

Fed. Government Funded Through Oct.

WASHINGTON (AP) — After last fall's tumultuous, bitterly partisan debt ceiling and government shutdown fights, a sense of fiscal fatigue seems to be setting in among many Washington policymakers as President Barack Obama prepares for his fifth State of the Union address later this month.

A declining U.S. budget deficit, still-accommodative Federal Reserve and a small-bore budget deal negotiated last month — given final approval Thursday in Congress and signed by Obama on Friday — are helping to temper partisan rhetoric in the short term as attention in Washington shifts to the approaching midterm elections.

The recovery from the deep recession of 2007-2009 has been one of the slowest in history and still has a ways to go, especially in terms of regaining lost jobs. That was driven home by a Labor Department report last Friday that U.S. employers added just 74,000 jobs last month, far fewer than had been forecast and the smallest monthly gain in three years.

The overall jobless rate dropped to 6.7 percent from 7 percent in November, the lowest level since October 2008. Much of the decline came from Americans who stopped looking for jobs and are no longer being counted by the government as unemployed. Meanwhile, a growing number of baby boomers are retiring.

Still, economists are generally predicting a pickup in economic growth in 2014 amid a continued favorable climate of low inflation, falling oil prices, a housing recovery and the Fed sticking to its plan to only slowly pare back the hundreds of billions of dollars in financial stimulus it has pumped into the economy over the past four years.

Pope Defrocked 400 Priests In 2 Years

VATICAN CITY (AP) — A document obtained by The Associated Press on Friday shows Pope Benedict XVI defrocked nearly 400 priests over just two years for sexually molesting children.

The statistics for 2011 and 2012 show a dramatic increase over the 171 priests removed in 2008 and 2009, when the Vatican first provided details on the number of priests who have been defrocked. Prior to that, it had only publicly revealed the number of alleged cases of sexual abuse it had received and the number of trials it had authorized.

While it's not clear why the numbers spiked in 2011, it could be because 2010 saw a new explosion in the number of cases reported in the media in Europe and beyond.

The document was prepared from data the Vatican had been collecting and was compiled to help the Holy See defend itself before a U.N. committee this week in Geneva.

Archbishop Silvano Tomasi, the Vatican's U.N. ambassador in Geneva, referred to just one of the statistics in the course of eight hours of oftentimes pointed criticism and questioning from the U.N. human rights committee.

Taliban Attack Kills 16 In Afghanistan

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — A suicide bomber blew himself up outside a Kabul restaurant filled with foreigners and affluent Afghans, while two gunmen snuck in through the back door and opened fire Friday in a brazen dinner-time attack that killed 16 people, officials said.

The Taliban claimed responsibility within an hour of the attack against La Taverna du Liban, part of a stepped-up campaign of violence against foreign and government interests to send a message that the militants are not going anywhere as the U.S.-led coalition winds down its combat mission at the end of the year. The bombing served as a reminder that although militant violence in the capital has dropped off in recent months, insurgents remain capable of carrying out attacks inside the most heavily guarded areas.

Security officials, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to release the information, said the assault began with the suicide bomber detonating his explosives at the front door of the restaurant, located in an area housing several embassies, non-governmental organizations and the homes and offices of Afghan officials. As chaos ensued, the two other attackers entered through the kitchen and began shooting. They were later killed by security guards, said Interior Ministry spokesman Sediq Sediqi.

Kabul police chief Gen. Mohammad Zahir Zahir said the 16 people killed were all inside the restaurant. He said foreigners and Afghans were among the dead, but he did not provide a breakdown. Officials said at least four other people were wounded.

Four U.N. employees who "reportedly could have been present in close proximity to the scene of the attack" remained "unaccounted for," said Ari Gaitanis, a spokesman for the U.N. mission in Afghanistan. The mission said in a statement that some of its staff "may be among the dead" and was verifying the status of personnel in Kabul.

Ohio's Death Penalty Future In Doubt

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — The long and restless execution of an Ohio inmate with an untested combination of chemicals brought cries of cruel and unusual punishment Friday and could further narrow the options for other states that are casting about for new lethal injection drugs.

