

Top GOP Say They Support Gov. Christie

WASHINGTON (AP) — High-profile Republicans were adamant Sunday that New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie should not resign from his post as chairman of the Republican Governors Association after a recent claim from a former ally that there is evidence Christie knew about an apparently politically motivated traffic jam earlier than he has said.

The support from former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani, Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal and Wisconsin U.S. Rep. Paul Ryan put Republicans on the offensive and the Democratic chairman of a state legislative committee investigating the September lane closures near the George Washington Bridge on the defensive the day Christie's state hosts the Super Bowl.

Christie, a potential 2016 presidential contender, has been going about Super Bowl ceremonial duties and has not taken questions about the scandal in recent days. He didn't respond Saturday when some spectators boomed him at an appearance in New York City's Times Square. He's scheduled to watch Sunday's game with his family from a luxury box at MetLife Stadium.

Giuliani, appearing on CBS' "Face the Nation" took aim at the credibility of two figures central to the scandal: John Wisniewski, who's leading the investigative probe, and David Wildstein, the former Christie loyalist who as an executive at the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey last year ordered the lane closures, as someone with less than pure motives.

He said Wildstein "wants somebody else to pay his legal bills and he can't get them paid unless the governor is responsible."

More Security Not Decreasing Shootings

WASHINGTON (AP) — There's been no real reduction in the number of U.S. school shootings despite increased security put in place after the rampage at Connecticut's Sandy Hook Elementary School in December 2012.

In Pennsylvania and New Mexico, Colorado and Tennessee, and elsewhere, gunfire has echoed through school hallways, and killed students or their teachers in some cases. "Lock-down" is now part of the school vocabulary.

An Associated Press analysis finds that there have been at least 11 school shootings this academic year alone, in addition to other cases of gun violence, in school parking lots and elsewhere on campus, when classes were not in session.

Last August, for example, a gun discharged in a 5-year-old's backpack while students were waiting for the opening bell in the cafeteria at Westside Elementary School in Memphis. No one was hurt.

Experts say the rate of school shootings is statistically unchanged since the mid- to late-1990s, yet still remains troubling.

Bombers' Remains Are Being Returned

BETHLEHEM, West Bank (AP) — When 18-year-old Ayat al-Akhras blew herself up outside a busy Jerusalem supermarket in 2002, killing two Israelis, her grieving parents were unable to bury her and say their final goodbyes because Israel refused to send her remains home.

More than a decade later, after appeals from human rights groups, Israel is handing over some 30 bodies of Palestinian assailants, including that of al-Akhras, enabling her family to arrange a funeral.

Israel has returned the remains of Palestinian attackers from time to time during the decades of conflict, sometimes as part of prisoner swaps, but the current round involves the most recent suicide bombers and gunmen and has revived painful memories for families and friends of some of the victims.

In the West Bank town of Bethlehem, the teenage bomber's parents, Mohammed and Khadra al-Akhras, expect an easing of their grief.

Violent Radicals Wild Card In Protests

KIEV, Ukraine (AP) — Wearing masks, helmets and protective gear on the arms and legs, radical activists are the wild card of the Ukraine protests now starting their third month, declaring they're ready to resume violence if the stalemate persists.

When the protests started in late November, attracting crowds sometimes above 100,000 and visits from Western officials, the gatherings' general determined peacefulness was an integral part of their claim to legitimacy. But in mid-January, the image of placid but principled people changed sharply, to frightening scenes of protesters heaving stones and firebombs at police.

The violence was sparked by the radicals within the larger protest movement, angered by President Viktor Yanukovich's implementation of harsh anti-protest laws and increasingly impatient with the protesters' failure to achieve any of their demands. In a vivid demonstration of frustration, they sprayed opposition leader Vitali Klitschko, the towering former heavyweight boxing champion, with a fire extinguisher when he pleaded for clashes to stop.

An uneasy truce settled in days later after three protesters died, but with no government concessions apparently in the works, the radicals say they're preparing to fight again.

