

34 Dead In Iraq/al-Qaida Fighting

BAGHDAD (AP) — The Iraqi military tried to dislodge al-Qaida militants in Sunni-dominated Anbar province Sunday, unleashing airstrikes and besieging the regional capital in fighting that killed at least 34 people, officials said. A series of bombs in Shiite neighborhoods of Baghdad, meanwhile, killed at least 20 people.

The recent gains by the insurgents have been a blow to the Shiite-led government — as sectarian violence has escalated since the U.S. withdrawal. U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said Washington was “very, very concerned” by the fighting but would not send in American troops.

Video of the airstrikes in Anbar — apparently taken by aircraft at night — was released by Iraq’s Defense Ministry showing al-Qaida hideouts being bombarded. It showed men gathered around a vehicle, then running away as the site was struck.

A ministry statement said the air force struck a militants’ hideout overnight, identifying them as belonging to the al-Qaida-linked Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, which the government refers to as “terrorists.”

The army and allied tribesmen also fought al-Qaida militants around the provincial capital of Ramadi on Sunday, two Anbar government officials told The Associated Press by telephone. They said 22 soldiers and 12 civilians were killed, along with an unknown number of militants, and 58 people were wounded. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to brief reporters.

Kerry: U.S. Will Support Fight In Iraq

JERUSALEM (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry said Sunday that the United States will support Iraq’s fight against al-Qaida-linked militants who have overrun two cities, but won’t send in American troops.

Kerry said the militants are trying to destabilize the region and undermine a democratic process in Iraq, and that the U.S. is in contact with tribal leaders in Anbar province who are standing up to the terrorists.

But, he said, “this is a fight that belongs to the Iraqis. That is exactly what the president and the world decided some time ago when we left Iraq, so we are not obviously contemplating returning. We are not contemplating putting boots on the ground. This is their fight. ... We will help them in their fight, but this fight, in the end, they will have to win and I am confident they can.”

Al-Qaida linked gunmen have largely taken over the cities of Fallujah and Ramadi in an uprising that has been a blow to the Shiite-led government of Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. Bombings in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, killed at least 20 people Sunday.

Anbar, a vast desert area on the borders with Syria and Jordan, was the heartland of the Sunni insurgency that rose up against American troops and the Iraqi government after the 2003 U.S.-led invasion that toppled Saddam Hussein.

One Person Dies in Colo. Plane Crash

DENVER (AP) — A fiery plane crash at the Aspen airport Sunday afternoon killed one person and injured two others, one severely, Colorado authorities said.

The three were the only ones aboard the plane, said Thomas Wright, a dispatcher with the Pitkin County Sheriff’s Office. One of those hurt had injuries that were not serious.

Ginny Dyche, a spokeswoman for Aspen Valley Hospital, said the facility admitted two patients who were involved in the crash. She said they were still being evaluated, but she declined to release any other information.

Allen Kenitzer, a Federal Aviation Administration spokesman said the aircraft appeared to be a Bombardier Challenger 600, a mid-sized private jet.

Below-Zero Temps Affecting More Than The Dakotas

CHICAGO (AP) — Icy, snow-covered roads and high winds made travel treacherous Sunday from the Dakotas and Michigan to Missouri as much of the nation braced for the next winter wallop: a dangerous cold that could break records.

A whirlpool of frigid, dense air known as a “polar vortex” was expected to suppress temperatures in more than half of the continental U.S. starting into Monday and Tuesday, with wind chill warnings stretching from Montana to Alabama.

It was 5 degrees at kickoff Sunday afternoon inside sold-out Lambeau Field for a playoff game between the Green Bay Packers and the San Francisco 49ers, one of the coldest ever played.

“We suited up, we brought all the snowboarding gear we use ... and added to it,” said 49ers fan Jeff Giardinelli of Fresno, Calif. “Without the wind, which isn’t here yet, we’re good. When it gets windy, we’ll be ready for it.”

