

Justice Dept Joins Suit Against Armstrong

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department joined a lawsuit Friday against disgraced cyclist Lance Armstrong that alleges the former seven-time Tour de France champion concealed his use of performance-enhancing drugs and defrauded his longtime sponsor, the U.S. Postal Service.

The lawsuit alleges that riders on the postal service-sponsored team, including Armstrong, knowingly violated their postal service agreements by regularly employing banned substances and methods to enhance their performance.

"Lance Armstrong and his cycling team took more than \$30 million from the U.S. Postal Service based on their contractual promise to play fair and abide by the rules — including the rules against doping," said U.S. Attorney Ronald Machen, whose office is handling the case. "The Postal Service has now seen its sponsorship unfairly associated with what has been described as 'the most sophisticated, professionalized and successful doping program that sport has ever seen.'"

In recent weeks, settlement discussions had been under way between the Justice Department and Armstrong's lawyers. A person familiar with the negotiations said Friday the two sides are tens of millions of dollars apart on how much Armstrong should pay to settle the case. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the source was not authorized to speak on the record about the private talks.

Pistorius Free On Bail Ahead Of Murder Trial

PRETORIA, South Africa (AP) — Oscar Pistorius walked out of a South African court Friday a free man — for now — after a magistrate agreed to release him on bail ahead of his premeditated murder trial over the shooting death of his girlfriend.

But even as he was driven away from court and chased by videographers and photographers, questions continued to hound the Paralympian about what actually happened when he opened fire on Valentine's Day inside his home and killed Reeva Steenkamp.

Chief Magistrate Desmond Nair, who agreed to bail with harsh restrictions for the athlete, expressed his own doubts about Pistorius' story. Those questions, highlighted at a four-day bail hearing that at times foreshadowed his coming trial, come from Pistorius' account that he felt threatened and mistook Steenkamp for an intruder when he fired the four shots at her in his bathroom.

"Why would (Pistorius) venture further into danger?" Nair asked. Pistorius' supporters shouted "Yes!" when Nair made his decision after a nearly two hour explanation of his ruling to a packed courtroom in Pretoria, South Africa's capital. Yet when prosecutors and the defense said they agreed to bail terms, Nair more than doubled those conditions for the 26-year-old runner to be free ahead of trial.

Driver Killed In Vegas Crash Was Aspiring Rapper

LAS VEGAS (AP) — The Maserati driver who died after being peppered with gunfire from someone in a Range Rover SUV, sparking a fiery crash that killed two others, was identified Friday as an aspiring rapper originally from Northern California.

The Clark County coroner confirmed that Kenneth Wayne Cherry Jr. was killed, although the cause of death was still being investigated. It wasn't clear Friday if Cherry died of gunshots or the crash.

The coroner hasn't identified the taxi driver and his female passenger who died when the cab exploded early Thursday, but a family member identified the cab driver as Michael Boldon, 62.

Boldon's older sister, Carolyn Jean Trimble, told The Associated Press that Boldon was a father and grandfather who was born and raised in Michigan and had been driving taxis since he moved to Las Vegas about 1 1/2 years ago. Boldon loved watching car races and drove a Mercedes when he wasn't in a cab.

"Everybody just loved him," Trimble said. "When that car hit that cab, Mike had to be in there talking and laughing."

Opposition Says Timing 'Recipe For Disaster'

CAIRO (AP) — Egypt's president set parliamentary elections to begin in April — a decision that an opposition leader denounced Friday as "a recipe for disaster" because of the ongoing political turmoil in the country.

About 15,000 people took to the streets in the Suez Canal city of Port Said to demonstrate against President Mohammed Morsi, hanging effigies of him in the main square. Residents have been on a general strike for six days, demanding punishment for what they considered a heavy-handed police crackdown during unrest in the city.

Morsi scheduled the staggered, four-stage voting process to begin April 27 and end in June. The newly elected parliament would convene on July 6, according to a decree issued late Thursday night.

He hopes the election will end the political turmoil that has beset Egypt for the past two years, since the ouster of longtime ruler Hosni Mubarak. The upheaval has scared away foreign investors and dried up tourism, both crucial foreign currency earners that helped the government pay for subsidized goods needed by the poor for survival.

But Mohamed ElBaradei, who leads one of the main opposition groups, the National Salvation Front, wrote on his Twitter account Friday that Morsi's "decision to go for parliamentary elections amidst severe societal polarization and eroding state authority is a recipe for disaster."

FDA Approves New Breast Cancer Drug

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Food and Drug Administration has approved a first-of-a-kind breast cancer medication that targets tumor cells while sparing healthy ones.

