

Court To Target Recess Appointments?

WASHINGTON (AP) — Just back from their own long break, Supreme Court justices set out Monday to resolve a politically charged fight over when the Senate's absence gives the president the power to make temporary appointments to high-level positions without senators' approval.

The legal battle is the outgrowth of partisan rancor over presidential appointees that has characterized Washington over the past 20 years, and especially since President Barack Obama took office in 2009.

Recess appointments have divided Democrats and Republicans, with views changing depending on which party holds the White House. But during more than 90 minutes of arguments Monday, the Obama administration was hard pressed to find support for its stand in favor of recess appointments from justices named by Republicans and Democrats alike — including Obama.

Justice Elena Kagan, an Obama nominee, seized on the political dispute to make the point to Solicitor General Donald Verrilli Jr. that "congressional intransigence" to Obama nominees may not be enough to win the court fight.

Kagan, Verrilli's predecessor as Obama's top Supreme Court lawyer, suggested that it "is the Senate's role to determine whether they're in recess."

Pilots Grounded After Wrong Landing

DALLAS (AP) — The pilots of a Southwest Airlines flight that mistakenly landed at the wrong Missouri airport were grounded Monday, less than a day after they touched down at a small airfield that gave them only half as much room as normal to stop the jet.

Southwest Flight 4013 was traveling Sunday evening from Chicago's Midway Airport to Branson Airport but instead landed at tiny Taney County Airport seven miles away.

No one was hurt, but after the 124 passengers were let off the plane, they noticed the airliner had come dangerously close to the end of the runway, where it could have tumbled down a steep embankment if it had left the pavement.

Branson Airport has a runway that is more than 7,100 feet long — a typical size for commercial traffic. The longest runway at Taney County is only slightly more than 3,700 feet because it is designed for small private planes.

Ford's New F-150 Could Change Market

DETROIT (AP) — Some call it a game-changer. Some just shake their heads. Either way, Ford's new aluminum-clad F-150 is such a radical departure from past pickup trucks that it dominated talk at the opening of the Detroit auto show.

Ford Motor Co. unveiled the 2015 F-150, whose body is 97-percent aluminum, on Monday. The lighter material shaves as much as 700 pounds off the 5,000-pound truck, a revolutionary change for a vehicle known for its heft and an industry still reliant on steel. No other vehicle on the market contains this much aluminum.

"It's a landmark moment for the full-size pickup truck," said Jack Nerad, editorial director for Kelley Blue Book.

The change is Ford's response to small-business owners' desire for a more fuel-efficient and nimble truck — and stricter government requirements on fuel economy. It sprang from a challenge by Ford's CEO to move beyond the traditional design for a full-size pickup.

City

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"We brought this plan forward to see if you like it or don't like it," Yankton Parks and Recreation Director Todd Larson said. "Do you want to fund it and build some of it, or not build it?"

The commission was unified in voicing a desire to find ways to cut down the costs.

"You get a bit of sticker shock just on phase one because, as you can see, we'll be spending a bulk of what we have set aside for the entire project," said Commissioner David Knoff, who served on the plaza committee. "If the commission likes the concept, it may be something we can play with a little more and see what we can do with the price."

Commissioner Pauline Akland called the price tag "severe sticker shock." She also questioned why, with Fourth Street scheduled for reconstruction in 2015-16 and traffic diverted to Second Street, the north approach improvements wouldn't be delayed. The former Stern Oil property could be phase one, she offered.

"It's beautiful, but it's excessive," Akland said of the overall plan. "We look at what our sales tax receipts are for the past six months, and I think the community is going to have issues with us spending over \$1.2 million in three phases down at the river."

She also referenced recent increases in city utility rates, especially for the price of water.

"People are feeling those effects, and they're going to feel those effects even stronger this summer, depending on what kind of year we have," Akland said. "My concern is, they're seeing us spend even \$300,000 down there and feeling that money should maybe be put toward the water plant (construction)."

Commissioner Brooke Blaaid countered that the work along Second Street should be done prior to the Fourth Street reconstruction.

"If we have so much traffic on that street, why not showcase what we have to entice them to come back?" she asked.

Commissioner Craig Sommer, who also served on the committee, was adamant that work proceed on the plaza.

"The money was put away years ago to make sure we had it when we got to this point," he said. "They whole point of that plaza was to become a tourist attraction — a place people would come to in Yankton to go sit at, see it and walk it. I'd hate to see another year go by where we fiddle with numbers, look at

plans and get no bids let and no work done. Every year we wait, we're losing more of this project to the cost of building materials going up."

