

US, Iran Edge Toward Historic Pact

GENEVA (AP) — Edging toward a historic compromise, the U.S. and Iran reported progress Monday on a deal that would clamp down on Tehran's nuclear activities for at least 10 years but then slowly ease restrictions on programs that could be used to make atomic arms.

Officials said there were still obstacles to overcome before a March 31 deadline, and any deal will face harsh opposition in both countries. It also would be sure to further strain already-tense U.S. relations with Israel, whose leaders oppose any agreement that doesn't end Iran's nuclear ambitions.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to strongly criticize the deal in an address before Congress next week.

Still, a comprehensive pact could ease 35 years of U.S.-Iranian enmity — and seems within reach for the first time in more than a decade of negotiations.

"We made progress," U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said as he bade farewell to members of the American delegation at the table with Iran. More discussions between Iran and the six nations engaging it were set for next Monday, a senior U.S. official said.

Obama Seeks Tighter Rules For Brokers

WASHINGTON (AP) — Tapping the anxieties of aging baby boomers, President Barack Obama on Monday called for tougher standards on brokers who manage retirement savings accounts, a change that could affect the investment advice received by many Americans and aggravate tensions between the White House and Wall Street.

The Labor Department submitted a proposal to the White House Monday that would require the brokers who sell stocks, bonds, annuities and other investments to disclose to their clients any fees or other payments they receive for recommending certain investments.

"If you are working hard, if you are putting away money, if you are sacrificing that new car or that vacation so you can build a nest egg for later, you should have the peace of mind of knowing that the advice you are getting for investing those dollars is sound," Obama said in a speech to the AARP, the retiree advocacy group. "These payments, these inducements incentivize the brokers to make recommendations that generate the best returns for them but not necessarily the best return for you."

The proposed rule, which could be months away from actual implementation, has been the subject of intense behind-the-scenes lobbying, pitting major Wall Street firms and financial industry groups against a coalition of labor, consumer groups and retiree advocates such as the AARP.

Americans increasingly are seeking financial advice to help them navigate an array of options for retirement, college savings and more. Many people provide investment advice, but not all of them are required to disclose potential conflicts of interest.

US Home Sales Plunge 4.9% In January

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. home sales struck a snow drift in January, plunging to the slowest pace in nine months.

The National Association of Realtors said Monday that sales of existing homes tumbled 4.9 percent last month to a seasonally adjusted annual rate of 4.82 million. That brings sales down to their lowest level since April 2014.

Relatively low mortgage rates and steady job growth have yet to spur more activity from buyers and sellers, raising the possibility of either a spring sales rush or a second straight year of numbness in the real estate market. Few properties are being listed for sale, would-be buyers are holding off on purchases and snowstorms are cutting into traffic at open houses.

Weak sales in 2014 had set up expectations of a strong rebound in 2015, yet signs of that resurgence have yet to appear. The addition of roughly 1 million new jobs over the past three months has failed to make much of a dent in home-buying.

French President Pledges Protection

PARIS (AP) — French President Francois Hollande said his country must offer protection and affection to the Jewish community as anti-Semitism is on the rise in France.

"Jews are at home in France, it's the anti-Semites who have no place in the Republic," Hollande said in a speech Monday at a prestigious annual dinner of the country's main Jewish organization.

Many French Jews feel increasingly worried about anti-Semitism, particularly coming from young Muslims who embrace radical ideology propagated online.

France has Europe's largest Jewish population, about half a million. More than 7,000 emigrated to Israel last year.

Hollande noted that acts against Muslims are also on the rise in France.

Oscars See 16 Percent Fall In Ratings

NEW YORK (AP) — Oscar viewership was down 16 percent from last year and reached its lowest point since 2009, with 36.6 million people watching the Neil Patrick Harris-hosted awards show on ABC Sunday night.

The Nielsen company's preliminary estimate of U.S. viewership was down from the 43.7 million people who watched last year, a feel-good show where host Ellen DeGeneres attracted attention for posting a "selfie" with various movie stars and having pizzas delivered to the audience.

Last year's show, which also had the star power of "Frozen," Matthew McConaughey and U2, reached the biggest audience for any Academy Awards show since 2000.

The Oscars tend to be the most-watched entertainment program of the year on television, often second only to the Super Bowl. But viewership can be affected by the relative popularity of the movies up for big awards, and best picture winner "Birdman" wasn't a particularly big box office draw. "American Sniper" was the most popular movie, but received one relatively minor award.

There was also a movement among black viewers to boycott the awards show because all of the major acting nominees were white. There's no way to immediately tell whether this had an impact on the decrease in viewers since Nielsen did not have an immediate breakdown of ethnic viewership.

■ Complete list of Oscar winners, see page 13



Traffic is all but absent from I-30 looking west near downtown as sleet and freezing temperatures hit Monday in Fort Worth, Texas. PAUL MOSELEY/FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM/TNS

Obama Warns Against DHS Shutdown

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama warned Monday that states will feel the pain of a Homeland Security Department shutdown if Congress can't break an impasse by week's end. But on Capitol Hill, no solution was in sight.

