

## Shelling In Syrian City Kills Two Journalists

BEIRUT (AP) — Syrian gunners pounded an opposition stronghold where the last dispatches from a veteran American-born war correspondent chronicled the suffering of civilians caught in the relentless shelling. An intense morning barrage killed her and a French photo-journalist — two of 74 deaths reported Wednesday in Syria.

"I watched a little baby die today," Marie Colvin told the BBC from the embattled city of Homs on Tuesday in one of her final reports.

"Absolutely horrific, a 2-year old child had been hit," added Colvin, who worked for Britain's *Sunday Times*. "They stripped it and found the shrapnel had gone into the left chest and the doctor said, 'I can't do anything.' His little tummy just kept heaving until he died."

Colvin and photographer Remi Ochlik were among a group of journalists who had crossed into Syria and were sharing accommodations with activists, raising speculation that government forces targeted the makeshift media center, although opposition groups had previously described the shelling as indiscriminate. At least two other Western journalists were wounded.

Hundreds of people have died in weeks of siege-style attacks on Homs that have come to symbolize the desperation and defiance of the nearly year-old uprising against President Bashar Assad.

## Obama Benefits From The Economy's Climb

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama is reaping political benefits from the country's brighter economic mood. A new poll shows that Republicans and Democrats alike are increasingly saying the nation is heading in the right direction and most independents now approve the way he's addressing the nation's post-recession period.

But trouble could be ahead: Still-struggling Americans are fretting over rising gasoline prices. Just weeks before the summer travel season begins, the Associated Press-GfK survey finds pump prices rising in importance and most people unhappy with how Democratic president had handled the issue.

It's seemingly no coincidence that Obama this week is promoting the expansion of domestic oil and gas exploration and the development of new forms of energy.

It's his latest attempt to show that he, more than any of the Republican presidential contenders, knows that voters' pocketbooks remain pinched even as the economy improves overall. And on that question of empathy, solid majorities continue to view him as someone who "understands the problems of ordinary Americans" and "cares about people like you," the AP-GfK survey found.

There is evidence that the nation is becoming markedly more optimistic, and that Obama benefits from that attitude.

## Mayor: NYPD Misled City On Muslim Spying

NEWARK, N.J. (AP) — The mayor and police director of New Jersey's largest city said Wednesday the New York Police Department misled their city and never told them it was conducting a widespread spying operation on Newark's Muslim neighborhoods. Had they known, they said, they never would have allowed it.

"If anyone in my police department had known this was a blanket investigation of individuals based on nothing but their religion, that strikes at the core of our beliefs and my beliefs very personally, and it would have merited a far sterner response," Newark Mayor Cory Booker said.

In mid-2007, the NYPD's secretive Demographics Unit fanned out across Newark, photographing every mosque and eavesdropping in Muslim businesses. The findings were cataloged in a 60-page report, obtained by The Associated Press, that served as a police guidebook to Newark's Muslims. There was no mention of terrorism or any criminal wrongdoing.

## Obama Calls Current Tax System Unfair

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama rolled out a corporate tax overhaul plan Wednesday that lowers rates but also eliminates loopholes and subsidies cherished by the business world. A long-shot for action in an election year, the plan nevertheless stamps Obama's imprint on one of the most high-profile issues of the presidential campaign.

The president's plan to lower the corporate tax rate to 28 percent came on the same day Republican presidential contender Mitt Romney called for a 20 percent across-the-board cut in personal income tax rates, underscoring the potency of taxes as a political issue, especially during a modest economic recovery.

Obama has not laid out a plan for overhauling personal income taxes. But he has called for Bush era tax cuts to end on individuals making more than \$200,000, thus increasing their taxes, and for a 30 percent minimum tax on taxpayers who make \$1 million or more.

Obama decried the current corporate tax system as outdated, unfair and inefficient. "It's not right and it needs to change," he said in a statement.

The president would reduce the current 35 percent corporate tax, which is the highest in the world after Japan but which many corporations avoid by taking advantage of deductions, credits and exemptions. Under his plan, manufacturers would receive incentives so that they would pay an even lower effective tax rate of 25 percent.

