

White House Chief Of Staff Daley Leaving Post

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a jolt to the White House, President Barack Obama announced Monday that chief of staff William Daley was quitting and heading home, capping a short and rocky tenure that had been expected to last until Election Day. Obama budget chief Jack Lew, a figure long familiar with Washington's ways, will take over one of the most consuming jobs in America.

Daley's run as Obama's chief manager and gatekeeper lasted only a year. It was filled with consequential moments for the White House, like the killing of al-Qaida terrorist leader Osama bin Laden, but also stumbles with Congress and grumbles that Daley was not the right choice to coordinate an intense operation of ideas, egos and decisions.

Obama said he reluctantly accepted the news and at first refused to accept Daley's post-holidays resignation letter last week.

Daley did not waver, expressing to his boss a desire to get back to his family in Chicago, where Daleys have dominated local politics for decades. But he offered no explanation on Monday about what accelerated his decision; he had committed to Obama that he would stay on through the election.

It apparently became clear that the fit was no longer working for either side. Senior adviser Pete Rouse had already taken on more of the day-to-day management.



Daley

U.S. Condemns Iranian Death Sentence

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Obama administration denied on Monday that an American man sentenced to death in Iran was a CIA spy, and sharply criticized the Islamic republic in Tehran for what it called a pattern of arresting innocent people for political reasons.

White House spokesman Tommy Vietor said officials were still trying to learn the details of the sentence against Amir Mirzaei Hekmati. If true, the U.S. would condemn the verdict, he said.

Iran charged that Hekmati received special training and served at U.S. military bases in Iraq and Afghanistan before heading to Iran for an intelligence mission. A court convicted him of working with a hostile country, belonging to the CIA and trying to accuse Iran of involvement in terrorism, according to a state radio report Monday.

"Allegations that Mr. Hekmati either worked for, or was sent to Iran by the CIA are false," Vietor said in a statement. "The Iranian regime has a history of falsely accusing people of being spies, of eliciting forced confessions, and of holding innocent Americans for political reasons."

The 28-year-old former military translator was born in Arizona and graduated from high school in Michigan. His family is of Iranian origin, and Hekmati claims dual citizenship. His father, Ali, a professor at a community college in Flint, Mich., has said his son was visiting his grandmothers in Iran.

UN Confirms Iranian Uranium Enrichment

VIENNA (AP) — The U.N. nuclear agency on Monday confirmed that Iran has begun enriching uranium at an underground bunker to a level that can be upgraded more quickly for use in a nuclear weapon than the nation's main enriched stockpile.

Comment from the International Atomic Energy Agency came after diplomats said that centrifuges at the Fordo site near Iran's holy city of Qom are churning out uranium enriched to 20 percent. That level is higher than the 3.5 percent being made at Iran's main enrichment plant and can be turned into fissile warhead material faster and with less work.

"The IAEA can confirm that Iran has started the production of uranium enriched up to 20 percent ... in the Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant," said an agency statement, which used the alternate spelling for the site.

The move was expected, with Tehran announcing months ago that it would use the Fordo facility for 20 percent production. Iran began to further enrich a small part of its uranium stockpile to nearly 20 percent as of February 2010 at a less-protected experimental site, saying it needs the higher grade material to produce fuel for a Tehran reactor that makes medical radioisotopes for cancer patients.

But with the time and effort reduced between making weapons-grade uranium from the 20-percent level, the start of the Fordo operation increases international fears that Iran is determined to move closer to the ability to make nuclear warheads — despite insistence by the Islamic Republic that it is enriching only to make reactor fuel.

Decision 2012

Rivals Rip Romney Comment

BY DAVID ESPO AND KASIE HUNT
 Associated Press

NASHUA, N.H. — Republican front-runner Mitt Romney stumbled down the homestretch of the New Hampshire primary on Monday, declaring, "I like being able to fire people who provide services to me" as his rivals intensified already fierce criticism.

"Gov. Romney enjoys firing people. I enjoy creating jobs," said former Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman, who has staked his candidacy on a strong showing in Tuesday's primary and has shown signs of gaining ground in recent polls.

Romney is the odds-on favorite in New Hampshire, and Huntsman as well as other Republicans who are contesting the state have generally been content to vie for second place in hopes of emerging as his main rival in the South Carolina primary on Jan. 21.