A gasping, snorting Dennis McGuire took 26 minutes to die after the chemicals began flowing Thursday — the longest execution of the 53 carried out in Ohio since capital punishment resumed 15 years ago, according to an Associated Press analysis.

McGuire's adult children complained it amounted to torture, with the convicted killer's son, also named Dennis, saying: "Nobody deserves to go through that."

Whether McGuire felt any pain was unclear. But Ohio's experience could influence the decisions made in the 31 other lethal-injection states, many of which have been forced in the past few years to rethink the drugs they use.

States are in a bind for two main reasons: European companies have cut off supplies of certain execution drugs because of death-penalty opposition overseas. And states can't simply switch to other chemicals without triggering legal challenges from defense attorneys.

Gov. Proclaims State Is In A Drought

LOS ANGELES (AP) — California is nearly as dry as it's ever been. High water marks rim half-full reservoirs. Cities are rationing water. Clerics are praying for rain. Ranchers are selling cattle, and farmers are fallowing fields.

Gov. Jerry Brown formally proclaimed a drought Friday, saying California is in the midst of perhaps its worst dry spell in a century. He made the announcement in San Francisco amid increasing pressure from lawmakers and as firefighters battled flare-ups in a Southern California wildfire that chased thousands of people from their homes.

Unless the state gets significant rainfall in the next two months, television sets glowing with wildfires could play like reruns throughout the year.

Reservoir levels in the north and central parts of the state were more depleted than in Southern California, but Brown still asked Los Angeles to do its part to conserve — and gave a nod to the politics of water in the vast state.

"The drought accentuates and further displays the conflicts between north and south and between urban and rural parts of the state. So, as governor, I'll be doing my part to bring people together and working through this."

Obama Proposes Limits On NSA Phone Collections

BY JULIE PACE
AP White House Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Seeking to calm a furor over U.S. surveillance, President Barack Obama on Friday called for ending the government's control of phone data from hundreds of millions of Americans and immediately ordered intelligence agencies to get a secretive court's permission before accessing such records. Still, he defended the nation's spying apparatus as a whole, saying the intelligence community was not "cavalier about the civil liberties of our fellow citizens."

The president also directed America's intelligence agencies to stop spying on friendly international leaders and called for extending some privacy protections to foreign citizens whose communications are scooped up by the U.S.

Obama said the U.S. had a "special obligation" to re-examine its intelligence capabilities because of the potential for trampling on civil liberties.

"The reforms I'm proposing today should give the American people greater confidence that their rights are being protected, even as our intelligence and law enforcement agencies maintain the tools they need to keep us safe," Obama said in his highly anticipated speech at the Justice Department.

"This debate will make us stronger," he declared. "In this time of change, the United States of America will have to lead."

Obama's announcements capped the review that followed former National Security Agency analyst Edward Snowden's leaks about secret surveillance programs. If fully implemented, the president's proposals would lead to significant changes to the NSA's bulk collection of phone records, which is authorized under Section 215 of the USA Patriot Act.

Even with Obama's decisions, key questions about the future of the surveillance apparatus remain. While Obama wants to strip the NSA of its ability to store the phone



OLIVIERY DOULIERY/ABACA PRESS/MCT
People protest outside the Department of Justice in Washington, DC, against the NSA surveillance program on Friday.

records, he offered no recommendation for where the data should be moved. Instead, he gave the intelligence community and the attorney general 60 days to study options, including proposals from a presidential review board that recommended the telephone companies or an unspecified third party.

Civil libertarians said Obama did not go far enough. Anthony Romero, the executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union, said his organization would press on in its lawsuit against the administration's phone surveillance. A federal judge in New York upheld the phone sweeps last month, but the ACLU has appealed the ruling. Romero acknowledged that appeals judges might cite Obama's changes and not rule on the case.

There appeared to be some initial confusion about Congress' role in authorizing any changes. An administration official said Obama could codify the data transfer through an executive order, while some congressional aides said legislation would be required.

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., said he would introduce legislation to create a special Sen-

ate committee to examine the issues and exercise congressional oversight.

Congress would have to approve a proposal from the president that would establish a panel of outside attorneys who would consult with the secretive Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court on new legal issues that arise. The White House says the panel would advocate for privacy and civil liberties as the court weighed requests for accessing the phone records.