The forecast is extreme: 25 below zero in Fargo, N.D., minus 31 in International Falls, Minn., and minus 15 in Indianapolis and Chicago. Wind chills — what it feels like outside when high winds are factored into the temperature — could drop into the minus 50s and 60s. Northeastern Montana was warned of wind chills up to 59 below zero.

Snow Shark



GLEN STUBBE/MINNEAPOLIS STAR TRIBUNE/MCT
Connor, from left, Trevor and Austin Bartz, seen on Jan. 1, built a 16-foot high snow shark at their New Brighton, Minn., home. It took the brothers around 95 hours.

Election-Year Politics Shape Congressional Agenda

BY DONNA CASSATA

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Congress returns to work Monday with election-year politics certain to shape an already limited agenda.

Republicans intend to focus on every facet of President Barack Obama’s health care law. They see a political boost in its problem-plagued rollout as the GOP looks to maintain its House majority and seize control of the Democratic-led Senate.

First up in the House, according to Majority Leader Eric Cantor, R-Va., is legislation addressing the security of personal data, part of his party’s effort “to protect the American people from the harmful effects of Obamacare.”

Republicans also promise closer scrutiny of the administration’s tally of enrollment numbers in the program.

Democrats will press to raise the federal minimum wage from \$7.25 an hour and extend unemployment benefits, trying to cast the party as more concerned with the less fortunate and intent on dealing with income inequality. The issues resonate with liberals, the core Democratic voters crucial in low-turnout midterm elections.

Rep. Steny Hoyer of Maryland, the No. 2 Democrat in the House, said an extension of federal benefits for an estimated 1.3 million Americans who saw their payments stopped on Dec. 28 is more than an economic issue.

“It’s about real people, people with families struggling to put food on the table, to make ends meet, including ... 200,000 military veterans who are among these folks who are losing their benefits,” he told reporters Friday.

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., has scheduled a vote Monday night on legislation by Sens. Jack Reed, D-R.I., and Dean Heller, R-Nev., to extend jobless benefits for three months.

“For decades, Republicans and Democrats put partisanship and ideology aside to offer some security for job-seekers, even when the unemployment rate was lower than it is today,” President Barack Obama said Saturday in his weekly radio and Internet address. “Instead of punishing families who can least afford it, Republicans should make it their New Year’s resolution to do the right thing, and restore this vital economic security for their constituents right now.”

Rancor ruled in the first session of the 113th Congress with few bills passed

and sent to the president. The combination of divided government and the upcoming elections stand as an obstacle to major legislation in the second session, counting down to November when all 435 House seats and 35 Senate seats will be on the ballot.

Still, Congress must deal with some significant unfinished business before delving deep into political votes and extended breaks for campaigning.

The Senate was to vote Monday on Obama’s nomination of Janet Yellen to become the head of the Federal Reserve. If confirmed, Yellen would become the first woman to fill the powerful post, replacing Ben Bernanke.

Lawmakers face a Jan. 15 deadline to agree on a spending bill to keep the government running and avoid a partial shutdown that roiled Congress last fall. Passage of legislation in December scaling back the automatic, across-the-board cuts gave the House and Senate Appropriations Committees time to draft a massive, trillion-dollar-plus measure to run the government through September.

A short-term measure is likely this month just to let the government continue operating.

The GOP-controlled House and Democratic-led Senate spent a chunk of last year wrangling over renewing the nation’s farm bill after passing separate, competing versions of the five-year, roughly \$500 billion measure. In dispute are crop subsidies and how deeply to cut the \$80 billion-a-year food stamp program, with the House slashing \$4 billion and the Senate \$400 million annually.

Lawmakers are pressing for a compromise that can win approval from the House and Senate.

Several contentious issues loom in the near term.

Twenty-six senators have signed on to a new Iran sanctions bill that Obama opposes while his administration negotiates with the Iranian government

over its nuclear program. Proponents of the legislation are seeking to gain the support of further senators when Congress reconvenes, with the hope of securing a full Senate vote this month.

Although the issue may not be an immediate legislative priority for returning lawmakers, it could become a major point of discussion as advocates and opponents of fresh penalties make their cases.