The committee would be happy to work to bring costs down as much as possible by finding more affordable materials, identifying partnerships like Keep Yankton Beautiful and determining what work could be done by city employees, according to Sommer.

"It's time to start getting this project on the ground and running," he said.

Several members of the public also offered input on the proposal.

Ed Gleich expressed concern about placing too many trees in the plaza, which would obscure the view in the area.

Avon resident Tim Mad-den was on hand to represent South Dakota submarine veterans and hoped that the city would work with him to put more of a focus on the submarine memorial at the foot of the bridge.

After years of planning, downtown business owner and former City Commission member Curt Bernard said he wanted to applaud the effort and encourage the city to move forward with the project.

"If you look at the taxable sales numbers in this community ... they are flat to declining," he added. "You have to find ways to advertise your community. To be out there more strongly, you have to invest money in key things that can actually help."

"I look at the splash pad," he continued. "That feature alone will draw so much family-type activity. The fact that it is right there on Second Street — that's like a neon sign flashing, 'This is a really cool place.'"

Jane Bobzin also asked that the commission proceed.

"This is supposed to be one of the stars of our Yankton crown, so let's make this a definite focal point," she said.

The commission took no official action but directed the plaza committee to focus on more detail in order to bring down the costs for the project.

In other business Monday, it was noted that four applications were received for the city attorney position.

Former City Attorney David Hosmer resigned Dec. 31 to pursue another career opportunity. Ross Den Herder was selected to serve as the interim attorney.

The commission will attempt to schedule interviews with the candidates Monday, Jan. 20.

You can follow Nathan Johnson on Twitter at twitter.com/AnInlandVoyage. Discuss this story at www.yankton.net/.

ACA

Early Signups Skew Older

BY RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — It's an older, costlier crowd that's signing up so far for health insurance under President Barack Obama's law, according to government figures released Monday. Enrollments are lower for the healthy, younger Americans who will be needed to keep premiums from rising.

Young adults from 18 to 34 are only 24 percent of total enrollment, the administration said in its first signup figures broken down by age, gender and other details. With the HealthCare.gov website now working, the figures cover the more than 2 million Americans who had signed up for government-subsidized private insurance through the end of December in new federal and state markets.

Enrolling young and healthy people is important because they generally pay more into the system than they take out, subsidizing older adults. While 24 percent is not a bad start, say independent experts, it should be closer to 40 percent to help keep premiums down.

Adults ages 55-64 were the most heavily represented in the signups, accounting for 33 percent of the total. Overall, the premiums paid by people in that demographic don't fully cover their medical expenses. Some are in the waiting room for Medicare; that coverage starts at age 65.

Some questions remained unanswered.

For example, the administration is unable to say how many of those enrolling for coverage had been previously uninsured. Some might have been among the more than 4.7 million insured people whose previous policies were canceled because they didn't meet the law's standards.

"The uninsured folks for whom the law was intended don't seem to have signed up in nearly as high numbers," said Richard Foster, a former statistics chief for the Health and Human Services department. "There is still a huge unknown aspect to this."

But even if the age mix remains tilted toward older adults, "it's nothing of the sort that would trigger instability in the system," said Larry Levitt, an insurance expert with the nonpartisan Kaiser Family

Foundation. Premiums would go up next year for the overhaul, along with taxpayer costs per enrollee, but not enough to push the system into a "death spiral" in which rising premiums discourage healthy people from signing up.

Levitt and other experts expected older, sicker people to be more heavily represented in the early numbers. They would have had strong motivation to persevere in the face of website dysfunction.

Still, he said "it underscores a need to heighten outreach efforts to young people." Adults ages 18-34 represent 40 percent of the target group for the health care law, according to a recent Kaiser study. Open enrollment ends March 31.

Considering that the federal health care website was down most of the time in October, administration officials said they were pleased that the percentage of young adults was as high as it was.

"We think that more and more young people are going to sign up as time goes by," said Gary Cohen, head of the HHS office in charge of Obama's push to cover the uninsured. And there's a hammer, too: Those who fail to sign up face a tax penalty in 2015 for being uninsured.



LI RUI/XINHUA/ZUMA PRESS/MCT
Representatives from countries attend the funeral for former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, including former Prime Minister Tony Blair (3rd from left), Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu (center), U.S. Vice President Joe Biden, Israeli President Shimon Peres, speaker of Israel's Knesset Yuli Yoel Edelstein and Chairman of Russia's State Duma Dergey Naryshkin Jan. 13 in Jerusalem.