"It will have a direct impact on your economy, and it will have a direct impact on America's national security," Obama told the nation's governors as they visited the White House as part of their annual conference. With tens of thousands of workers in line to be furloughed if the agency shuts down at midnight Friday, and many more forced to work without pay, the president cast the standoff in starkly economic terms.

"These are folks who, if they don't have a paycheck, are not going to be able to spend that money in your states," the president said. "And as governors, you know that we can't afford to play politics with our national security."

The president's words appeared to have little impact on Capitol Hill, where Senate Republicans lined up a fourth procedural vote on House-passed legislation that funds the Homeland Security Department through the Sept. 30 end of the budget year, while also rolling back Obama's executive actions granting work permits to millions of immigrants in this country illegally.

The outcome of Monday evening's vote was expected to be the same as three other attempts earlier this month, when Senate Democrats lined up to block the legislation from advancing. Democrats say they won't agree to the bill unless the GOP-written immigration provisions are removed.

System Brings Freezing Rain, Snow Across US

By The Associated Press

Cold, slushy weather crawled across much of the U.S. on Monday, coating parts of several Southern states in snow, leaving highways dangerously icy in numerous states from New Mexico to Oklahoma to New England, and sending temperatures plunging to 25 to 30 degrees below normal across much of the country.

Here's what's happening:

STORMS IN THE SOUTH

Snow was expected in parts of North Texas, where freezing rain prompted officials to cancel more than 1,000 flights in and out of Dallas-Fort Worth International Airport on Monday. The weather also prompted at least a daylong delay in the trial of the ex-Marine charged in the shooting death of former Navy SEAL Chris Kyle, whose memoir, "American Sniper," was the basis for the Oscar-nominated movie.

A snowstorm moving through Oklahoma made roads slick and dangerous statewide, according to the Highway Patrol.

Snow, sleet and freezing rain are forecast in parts of North Carolina and South Carolina, all the way to the coast, while parts of Arkansas, Louisiana and Mississippi also were under winter weather advisories.

In Tennessee, where residents were struggling to recover from last week's ice storm and bone-chilling low temperatures, more snow was being forecast for the eastern part of the state. Schools in many counties remained closed Monday and thousands were still without power.

Tennessee Emergency Management Agency officials say 27 people around the state have died as a result of the ice storm and frigid temperatures.

CHILL IN THE AIR

Wind chills dove below zero in northern parts of the U.S., while some cities' actual temperatures got that low.

In Michigan, the deep freeze closed schools up and down the state Monday, broke water mains in the Detroit area and set records for low temperatures that plunged well below zero. Temperatures dipped to 10 degrees below zero in Saginaw, Bay City and Midland,

breaking the area's record of minus 2.

The weather service says the wind chill in Bennington, Vermont, could drop to 17 below zero, while Lake Placid, New York, could see minus 30.

Meanwhile, the Great Lakes are going the way of Niagara Falls: They're freezing over. Lake Erie is nearly totally frozen, and Lakes Huron and Superior are nearly 80 percent frozen, the *New York Daily News* reports.

ALL ABOARD

Boston's transit agency is slowly returning to normal after a series of crippling snowstorms and low temperatures. Most subway and trolley branches had service restored Sunday just in time for the Monday morning commute, and buses were running on a regular weekday schedule. Commuter rail passengers also were told to expect delays and cancellations.

WINTER DANGERS

A man was killed Sunday when he fell through a snow-covered skylight in Canton, Massachusetts. A man and a woman were found dead in the snow outside their rural western Pennsylvania home Sunday afternoon, but their causes of death weren't immediately clear. And in Texas, a 31-year-old Amarillo man died Sunday when he lost control of his car on icy Interstate 27.

About 60 people had to be

evacuated from an apartment complex in Hooksett, New Hampshire, after the roof partially collapsed under the weight of snow. No one was hurt there, or in Portland, Maine, where chunks of ice the size of end tables slid off the roof of a five-story building and crashed through the front and rear windows of an unoccupied car Sunday.

The cold also is affecting water mains, with numerous breaks and leaks reported in suburban Washington, D.C., and a few in the Detroit area.

MESSY COMMUTES

Snow made for difficult driving conditions Monday along numerous highways in northern and eastern New Mexico, while Colorado's lawmakers were told to stay at home.

A much-needed winter soaking flooded some Southern California streets and dampened the red carpet at the Academy Awards on Sunday. The rain let up around sunrise on Monday, but more showers were expected.

UNEXPECTEDLY UNTOUCHED

It's the second least-snowy winter on record in Anchorage, Alaska, according to the National Weather Service. That lack of snow has saved the city about \$1 million in snow removal and related public services, the *Alaska Dispatch News* reports.

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