

Pistorius Investigator Offers Mixed Testimony

PRETORIA, South Africa (AP) — The detective leading the police investigation into Oscar Pistorius' fatal shooting of his girlfriend offered confusing testimony Wednesday, at one point agreeing with the athlete's defense that officers had no evidence challenging the runner's claim he accidentally killed her.

Testimony by Detective Warrant Officer Hilton Botha of the South African Police Service left prosecutors rubbing their temples, only able to look down at their notes as he misjudged distances and acknowledged a forensics team left in the toilet bowl one of the bullet slugs fired at Reeva Steenkamp. However, Botha still poked holes in Pistorius' own account that he feared for his life and opened fire on Valentine's Day after mistaking Steenkamp for an intruder.

The second day of the bail hearing in a case that has riveted South Africa and much of the world appeared at first to go against the double-amputee runner, with prosecutors saying a witness can testify to hearing "non-stop talking, like shouting" between 2 a.m. and 3 a.m. before the pre-dawn shooting on Feb. 14. However, Botha later said under cross examination that the person who overheard the argument was in a house 600 meters (yards) away in Pistorius' gated community in the suburbs of South Africa's capital, Pretoria.

Later, prosecutor Gerrie Nel questioned Botha again and the detective acknowledged the distance was much closer. But confusion reigned for much of his testimony, when at one point Botha said officers found syringes and steroids in Pistorius' bedroom. Nel quickly cut the officer off and said the drugs were actually testosterone.

Pistorius' lead defense lawyer, Barry Roux, asserted when questioning the detective — who has 16 years' experience as a detective and 24 years with the police — that it was not a banned substance and that police were trying to give the discovery a "negative connotation."

New Effort To Stem Theft Of Trade Secrets Set

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Obama administration announced a broad new effort Wednesday to fight the growing theft of American trade secrets following fresh evidence linking cyberstealing to China's military.

The plan includes a new diplomatic push to discourage intellectual property theft abroad along with better coordination at home to help U.S. companies protect themselves. The administration says indications are that economic espionage is increasing, not only through electronic intrusion over the Internet but also through the recruitment of former employees of U.S. companies with knowledge of inside trade information.

"Trade secret theft threatens American businesses, undermines national security and places the security of the U.S. economy in jeopardy," said a report from the White House. "These acts also diminish U.S. export prospects around the globe and put American jobs at risk."

Earlier this week, a Virginia-based cybersecurity firm, Mandiant, accused a secret Chinese military unit in Shanghai of years of cyberattacks against more than 140 U.S. companies. The accusations and supporting evidence increased pressure on the United States to take more action against the Chinese for what experts say has been years of systematic espionage.

The Chinese government denied being involved in cybertheft, with China's defense minister calling the Mandiant report deeply flawed. China's Foreign Ministry said that country has also been a victim of hacking, much of it traced to the United States.

Egypt Signals Impatience With Muslim Group

CAIRO (AP) — Egypt's powerful military is showing signs of growing impatience with the country's Islamist leaders, indirectly criticizing their policies and issuing thinly veiled threats that it might seize power again.

The tension is raising the specter of another military intervention much like the one in 2011, when generals replaced longtime authoritarian leader Hosni Mubarak after they sided with anti-regime protesters in their 18-day popular uprising.

The strains come at a time when many Egyptians are despairing of an imminent end to the crippling political impasse between President Mohammed Morsi and his Muslim Brotherhood group on one side, and the mostly secular and liberal opposition on the other.

The tug of war between the two camps is being waged against a grim backdrop of spreading unrest, rising crime and a worsening economy.

"In essence, the military will not allow national stability or its own institutional privileges to come under threat from a breakdown in Egypt's social fabric or a broad-based civil strife," said Michael W. Hanna, an Egypt expert from the New York-based Century Foundation.

Jackson Jr. Pleads Guilty To Criminal Charges

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former U.S. Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr., holding back tears, entered a guilty plea Wednesday in federal court to criminal charges that he engaged in a scheme to spend \$750,000 in campaign funds on personal items. He faces 46 to 57 months in prison, and a fine of \$10,000 to \$100,000, under a plea deal with prosecutors.

A few hours later, his wife, Sandra Jackson, pleaded guilty to filing false joint federal income tax returns that knowingly understated the income the couple received. She faces one to two years in prison and a fine of \$3,000 to \$40,000.

Before entering the plea to a conspiracy charge, Jesse Jackson told U.S. District Judge Robert L. Wilkins, "I've never been more clear in my life" in his decision to plead guilty.

