picocuries per liter, more than three times the federal safety standard of 20,000 picocuries per liter.

States Proposing Bans On Health Mandates

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — Although President Barack Obama's push for a health care overhaul has stalled, conservative lawmakers in more than two-thirds of the states are forging ahead with constitutional amendments to ban government health insurance mandates.

The proposals would assert a state-based right for people to pay medical bills from their own pocketbooks and prohibit penalties against those who refuse to carry health insurance.

In many states, the proposals began as a backlash to Democratic health care plans pending in Congress. But instead of backing away after a Massachusetts election gave Senate Republicans the filibuster power to halt the health care legislation, many state lawmakers are ramping up their efforts with new enthusiasm.

The moves reflect the continued political potency of the issue for conservatives, who have used it extensively for fundraising and attracting new supporters. The legal impact of any state measures may be questionable because courts generally have held that federal laws trump those in states.

Lawmakers in 35 states have filed or proposed amendments to their state constitutions or statutes rejecting health insurance mandates, according to the American Legislative Exchange Council, a non-profit group that promotes limited government that is helping coordinate the efforts. Many of those proposals are targeted for the November ballot, assuring that health care remains a hot topic as hundreds of federal and state lawmakers face re-election.

FDA Adds Warning Language To HIV Drug

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal health officials said Monday that patients taking a Bristol-Myers Squibb drug for HIV are at risk of a rare, but potentially fatal, liver disorder.

The Food and Drug Administration said it has received 42 reports of the disorder since Videx was approved in 1991. Four patients died from bleeding or liver failure after developing the problem, known as non-cirrhotic portal hypertension.

The problem involves dangerously slow blood flow through the liver, which can cause veins in the esophagus to swell. These veins are thin and can cause burst, causing potentially deadly bleeding.

FDA says it is keeping the drug on the market because its benefits to patients outweigh its risks. Videx capsules prevent HIV from multiplying and are used in combination with other virus-fighting drugs in adults and children.

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OBITUARIES

Vesta Serr

SCOTLAND — Funeral services for Vesta I. Serr, 92, of Scotland will be held at 11:00 a.m. on Thursday, February 4 at the Zion Lutheran Church in Scotland with Rev. Jonathan Vehar officiating.

The family will be present to greet visitors on Wednesday from 4:00 p.m. until 7:00 p.m. at the Goglin Funeral Home in Scotland.

Burial will be held at a later date in Rosehill Cemetery, Scotland.

Vesta passed away on

Monday, February 1, 2010 at the Good Samaritan Society of Scotland.

Online condolences may be sent at www.goglinfh.com

Goglin Funeral Home
Tyndall - Scotland - Tripp
www.goglinfh.com

Kathleen Teget

Kathleen Teget, 93, of Yankton died Monday (Feb. 1, 2010) at her

residence at Walnut Village. Arrangements are pending with Wintz & Ray Funeral Home and Cremation Service, Yankton.

IN REMEMBRANCE

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Obama Releases \$3.8T Budget

Measure Would Raise Taxes For Rich, End NASA Moon Program

BY ANDREW TAYLOR
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Spelling out painful priorities, President Barack Obama urged Congress on Monday to quickly approve a huge new shot of spending for recession relief and job creation, part of a record \$3.8 trillion budget that would boost the deficit beyond any in the nation's history while only slowly beginning to put Americans back to work.

If Congress goes along with Obama's election-year plan, the nation would still end the year with unemployment pushing double digits at 9.8 percent and this year's pool of government red ink deepening to \$1.56 trillion under the administration's accounting.

The spending blueprint for next year calls for tax cuts for workers and business and more aid for cash-starved state governments as well as the unemployed. The jobs initiative largely mirrors last year's stimulus bill, but is about one-third its size. The president is asking for nearly \$300 billion for recession relief and job stimulus.

The budget paints a remarkably dire picture of a federal government that will have to borrow one-third of what it spends next year as it runs a deficit that still would total some \$1.3 trillion.