Battle

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November 2010 during the last year of Gov. Rounds' administration. The board used its standard process of public notice and a public hearing.

This year the nationally uniform achievement tests called Smarter Balanced will be given for the first time to South Dakota students, in what is a statewide trial run.

Now challenging that established order is a broad group of fundamentally conservative Republican legislators, energized activists, and various parents and grandparents with a variety of complaints, some founded and others less so or not at all.

Their mission is to stop Common Core's further use, prohibit all national standards in South Dakota in the future, and return to state-developed standards and testing.

They want to put their values into place instead and if necessary push aside the Republican establishment that's been in control of South Dakota's public school system for 35 years through the governor's office and to a lesser degree through the Legislature.

At least 10 measures dealing directly with Common Core, whether or not the actual phrase is mentioned, have been introduced in the

2014 legislative session.

With three weeks done and six weeks to go, two of those pieces of legislation are moving forward, while four are already dead, and four await their first hearings.

Republicans are the prime sponsors for every one of those nine bills and one resolution.

Because these are challenges to their party's governor, however, the 53-member Republican majority in the House and the 28-member Republican majority in the Senate have tended to be split on this matter.

That's meant Democrats, who have 17 members in the House and seven in the Senate, have been the deciders, with measures passing or failing based on how they vote.

Sen. Ernie Otten, a first-term Republican from Tea, brought the first three bills affecting Common Core. Each received a different response.

Otten found widespread Senate support for protecting individual students' private information and data. The Senate approved SB 63 on a 34-0 vote.

Democrats generally deserted Otten on SB 64 that would establish a longer decision-making process for new standards. The Senate vote was 28-6.

Otten lost on SB 62, which attempted to establish a state council to evaluate Common Core. He saw a combination of many Repub-

GOP Wary Of Immigration Issue

BY DONNA CASSATA

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama's new declaration that he's open to legal status for many immigrants short of citizenship sounds a lot like House Speaker John Boehner and other GOP leaders, an election-year compromise that numerous Republicans as well as Democrats crave.

But the drive for the first overhaul in three decades still faces major resistance from many Republicans who are wary that the divisive issue could derail what they see as a smooth glide path to winning November's congressional elections. And they deeply distrust the Democratic president to enforce the law.

Just hours after Boehner pitched immigration to the GOP at a Maryland retreat, Obama suddenly indicated he would be open to legal status for many of the 11 million living here illegally, dropping his once-ironclad insistence on a special path to citizenship.

Democrats, including Obama, and other immigration proponents have warned repeatedly about the creation of a two-tier class system.

"If the speaker proposes something that says right away, folks aren't being deported, families aren't being separated, we're able to attract top young students to provide the skills or start businesses here, and then there's a regular process of citizenship, I'm not sure how wide the divide ends up being," Obama said in a CNN interview that was recorded Thursday and aired Friday.

Obama's flexibility is a clear indication of the president's desire to secure an elusive legislative achievement before voters decide whether to hand him even more opposition in Congress. Republicans are expected to maintain their grip on the House and have a legitimate shot at grabbing the majority in the Senate.

"I'm going to do everything I can in the coming months to see if we can get this over the finish line," Obama said Friday of an immigration overhaul in a Google Plus Hangout talk.

In an earlier compromise, Obama signaled late last year that he could accept the House's piecemeal, bill-by-bill approach to immigration changes after months of backing a comprehensive, bipartisan Senate bill. Notably, he

calibrated his comments on immigration in his State of the Union address this week.

"I think he realizes that this is a very delicate issue, it's very controversial and I think his recent statements have been

very, very positive in allowing us to move forward," Rep. Mario Diaz-Balart, R-Fla., a proponent of immigration overhaul, told reporters Friday.

Boehner, for his part, tried to sell his reluctant broader caucus on tackling immigration this year by casting it as critical to job creation, economic growth and national security. The speaker, along with Reps. Paul Ryan, R-Wis., and Jeff Denham, R-Calif., argued for action in a closed-door session with other House Republicans Thursday at their annual retreat in Cambridge, Md.

Boehner rejected the idea of a special path to citizenship.