Later, when Wilkins asked if Jackson committed the acts outlined in court papers, the former congressman replied, "I did these things." He added later, "Sir, for years I lived in my campaign," and used money from the campaign for personal use.

Jackson told the judge he was waiving his right to trial.

Mahony Abuse Files Dominate Papal Conclave

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Popular pressure is mounting in the U.S. and Italy to keep California Cardinal Roger Mahony away from the conclave to elect the next pope because of his role shielding sexually abusive priests, a movement targeting one of the most prominent of a handful of compromised cardinals scheduled to vote next month.

Amid the outcry, Mahony has made clear he is coming, and no one can force him to recuse himself. The growing grass-roots campaign is an indication that ordinary Catholics are increasingly demanding a greater say in who is fit to elect their pope, and casts an ugly shadow over the upcoming papal election.

Conclaves always bring out the worst in cardinals' dirty laundry, with past sins and transgressions aired anew in the slow news days preceding the vote. This time is no different — except that the revelations of Mahony's sins are so fresh and come on the tails of a recent round of sex abuse scandals in the U.S. and Europe.

Panetta: Pentagon Furloughs Likely

BY ROBERT BURNS
 AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON — Defense Secretary Leon Panetta told Congress on Wednesday that if automatic government spending cuts kick in on March 1 he may be compelled to furlough the "vast majority" of the Defense Department's 800,000 civilian workers.

He also said the across-the-board spending reductions would "put us on a path toward a hollow force," meaning a military incapable of fulfilling all of its missions.

In a written message to employees, Panetta said that he notified members of Congress Wednesday that if the White House and Congress cannot strike a deficit reduction deal before March 1 to avoid the furloughs, all affected workers will get at least 30 days' advance notice.

The furloughs would be part of a broader plan the Pentagon is preparing in order to cut \$46 billion through the end of this budget year, which ends Sept. 30. More cuts would come in future years as long as the automatic government spending cuts, known as sequestration, remained in effect.

"In the event of sequestration we will do everything we can to be able to continue to perform our core mission of providing for the security of the United States, but there is no mistaking that the rigid nature of the cuts forced upon this department, and their scale, will result in a serious erosion of readiness across the force," Panetta wrote.



Panetta

Adding his voice to the budget debate, Secretary of State John Kerry said the fiscal impasse is a serious threat to American credibility around the world.

"Think about it: It is hard to tell the leadership of any number of countries that they must resolve their economic issues if we don't resolve our own," Kerry said Wednesday in a speech at the University of Virginia.

Panetta was flying Wednesday to Brussels to attend a NATO defense ministers meeting. Spokesman George Little told reporters en route that Panetta would tell his counterparts that across-the-board budget cuts will hurt not only the U.S. military but also the ability of NATO to respond to crises.

Little said the Pentagon is also discussing the possibility of not being able to send military units on planned rotations to various places around the world. In anticipation of cuts, the Pentagon has already decided not to send one aircraft carrier back to the Persian Gulf, reducing the U.S. presence there to one carrier.

Pentagon officials have said their furloughs would be structured so that nearly all 800,000 civilian workers lose one day of work per week for 22 weeks, probably starting in late April. That means they would lose 20 percent of their pay over that period.

The Pentagon has begun discussing de-

tails of the furloughs with defense worker union officials.

President Barack Obama has exempted military personnel from furloughs.

House Speaker John Boehner put the blame on Obama and said he agrees with Panetta that automatic spending cuts would devastate the military.

Boehner released a copy of Panetta's letter formally notifying Congress that the Pentagon will have to consider furloughing a large portion of its civilian workforce if sequestration kicks in.

"The furloughs contemplated by this notice will do real harm to our national security," Panetta wrote in his congressional notification letter, adding that it would make troops less ready for combat and slow the acquisition of important weapons.

"Overall, sequestration will put us on a path toward a hollow force and inflict serious damage on our national security," Panetta wrote.

The only civilian Pentagon workers who would be exempt from furloughs would be Senate-confirmed political appointees such as the defense secretary and deputy defense secretary, as well as a relatively small number of workers deemed essential to protect the safety of defense property and personnel.

Panetta said the administration is still working with Congress to avoid automatic budget cuts by reaching agreement on a deficit reduction plan.