Israel Says Its Final Farewell To Ariel Sharon

BY JOSEF FEDERMAN
Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Israel said its last farewell to the late Ariel Sharon on Monday with a state ceremony outside the parliament building before his flag-draped coffin was taken on a cross-country procession to its final resting place at his family home in the country's south.

With a high-powered crowd of VIPs and international dignitaries on hand, Sharon was eulogized as a fearless warrior and bold leader who devoted his life to protecting Israel's security. U.S. Vice President Joe Biden and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair headed the long list of visitors.

In a heartfelt address, Biden talked about a decades-long friendship with Sharon, saying the death felt "like a death in the family."

When the two discussed Israel's security, Biden said he understood how Sharon earned the nickname "The Bulldozer," explaining how Sharon would pull out maps and repeatedly make the same points to drive them home.

"He was indomitable," Biden said. "But like all historic leaders, all real leaders, he had a north star that guided him. A north star from which he never, in my observation, never deviated. His north star was the survival of the state of Israel and the Jewish people wherever they resided," Biden said.

Sharon died on Saturday, eight years after a devastating stroke left him in a coma from which he never recovered. He was 85.

One of Israel's greatest and most divisive figures, Sharon rose through the ranks of the military, moving into politics and overcoming scandal and controversy to become prime minister at the time of his stroke.

He spent most of his life battling Arab enemies and promoting Jewish settlement on war-torn lands. But in a surprising about-face, he led a historic withdrawal from the Gaza Strip in 2005, uprooting all soldiers and settlers from the territory after a 38-year presence in a move

he said was necessary to ensure Israel's security.

His backers called him a war hero. His detractors, first and foremost the Palestinians, considered him a war criminal and held him responsible for years of bloodshed.

The speakers at Monday's ceremony outside parliament largely glossed over the controversy, and instead focused on his leadership and personality.

"Arik was a man of the land," President Shimon Peres, a longtime friend and sometimes rival, said in his eulogy. "He defended this land like a lion and he taught its children to swing a scythe. He was a military legend in his lifetime and then turned his gaze to the day Israel would dwell in safety, when our children would return to our borders and peace would grace the Promised Land."

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who resigned from Sharon's Cabinet to protest the Gaza withdrawal, said that he and Sharon didn't always agree with each other. Nonetheless, he called Sharon "one of the big warriors" for the nation of Israel.

"Arik was a man of actions, pragmatic, and his pragmatism was rooted in deep emotion, deep emotion for the country and deep emotion for the Jewish people," Netanyahu said.

Nearly 10 years on, the withdrawal from Gaza remains hotly debated in Israeli society. Supporters say Israel is better off not being bogged down in the crowded territory, which is now home to 1.7 million Palestinians.

Critics say the pullout has only brought more violence. Two years after the withdrawal, Hamas militants seized control of Gaza and stepped up rocket fire on Israel.

In a reminder of the precarious security situation, Palestinian militants on Monday fired two rockets from the Gaza Strip. Sharon's ranch in southern Israel, where his body was being laid to rest, is within range of such projectiles, though but Monday's missiles did not hit Israel. No injuries or damage were reported.

W. Virginia

Some Water Service Is Returning In Places

CHARLESTON, W.Va. (AP) — Safe tap water gushed from faucets and shower heads in West Virginia on Monday, a welcome sight and sound for a small fraction of the 300,000 people who have not been able to use running water since a chemical spill five days ago.

It could still be days before everyone in the Charleston metropolitan area is cleared to use the water, though officials said the water in certain designated areas was safe to drink and wash with as long as people flushed out their systems. They cautioned that the water may still have a slight licorice-type odor to it, raising the anxieties of some who believed it was still contaminated.

"I'm not going to drink it. I'll shower in it and do dishes in it. But I won't drink it. I don't think it's (the chemical) all out," said Angela Stone, who started the 30-minute or so process of flushing her system out soon after the ban was lifted.

By Monday afternoon, officials had given the green light to about 10 percent of West Virginia American Water's customers, and company spokeswoman Laura Jordan said as much as 25 percent of its customer base could have water by the end of the day.

The water crisis shuttered schools, restaurants and day-care centers and truckloads of water had to be brought in from out of state. People were told to use the water only to flush their toilets.

"Finally," said Stone's husband, James Parker. "I can finally take a shower, do dishes and cook some regular meals."

Officials were lifting the ban in a strict, methodical manner to help ensure the water system was not overwhelmed by excessive demand, which could cause more water quality and service problems. An online map detailing what areas were cleared showed a very small portion in blue and a vast area across nine counties still in the 'do not use' red.

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