Reid spared the administration a vote in December, but this month he may not be able to hold off proponents of tough sanctions.

The majority leader did promise Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand, D-N.Y., a vote on her legislation to give victims of rape and sexual assault in the military an independent route outside the chain of command for prosecuting attackers. Her solution would take the decision from commanders and give it to seasoned military lawyers.

The top echelon of the military, the Democratic chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee and other Senate Democrats and Republicans oppose her plan. Reid backs, it as do several top conservatives such as Sens. Ted Cruz, R-Texas, and Rand Paul, R-Ky., but Gillibrand is still short of the 60-vote, filibuster-proof threshold.

Unclear is whether the House will tackle major legislation to overhaul immigration laws. Advocates remain hopeful, buoyed by Speaker John Boehner’s hire of a Senate aide who worked on bipartisan immigration legislation for Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., and Boehner’s willingness to stand up to outside conservative groups and tea partiers over the budget.

Boehner and Obama have spoken about a piecemeal approach after the comprehensive Senate measure stalled in the House. But some House Republicans still resist any legislation, fearing it would lead to negotiations with the Senate and a final bill that includes a path to citizenship for the 11 million immigrants living in the country illegally.

Cold

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signature waterfalls were frozen over — just a trickle of running water.

North Dakota Gov. Jack Dalrymple did not order a statewide school closures for Monday, but he encouraged superintendents to use their discretion and make student safety a priority.

The North Dakota

Department of Transportation issued a travel alert for the southwestern part of the state including the cities of Beach, Dickinson, Mott, Hettinger and Bowman, as blowing snow was reducing visibility. The department encouraged drivers to reduce speeds and drive accordingly.

In Grand Forks, N.D., which sits about 82 miles south of the Canadian border, an air temperature of -19 degrees and 18 mph winds drove the wind chill down to

-46 on Sunday afternoon.

The Northlands Rescue Mission, a Grand Forks homeless shelter operating with a waiting list since October, was opening its doors to anyone needing to escape the bitter cold.

Robert Raymer, who’s been living at Northland for a month, told WDAY-TV that he’s seen a lot of people come in to escape the cold. Raymer said no one is turned away, and the center has mats they can throw down on the floor if needed.

class for caregivers.

Schoenfelder said the caregivers group began with two visitors, but grew larger as word spread, and now has about six people attend each meeting. With more support and resources, it was decided recently that the meeting could now be made available to the public, she said.

“If I can use what I’ve gone through — the tears I’ve shed, the frustration I’ve felt — then I want to,” Schoenfelder said. “I think so far it has been helpful, and I think the whole group can be helpful to others. Maybe we can enlighten them in some manner so they won’t have to go through some of the things we’ve gone through.”

Following the Jan. 13 meeting, entitled “New Hope,” the group will continue to meet on the second Monday of each month from 7-8:30 p.m. The meetings are open to any caregivers of

individuals who are physically or mentally in need of continued long-term care.

Schoenfelder added that the caregivers’ group is not affiliated with any one religion or denomination, but it is Christ-based and includes opening and closing prayers.

“We want everyone to feel free to come, and I hope that people take advantage of the ability to hear from others in their situation,” she said. “If all they want to do is listen, that’s fine too. The main thing people should know is they don’t have to do it alone.”

For more information about the Caregivers Support Group, contact Schoenfelder at 605-660-5063.

You can follow Derek Bartos on Twitter at twitter.com/d_bartos/. Discuss this story at www.yankton.net/.

Group

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has received caring for her husband, John, to help others in similar situations. John suffers from Parkinson’s disease and permanently resides in a hospital.

“I felt my journey through John’s struggle had to have a purpose,” Schoenfelder said. “God must be using it for a reason, and I believe it is so that I can help others going through the same thing.”

As a member of Calvary Baptist Church, Schoenfelder first opened the group to other parishioners on a trial basis, with the hope of opening it up to the public at a later date. In addition to using her experience from her own situation, she also gathered resources from the Veteran’s Administration, various books and an online



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