"Second place would be a dream come true," said former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum, as he raced through a final full New Hampshire campaign day that began before sunrise and stretched for more than 14 hours. The former Pennsylvania senator finished a surprising second in last week's Iowa caucuses, but without money for television ads he has appeared to struggle as he seeks to convert that into momentum.

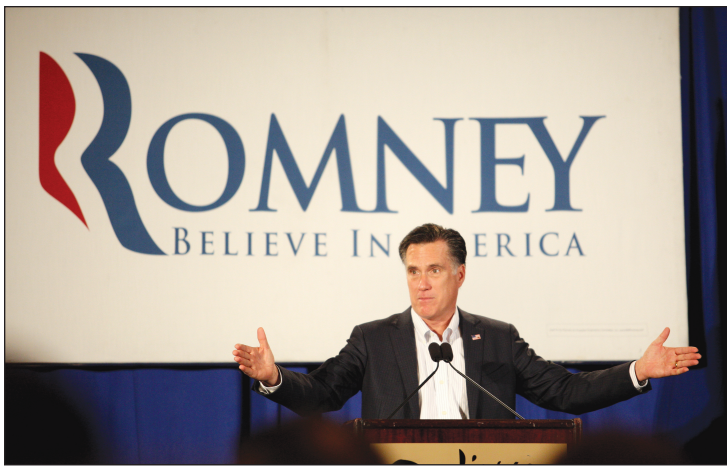
Romney, the former Massachusetts governor, won in Iowa by eight votes. A victory in New Hampshire would make him the first Republican in a contested presidential nomination battle to capture the first two races of the campaign since Iowa began leading off for the GOP in 1976.

The battle has grown increasingly rancorous in recent days — both in New Hampshire and next-up South Carolina — with Santorum, Texas Gov. Rick Perry and former House Speaker Newt Gingrich escalating their attacks on Romney's claim that a background in business uniquely qualifies him to help create American jobs.

At the same time, an organization that backs Gingrich has spread the word that it intends to spend \$3.4 million on television ads in South Carolina that are expected to attack Romney with gusto.

"Now we'll see if he has the broad shoulders and can stand the heat," said Gingrich, relishing the battle ahead as the nominating campaign wheels South.

Romney's remark about firing people was the second jarring moment for the front-runner in the span of less than 24 hours.



ANDY JACOBSON/MCT

A day before the New Hampshire Primary, Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney, former governor of Massachusetts, speaks to a crowd of business leaders and owners during the Nashua Chamber of Commerce breakfast series in the ballroom of a Radisson Inn in Nashua, N.H., Monday.

On Sunday afternoon, the millionaire businessman told an audience that he understood the fear of being laid off, adding, "there were a couple of times when I was worried I was going to get pink-slipped." His aides refused to provide details.

On Monday morning, addressing the Nashua, N.H., Chamber of Commerce, he said he wants individuals to be able to choose among different health insurance policies as they seek coverage.

"That means the insurance company will have an incentive to keep you healthy. It also means if you don't like what they do, you can fire them," he said.

"I like being able to fire people who provide services to me. If someone doesn't give me the good service I need, I'm going to go get somebody else to provide that service to me," he added.

A few hours later, in a previously unscheduled appearance before reporters, Romney emphasized he had been talking about insurance companies.

"Things can always be taken out of context, and I understand that's what the Obama people will do. But as you know I was speaking about insurance companies and we need to be able to make a choice and my comments entirely

reflected that discussion."

As for once fearing he would be fired, he said, "I came out of school, and I got an entry level position like the other people that were freshly minted MBAs, and like anybody that starts at the bottom of an enterprise you wonder, when you don't do so well, whether you're going to be able to hang onto your job."

Romney has made his career in business the core credential of his candidacy, saying that his firm, Bain Capital, created 100,000 jobs on balance as it started some firms while taking over, remaking and then spinning off others.

Gingrich told one interviewer during the day that Bain Capital "apparently looted the companies, left people totally unemployed and walked off with millions of dollars."

He wasn't asked to provide details.

But Perry, campaigning in Anderson, South Carolina, was — and did.

"If you're a victim of Bain Capital's downsizing, it's the ultimate insult for Mitt Romney to come to South Carolina to tell you he feels your pain. Because he caused it," he said.

"I have no doubt that Mitt Romney was worried about pink slips — whether he'd have enough of them to hand out."

He cited Holson Burns Group Inc. of Gaffney, S.C., where he said 150 workers who made photo albums lost their jobs. "They looted that company," Perry said, referring to Bain Capital.

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Fashion Show
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