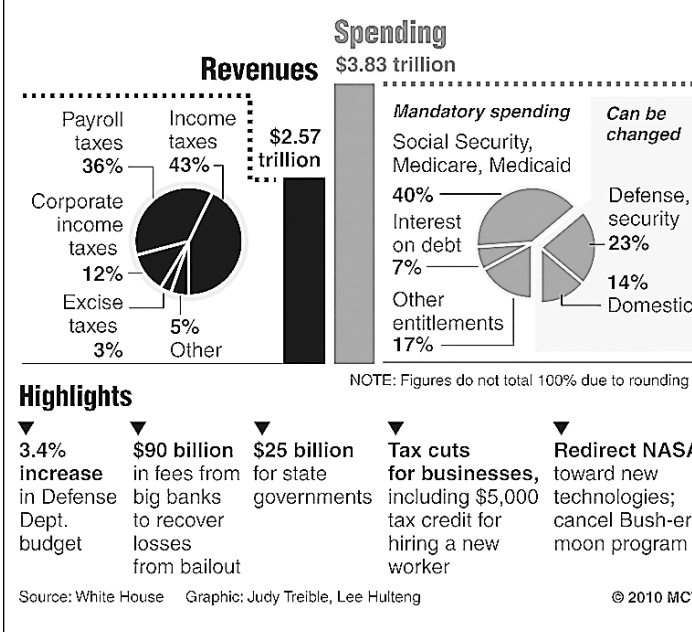
At the same time, Obama is acutely aware that persistent joblessness is the issue most likely to spell political trouble for Democrats in this year's midterm elections — and perhaps for his own re-election chances in 2012.

The president's budget plan sees the deficit coming down by nearly \$300 billion next year, and he's offering more than \$1 trillion in deficit reduction proposals over the coming decade.

While proposing increases for immediate needs, he urged law-

Obama's budget proposal

President Barack Obama's plan increases federal spending by 3 percent and boosts the deficit to \$1.27 trillion.



makers to follow his lead and make cuts, even painful ones in programs dear to them. "I'm asking Republicans and Democrats alike to take a fresh look at programs they've supported in the past to see what's working and what's not, and trim back accordingly," he said.

Obama's deficit salve mixed nearly \$1 trillion in tax increases on higher-income people with \$250 billion in savings over a decade from a partial freeze on domestic programs. But popular benefit programs like Medicare would remain untouched.

Democrats, facing the prospect of major losses in November, are likely to join Republicans in balking at many of Obama's proposals. Moderate Democrats already are wary of another debt-financed economic stimulus program and may also

choke on many of the recommended tax increases and spending cuts.

Obama's budget presents a delicate balance between trying to cement the fragile recovery and pivoting to curb deficits that are on the rise not only in dollar figures but also as a political issue that is causing Democrats to lose popularity with independent voters.

So while pledging to tackle deficits, he also said that continuing them in the short term is necessary to help lower unemployment. We will "do what it takes to create jobs," he said. "It's essential."

His budget proposed a job creation tax credit of up to \$5,000 for each new worker that businesses hire, another round of one-time \$250 checks for senior citizen on Social Security and extending

unemployment benefits and health insurance subsidies for the jobless through the end of the year. Obama also wants to extend a \$400 "Making Work Pay" tax credit for most workers through 2011.

While White House Press Secretary Robert Gibbs spoke Sunday of a \$100 billion jobs initiative, these "temporary recovery measures" in fact total \$282 billion through the autumn of 2012, according to budget documents.

At the same time, Obama wants to hand off to a commission decisions on the tough steps needed to reduce deficits and slow the growth in the federal debt to levels economists deem prudent. The panel's recommendations wouldn't be due until after the midterm election.

Obama's proposal lays out a path to reduce annual deficits to about \$700 billion in four years, but ideas for tax increases or cuts in popular benefit programs like Medicare or Social Security to reduce them an additional \$200 million would have to come from the commission.