The drug Kadcyla from Roche combines the established drug Herceptin with a powerful chemotherapy drug and a third chemical linking the medicines together. The chemical keeps the cocktail intact until it binds to a cancer cell, delivering a potent dose of anti-tumor poison.

Cancer researchers say the drug is an important step forward because it delivers more medication while reducing the unpleasant side effects of chemotherapy.

"This antibody goes seeking out the tumor cells, gets internalized and then explodes them from within. So it's very kind and gentle on the patients — there's no hair loss, no nausea, no vomiting," said Dr. Melody Cobleigh of Rush University Medical Center. "It's a revolutionary way of treating cancer."

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Analysis: Obama, GOP See No Need To Stop Cuts

BY DAVID ESPO

AP Special Correspondent

WASHINGTON — Unlike in earlier rounds of budget brinkmanship, President Barack Obama and congressional Republicans both seem content to fight out their latest showdown on the current terrain, let across-the-board spending cuts take effect on March 1 and allow them to stay in place for weeks if not much longer.

This time, there is no market-rattling threat of a government default to force the two sides to compromise, no federal shutdown on the short-term horizon and no year-end deadline for preventing a tax increase for every working American.

The rhetoric is reminiscent, for sure.

"So far at least, the ideas that the Republicans have proposed ask nothing of the wealthiest Americans or the biggest corporations," Obama said this week as he campaigned to pin the blame for any negative effects on his political opponents. "So the burden is all on the first responders, or seniors or middle class families," he said in comments similar in tone to his re-election campaign.

Republicans, standing on political ground of their own choosing, responded sharply to the president's fresh demand for higher taxes.

"Spending is the problem, spending must be the focus," said House Speaker John Boehner of Ohio, while Senate GOP leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky declared, "There won't be any easy off-ramps on this one. The days of 11th hour negotiations are over."

A crisis atmosphere could yet develop this spring, when hundreds of thousands or even millions of threatened government furloughs begin to take effect and



POOL PHOTO BY KRISTOFFER TRIPPLAAR/SIPA PRESS VIA ABACA PRESS/MCT
U.S. President Barack Obama, joined by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, speaks to the media in the Oval Office following a bilateral meeting between the two leaders, Friday, February 22, 2013.

the spending cuts begin to bite. Already, Republicans are considering legislation to give the administration greater flexibility in making the cuts, a step that could minimize the impact on the public. It's a step the White House says it opposes, although the depth of that conviction has yet to be tested.

At heart, the present standoff is yet another indication of the political resistance to a compromise curbing the growth of Medicare, Medicaid and possibly Social Security, a step that both Obama and Republicans say is essential to restoring the nation's fiscal health. It is the last major remaining challenge in divided government's struggle, now in its third year, to reduce deficits by \$4 trillion or more over a decade.

Counting the across-the-board cuts now beginning to command the nation's attention — at a 10-

year cost of \$1.2 trillion — the president and Congress have racked up more than \$3.6 trillion in savings. Much came from spending, although legislation that Republicans let pass at year's end raised taxes on the wealthy to generate an estimated \$600 billion for the Treasury over a decade.

The so-called sequester now approaching was never supposed to happen. It was designed as an unpalatable fallback, to take effect only in case a congressional supercommittee failed to come up with \$1 trillion or more in savings from benefit programs.

Now, more than a year later, Republicans are fond of saying that the idea itself originated at the White House.

That skips lightly over the fact that their own votes helped enact it into law.

Also that they decided a month ago that it marked the moment of most leverage in their struggle to maneuver Obama and Democrats into curtailing benefit programs. To accomplish that objective, they already have raised the debt limit without winning any cuts in exchange, a step they once vowed not to take. And within two weeks, they are likely to launch legislation making sure the government operates without interruption when current funding authority runs out for most agencies on March 27.

Republicans aren't the only ones partial to verbal sleights of hand.

In a letter to lawmakers earlier this month, Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius sounded a series of alarms. The spending cuts "could compromise" the health of more than 373,000 mentally ill or emotionally disturbed individuals, "could slow efforts to improve" health care for American Indians and Alaska Natives, she wrote, and admissions to inpatient addiction facilities "could be reduced."

Could or could not. Soon or later. Nothing pinned down.

The administration hopes to win over the public and bring Republican lawmakers to heel, and it dispatched Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood to the White House briefing room on Friday.

"Come to the table and start talking" to find a way to avert the cuts, the former GOP lawmaker urged members of his own Republican Party.

Peppered with skeptical questions, LaHood directed reporters to his department's website, with a listing of more than 300 air traffic facilities where overnight shifts could be eliminated or perhaps closed entirely.

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