"If Democrats insist on that, then we are not going to get anywhere this year," he said.

The House leaders' "standards for immigration reform" call for increased border security, better law enforcement within the U.S., a pathway to legal status but not citizenship for millions of adults who live in America unlawfully — after they pay back taxes and fines — and a chance for legal residence and citizenship for children brought to the country illegally.

But several Republicans questioned the strategy of pushing a contentious issue that divides the caucus and angers conservative GOP voters — especially since the party has been capitalizing on Obama's abysmal approval ratings and on Democrats' troubles in defending the national health care overhaul.

Any doubts about the Republicans' election-year prospects were erased with news this week of the planned retirement of Rep. Henry Waxman, a 20-term lawmaker who would have become chairman of a House committee if Democrats could win back the chamber.

"Why in the world would we want to change the subject to comprehensive immigration reform," said Rep. John Fleming, R-La., who called it a "suicide mission" for the GOP.



Obama



Boehner

Aside from election hopes and concerns, some of the deep-seated opposition on immigration stems from Obama's willingness in the past year to waive or suspend parts of his health care law and his pronouncement

in his State of the Union speech that he would bypass Congress on some issues.

"There is a trust gap that is a major obstacle," Diaz-Balart said.

Still, the business community, advocacy groups and other proponents are optimistic about House action this year, with many in the GOP arguing that it was imperative to eliminate a major political drag on the party ahead of the next presidential election.

A White House official said the details of a legalization plan would be crucial and administration support could hinge on whether those given legal status would have the option to eventually become citizens. Still, the official said the White House was buoyed by Republican progress on the issue and will be watching to see if the GOP might be willing to move closer to the president on citizenship and other aspects of the legislation.

Administration and congressional officials have suggested that Republicans could put legislation on the House floor in late March or early April.

The House principles set out by Boehner say "there will be no special path to citizenship for individuals who broke our nation's immigration laws — that would be unfair to those immigrants who have played by the rules and harmful to promoting the rule of law."

Still that wouldn't preclude millions from trying to obtain permanent legal residence, often known as a green card, through sponsorship by an employer or adult child. Those individuals could later seek citizenship.

The House principles "say no special pathway. It doesn't say no pathway," Rep. Luis Guterres, D-Ill., told reporters.

While strong majorities of Hispanics continue to back a pathway to citizenship, a Pew Research Center poll in December found that being able to live and work in the U.S. legally without the threat of deportation was more important to Latinos, by 55 percent to 35 percent.

Oscar-Winning Actor Philip Seymour Hoffman Found Dead



MICHAEL GOULDING/ORANGE COUNTY REGISTER/MCT Actor Philip Seymour Hoffman, posing with his Oscar for Best Actor in the film "Capote" during the 2006 Academy Awards, has died. He was 46.

NEW YORK (AP) — Philip Seymour Hoffman, who won the Oscar for best actor in 2006 for his portrayal of writer Truman Capote and created a gallery of other vivid characters, many of them slovenly and somewhat dissipated, was found dead Sunday in his apartment with what officials said was a needle in his arm. He was 46.

Two law enforcement officials, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk about the evidence, said the actor apparently died of a drug overdose. Glassine envelopes containing what was believed to be heroin were found with him, they said.

Hoffman — no matinee idol, with his lumpy build and limp blond hair — made his career mostly as a char-

acter actor, and was one of the most prolific in the business, plying his craft with a rumped naturalism that also made him one of the most admired performers of his generation.

The stage-trained actor was nominated for Academy Awards four times in all: for "Capote," "The Master," "Doubt" and "Charlie Wilson's War." He also received three Tony nominations for his work on Broadway, which included an acclaimed turn as the weary and defeated Willy Loman in "Death of a Salesman."

Hoffman spoke candidly over the years about past struggles with drug addiction. After 23 years sober, he admitted in interviews last year to falling off the wagon and developing a heroin problem that led to a stint in rehab.

licans, including the most prominent opponents of Common Core, and all of the Democrats, vote against it for opposite reasons.