## Wash. State Can't Force Contraceptive Sales

TACOMA, Wash. (AP) — Washington state cannot force pharmacies to sell Plan B or other emergency contraceptives, a federal judge ruled Wednesday, saying the state's true goal was to suppress religious objections by druggists — not to promote timely access to the medicines for people who need them.

U.S. District Judge Ronald Leighton heard closing arguments earlier this month in a lawsuit that claimed state rules violate the constitutional rights of pharmacists by requiring them to dispense such medicine. The state requires pharmacies to dispense any medication for which there is a community need and to stock a representative assortment of drugs needed by their patients.

Ralph's Thriftway in Olympia, Wash., and two licensed Washington pharmacists sued in 2007, saying that dispensing Plan B would infringe on their religious beliefs because it can prevent the implantation of a fertilized egg, an act they equate with taking human life.

The state argued that the requirements are legal because they apply neutrally to all medicines and pharmacies, and that they promote a government interest — the timely delivery of medicine, including Plan B, which becomes less effective as time passes.

# Argentine Train Crash Kills 49

BY MICHAEL WARREN  
Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina — The first two cars were packed as usual for the morning rush, so tightly that people stood pressed flesh to flesh, sandwiched between bicycles and the few seats, many without so much as a strap to hold onto.

This train didn't lurch, though. It had trouble stopping at all, overshooting platform after platform and missing at least one station entirely as it rushed toward the end of the line.

The train didn't come to a halt until it had slammed into a metal barrier at Buenos Aires' Once station. With eight cars carrying a mass of steel and humanity — more than 1,200 people on board — the momentum was devastating. Forty-nine people were killed and 600 were injured.

Windows exploded and the first cars were crushed into a jumble of glass, metal, plastic and bodies.

The cause wasn't immediately determined, but many pointed to a deteriorating rail system and train cars that lack modern equipment and safety measures. Passengers said the conductor had appeared to be struggling with the brakes before the crash.

The dead included 48 adults and one child — most of whom had crowded into the first two cars to get ahead of the rush-hour crowds on arrival. The injured included 461 who were hospitalized, Transportation Secretary J.P. Schiavi said.

Passengers' friends and relatives were still rushing around the city hours later, checking emergency rooms and the city's two largest morgues for some sign of their loved ones.

Ezequiel Mercado, his mother-in-law and 10 other friends and family members frantically searched for his wife, Sabrina Espindola, 29, who didn't show up for work Wednesday. They checked nine hospitals before heading to the morgue.

"I went everywhere. She is always with her BlackBerry. We are always in contact," he said. "This morgue is the last place I thought of, but well, she's missing. I call her cell phone, and it rings, rings, but she isn't responding."

Schiavi defended the rail system at a news conference.

"It was an accident like those in many other countries," he said, pointing to a newspaper clipping about a fatal crash in Los Angeles. "In recent years, we've made huge investments" in the system.

As Schiavi spoke, riot police faced off against angry passengers in the closed station, where emergency workers spent hours extracting dozens of people trapped inside the train's first car. Rescuers had to slice open the roof and set up a pulley system to ease them out one by one. Dozens of the injured were lined up on stretchers on the station platform.

The 28-year-old conductor, who survived the



TELENOTICIOSA AMERICANA/XINHUA/ZUMA PRESS  
**Rescuers take wounded persons out of a carriage at the site of a train derailment in Buenos Aires, Argentina, Wednesday. The derailment of an inter-city train has resulted in the death of at least 49 people and the injury of at least 550 people in Buenos Aires early Wednesday.**

crash, was apparently well-rested, Schiavi said, having just begun his workday.

"Tiredness, his age, the problems that a conductor might face" are among the factors being investigated, he said. "This young person had just begun his shift moments before the accident."

The motorman was hospitalized in intensive care and hasn't given a statement, Schiavi added.

Passengers said the conductor seemed to struggle with the brakes, missing his stopping marks at station after station.