"We simply cannot continue to spend as if deficits don't have consequences, as if waste doesn't matter, as if the hard-earned tax dollars of the American people can be treated like Monopoly money, as if we can ignore this challenge for another generation," Obama said.

Balancing the budget or producing surpluses of the kind from 1998 through 2001 is now seen as all but impossible. Instead, many policymakers are for a secondary goal of stabilizing the national debt in relation to the size of the economy. That generally requires keeping the deficit to 3 percent of gross domestic product. Just three years ago, the deficit stood at 1.2 percent of GDP. This year it's 10.6 percent.

Haiti: Baptists Knew Taking Kids Was Wrong

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Haiti's prime minister said Monday that 10 Americans who tried to take a busload of undocumented Haitian children out of the country knew that "what they were doing was wrong," and could be prosecuted in the United States.

Prime Minister Max Bellerive told The Associated Press that his country is open to having the Americans face U.S. justice, since most government buildings — including Haiti's courts — were crippled by the monster earthquake.

"It is clear now that they were trying to cross the border without papers. It is clear now that some of the children have live parents," Bellerive said. "And it is clear now that they knew what they were doing was wrong."

If they were acting in good faith — as the Americans claim — "perhaps the courts will try to be more lenient with them," he said.

U.S. Embassy officials would not say whether Washington would accept hosting judicial proceedings for the Americans, who are mostly from Idaho. For now, the case remains firmly in Haitian hands, State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley said in Washington.

"Once we know all the facts, we will determine what the appropriate course is, but the judgment is

really up to the Haitian government," he said.

Haitian officials insist some prosecution is needed to help deter child trafficking, which many fear will flourish in the chaos caused by the devastating Jan. 12 quake. The government and aid groups are still struggling to get food, water, shelter and basic health care to hundreds of thousands of survivors, and many parents are desperate to get help for their children.

U.S. diplomats have had "unlimited" access to the 10 detainees, and will monitor any court proceedings, said Crowley. They have not yet been charged.

Members of the church group insisted they were only trying to save abandoned and traumatized children — but appeared to lack any significant experience with Haiti, international charity work or international adoption regulations.

After their arrest Friday near the border, the church group members were placed in two small concrete rooms in the same judicial police headquarters building where ministers have makeshift offices and give disaster response briefings.

"There is no air conditioning, no electricity. It is very disturbing," Attorney Jorge Puello told the AP by phone from the Dominican Republic, where the

Baptists hoped to shelter the children in a rented beach hotel.

One of the Americans, Charisa Coulter of Boise, Idaho, was treated Monday at a field hospital for either dehydration or the flu. Looking pale as she lay on a green Army cot, the 24-year-old Coulter, was being guarded by two Haitian police officers.

Investigators have been trying to determine how the Americans got the children, and whether any of the traffickers that have plagued the impoverished country were involved.

Puello said they came from a collapsed orphanage. Their detained spokeswoman, Laura Silsby, said they were "just trying to do the right thing," but she conceded she had not obtained the required passports, birth certificates and adoption certificates for them — a near impossible challenge in the post-quake mayhem.

Bellerive said that without the documents, the children were unlikely to reach the United States, as some of their families might have hoped.

Exxon Mobil Posts Lowest Annual Profit Since '02

NEW YORK (AP) — Exxon Mobil's earnings fell by more than half to \$19.3 billion in 2009, the lowest total in seven years, as company refineries struggled with a plunge in global fuel consumption.

The Irving, Texas company now has posted lower profits for five straight quarters after setting a record of \$14.83 billion in the third quarter of 2008.

The results for the world's largest publicly traded oil company have swung with the price of oil and the impact of the global recession. When oil spiked above \$147 a barrel in mid-2008, Exxon set ever-higher marks for earnings by a U.S. company. Then oil prices plummeted, and Exxon suffered a yearlong hangover that included its smallest quarterly earnings in several years.

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