The legislation initially called for \$100,000 to pay for the two-year review. The amount was amended to \$1 as a procedural move, but even a \$1 appropriation meant a two-thirds majority was needed.

The vote was 18-16, well short of the 24 majority necessary. The Democrats' Larry Lucas of Mission said there wasn't any reason to take a second look at Common Core. The Republicans' anti-Common Core leader David Omdahl of Sioux Falls said it was a waste of money.

The Legislature's earliest advocate against Common Core, starting in the 2011 session, was Rep. Jim Bolin, R-Canton. This year Bolin brought three bills and a resolution regarding Common Core. Two remain alive.

With HB 1187, Bolin wants to allow students to opt-out of achievement tests, while HB 1075 would require the state board to take more time to allow public involvement in considering new multi-state standards or other education initiative.

They haven't received their first committee hearings yet. His two other measures were defeated last week.

HB 1098 attempted to revive an old practice: Electing the state superintendent of education. The House State Affairs Committee blocked it

9-4. Afterward, Bolin vowed to try again in 2015 if he is re-elected.

Bolin's resolution HCR 1008 was a different mechanism altogether. He wanted the Legislature to tell the state board to develop a plan to replace the Common Core standards by June 30, 2017.

The resolution didn't have any legally binding effect, but it would have been a statement to future legislators that they would have reason to punish the board in some way, such as through the budgeting process, if the order wasn't followed. Also, the governor doesn't have any direct approval or veto powers over a resolution.

The House of Representatives split on the resolution, with 31 representatives for it and 35 against. Afterward Bolin proclaimed that he had a majority of the House Republicans — 30 of the 53 — on his side.

The resolution's outcome reflected the coalition of minority Democrats and governor-oriented Republicans who are defending the established process, versus the fundamentally conservative Republican legislators who oppose further nationalization and federal involvement in public schools.

Two new bills will provide opportunity for more debate.

SB 129 from Sen. Phil Jensen, R-Rapid City, calls for the state board to develop new standards to re-

place Common Core and for analysis of Common Core and the related Smarter Balanced tests.

Jensen said he is working to bring an Indiana legislator to the Capitol to discuss how lawmakers in the Hoosier State changed direction away from Common Core.

SB 155 from Sen. Blake Curd, R-Sioux Falls, takes a more basic approach to getting the Legislature more involved at the state level in public schools. His bill would give the Legislature the opportunity to allow or counter-act any curriculum or standards changes by the state Department of Education.

Curd would require the department to report those changes annually to the Legislature's House and Senate committees on education no later than the final day for legislators to file individual bills.

The reports would be required to include all curriculum and standards changes and explain the reasons for them.

The House Education hearing Friday on the data-protection bill showed how thorny the topic is.

Rep. Jim Stalzer, R-Sioux Falls, delivered the main testimony in favor of the bill. He said there are up to 400 "data points" that the U.S. Department of Education is interested in obtaining from state departments about students and their test results.

The legislation would allow the state secretary to close data access as neces-

sary in addition to the specific restrictions set in the bill. "We felt the process was too cumbersome to come back to the Legislature every year," Stalzer said.

Said Otten: "The problem lies with Washington and the speed of computers. ... This beast is out there. It is alive. It is waiting to gather information on our kids."

Cindy Flakoll, representing the Concerned Women of America, said her organization supports the legislation "but not without reservations and questions."

Flakoll said nine states have pulled out of the two national-level testing organizations and four more are considering doing so. She said the Kansas state board voted last month to withdraw.

"Perhaps the answer is for South Dakota to do the same," she said.

The discussion turned to a letter sent from state Education Secretary Melody Schopp to federal Education Secretary Arne Duncan regarding the data that South Dakota won't provide to the U.S. department

"It's not a matter of asking for permission. We're making a statement," Schopp said.

That didn't seem to convince Rep. Elizabeth May, R-Kyle. "Well, that's good to hear," May said, "But at the end of the day, we all know who runs this show."

Schopp said the letter was clear. "Regardless of his response, we are prohibited to do that," she said