Concepcion Ortiz, 60, told the Clarin newspaper that in Caballito, the conductor "went past the station and needed to go in reverse." Jorge Medina told the paper the same thing happened in the Haedo and Ramos Mejia stations.

"We had noticed severe problems in the brakes during the whole trip," said a man with a broken ankle who gave his name only as Juan, and was interviewed in a wheelchair at Ramos Mejia Hospital, one of a dozen that cared for the injured.

"It was noticeable because when he got to where he needed to stop, he didn't slow down. In Haedo, almost half the train passed the station; in Liniers he also overran (the platform) and in Floresta he simply went right past it. He never stopped," the young man told the C5N television channel.

A labor union official said earlier Wednesday the train had appeared to be in good working order.

# Obama Signs Payroll Tax Cut Extension Into Law

BY MARK S. SMITH  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama signed the payroll tax cut extension into law Wednesday, notching an election-year victory and rare bipartisan agreement in the continuing partisan battle over jobs, taxes and debt.

The \$143 billion measure that Congress passed overwhelmingly on Friday continues the 2 percentage-point reduction in the tax that funds Social Security, a cut begun last year to aid the nation's struggling economic recovery. It also extends jobless benefits for between 63 weeks and 73 weeks, and averts a big cut in the reimbursements doctors get for treating Medicare patients.

The president signed the measure without ceremony Wednesday, having already celebrated its passage at an event Tuesday at the White House.

Obama senior adviser David Plouffe emailed his gratitude to people who sent the White House their stories about how losing the tax cut would affect their lives.

"Extending the payroll tax cut was a critical step for middle class families, but we still have a lot more work to do. So get ready," Plouffe wrote in an email that included a photograph of Obama signing the bill at his Oval Office desk.

The payroll tax cut became a centerpiece of the jobs plan Obama unveiled in September — and of a re-election strategy that seeks to cast

## Obama's business tax plan

*What the Obama administration's corporate tax reform plan would cover*

### Key points

- Eliminate tax loopholes, subsidies; broaden business tax base to reduce distortions that hurt productivity; lower corporate rate to 28 percent
- Minimum tax on foreign earnings to encourage domestic investment
- Simplify and cut taxes for small businesses
- Either eliminate or make permanent and pay for the temporary tax provisions now in tax code

### What some industries pay now

Some industries use loopholes and tax breaks to pay less than the 35 percent top corporate tax rate; effective rates for 2007-08

<b>Construction</b>	<b>31%</b>	<b>Real estate</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Manufacturing</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>Agriculture, forestry*</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Information</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>Mining</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Insurance</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>Avg. effective actual rate</b>	<b>26</b>
Source: U.S. Treasury Department Graphic: Judy Treible		*Includes fishing and hunting © 2012 MCT	

his GOP foes as protectors of the rich and out of touch with the worries of working families.

The administration estimates that for a worker earning 50,000 a year, the tax holiday means \$80 a month in extra take-home pay. For better-paid employees, the bonus could total \$2,200 a year.

But the cost to the deficit is substantial: an-

other \$93 billion for the latest extension. However, bowing to its inevitability, House GOP leaders last week agreed not to demand spending cuts to offset the lost tax revenues.

The legislation also extended benefits for the long-term unemployed that average about \$300 a week, though Obama and Democratic allies compromised over an initial demand for 99 more weeks. Those benefits will be paid for by auctioning broadcast frequencies and requiring newly hired federal workers to contribute more to their pensions.

Obama maintained that both extensions are crucial to supporting a still-fragile recovery from the nation's deepest recession since the 1930s.

GOP leaders initially balked at the extensions, then clashed with Obama and congressional Democrats over how to pay for them. As the holidays approached in December, their opposition drew a fierce public backlash, especially when House Republicans rejected a compromise that Senate leaders had brokered. In the end, Republicans accepted a two-month extension — after paying a heavy political price.

"We did not want to repeat the debacle," Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., said. "We're dumb, but we're not stupid."

The extension puts off until December — after the presidential and congressional elections — a mix of taxing and spending decisions, including whether to extend Bush-era tax cuts, increasing the debt ceiling and meeting a trillion-dollar spending cut requirement.

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