Body Found At K.C. Restaurant Blast, Focus Turns To Why

BY LYNN HORSLEY, LAURA BAUER, ALAN BAVLEY AND JUDY L. THOMAS

The Kansas City Star

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — A body was found Wednesday morning in the debris of JJ's restaurant, where fire crews searched for a female server missing after a massive explosion rocked the area just west of Kansas City's Country Club Plaza Tuesday night.

The body was discovered in the bar area in the southwest corner of the building.

In Springfield, Mo., the family of Megan Cramer told *The Kansas City Star* that it had been contacted by authorities in Kansas City. Cramer, 46, had been a server at JJ's for several months.

The family said confirmation using medical records might take 24 to 48 hours.

Kansas City Fire Chief Paul Berardi said the restaurant was reduced to rubble 3 or 4 feet deep, with debris too heavy for crews to lift manually, requiring heavy equipment for a careful search.

But the fire department is also mindful that, with a winter storm bearing down on Kansas City, it needs to work quickly to try to find anyone who might still be in the building.

"We're working two critical situations," he said. "We have a short window of time to do a lot of work. We'll continue through this process to ensure that there aren't other victims."

He said search and rescue crews and cadaver dogs spent three hours Tuesday night searching the scene.

Ambulances took nine people to area hospitals Tuesday night and six others made their own way to hospitals. Berardi said the injuries included burns, head injuries and abrasions from flying glass.

University of Kansas Hospital said Wednesday afternoon that it had five patients whose conditions ranged from serious to extremely critical. St. Luke's Hospital has one patient, a male in serious condition with trauma injuries and smoke inhalation.

A KU Hospital trauma surgeon described injuries comparable to what might be seen in wartime: severe concussions, lacerations,



DAVID EULITT/KANSAS CITY STAR

A group of Kansas City, Mo. firefighters walk out of the charred wreckage of JJ's Restaurant carrying a stretcher on Wednesday. A natural gas leak turned into an explosion that leveled the building on Tuesday evening.

multiple fractures, injuries to the liver and spleen, lung injuries that may require days or weeks on a ventilator, burns that will require multiple surgeries.

"There's no patient with just one thing (injured)," surgeon Michael Moncure said.

Moncure said one patient who was in serious condition in the hospital's burn unit may be well enough to be released by Thursday.

But two other patients in the burn unit were in critical condition and two patients with other traumatic injuries were in "extremely critical" condition, Moncure said.

Another KU Hospital patient who was initially in serious condition was treated and released Tuesday night.

Moncure said patients were injured when the blast threw them against walls and struck them with debris. But it was the shock wave of the explosion that was particularly damaging, causing severe brain and lung injuries.

"Most of what we've seen is from the pressure of the blast," Moncure said.

KU Hospital chaplain Greg Delort spent Tuesday night talking to patients and their families. Several patients were trying to figure out how they had managed

to survive and wondered what had happened to others at the scene, Delort said.

"They mostly seemed to be overwhelmed," Delort said. "They were still sometimes shaking from the incident."

The explosion was reported about 6 p.m. Tuesday and is believed to have come from a natural gas leak. Some witnesses have reported smelling natural gas several hours before the explosion, but both Berardi and City Manager Troy Schulte said Wednesday morning that they were not aware of any gas leak lasting that long.

Berardi said the fire department was called about 5:15 p.m. and told that a construction contractor working in the area had struck a gas line. He said fire crews arrived quickly on the scene, conferred with representatives of Missouri Gas Energy and were told the situation was under control.

"We left the situation in their hands," Berardi said.

The explosion occurred about 50 minutes later. Berardi said the exact circumstances are under investigation. He said he did not know the exact time the calls about the gas odor came in but said it was around 5:15 p.m.

"All of that is under investigation," he said. "That process is

just now beginning."

Kansas City Mayor Sly James declined to discuss who was to blame but said the fire department deferred to Missouri Gas Energy.

"The utility company was there working on what they do," he said. "They do gas. They tell the fire department that everything is under control. The fire department has to defer. When those situations exist, the fire department defers to those with expertise."

"I understand everybody wants to know what happened, everybody wants to blame somebody," the mayor said. "That's not going to happen today. The main thing we're focusing on is taking care of people. We'll get to the blame phase later."

James said officials had talked to Missouri Gas Energy late Tuesday night "and they were trying to figure out what was going on."

When asked if the utility had been invited to speak at the news conference, he said they were aware that it was taking place.

Three of the injured people at hospitals Tuesday night were Missouri Gas Energy employees, according to Kevin Gunn, chairman of the Missouri Public Service Commission.

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