Kentucky Republican Sen. Rand Paul, a leading congressional civil liberties advocate, said he was disappointed in Obama's proposals.

"President Obama's announced solution to the NSA spying controversy is the same unconstitutional program with a new configuration," Paul said. "The American people should not expect the fox to guard the henhouse."

Many Democrats said the president made important reforms, but did not go far enough. "We will make sure that President Obama follows through on the promises he made today and will fight for further legal reforms to safeguard against indiscriminate,

bulk surveillance of everyday Americans," Rep. Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y., said in a statement.

However, Republican House Speaker John Boehner expressed more concern about eroding programs that he said have saved American lives. "Because the president has failed to adequately explain the necessity of these programs, the privacy concerns of some Americans are understandable. When considering any reforms, however, keeping Americans safe must remain our top priority," Boehner said in a statement.

The moves are more sweeping than many people had been anticipating. People close to the White House review process say Obama was still grappling with the key decisions on the phone record collections in the days leading up to Friday's speech.

Obama only briefly mentioned Snowden.

"The sensational way in which these disclosures have come out has often shed more heat than light, while revealing methods to our adversaries that could impact our operations in ways that we may not fully understand for years to come," Obama said.

2 Students Shot In Philly School Gym; Boy Held

BY MARYCLAIRE DALE
Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — A boy and a girl hanging out with a group of fellow students in a high school gym were shot and wounded Friday afternoon, and up to three boys may have been involved in the shooting, police said.

One boy fled and was captured near his home, and one or two other boys were being sought, they said.

The shooting happened at the Delaware Valley Charter High School in north Philadelphia around 3 p.m., authorities said.

Surveillance video shows a group of about seven students hanging around in the gym when the shooting happened, police Commissioner Charles Ramsey said. It was unclear if the shooting was accidental or intentional, but it "doesn't look like an active shooter type of situation," he said.

The wounded boy and girl each were shot in an arm, but it was unclear whether one or two shots were fired, Ramsey said. The wounded students, believed to be 15 years old, were taken to a hospital near the school, where they were listed in stable condition, police said.

The boy who was captured lives in south Philadelphia, miles away from the school, and may have driven or taken a bus home after the shooting, Ramsey said. No gun was recovered, he said.

"We have not found a gun, but there's two, perhaps three, youngsters that were together," Ramsey said.

"We're not sure which one fired. One of the ones that we



CHARLES FOX/PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER/MCT
Keisha Thompson, right, who has a son and daughter attending the Delaware Valley Charter High School in Philadelphia, hugs another woman following a shooting at the school, Friday.

have been part of that group." He said they were all boys and all students at the school.

Ramsey didn't know what staffing or security procedures were in place at the school but said "there was a breakdown in security of some kind" because the gun got into the building.

Former student Donte Jenkins, who graduated last year, said there were metal detectors at the entrance and he couldn't figure out how someone could have gotten in with a gun.

"It was always a safe environment," said Jenkins, 19. "It was never a bad environment. I don't know how this really happened."

The school was placed on lockdown and secured by SWAT officers checking each room. Students were searched and released one by

one. Terry Starks, an outreach supervisor for the gun control group Philadelphia CeaseFire, was outside the school Friday evening and was trying to contact his son, a student.

"I'm a gunshot victim so I already know how being shot affects the family," he said. "I feel bad for the mothers and the fathers of these children that got shot. ... Your heart drops."

A spokesman for the school district didn't immediately respond to a call seeking comment. The president of the charter school's board of trustees said he didn't have any additional information about the shooting, not the only U.S. school shooting this week.

Authorities said a seventh-grader opened fire Tuesday in a New Mexico middle school gym, wounding two classmates.

NC Abortion Ultrasound Law Illegal

GREENSBORO, N.C. (AP) — A North Carolina law requiring women who want an abortion to have an ultrasound and then have a medical provider describe the image to them is a violation of constitutional free-speech rights, a federal judge ruled Friday.

U.S. District Judge Catherine Eagles ruled that states don't have the power to force a health care provider to be the bearer of what she called an "ideological message in favor of carrying a pregnancy to term."

Eagles, who was nominated to the court by President Barack Obama, had put the law on hold a few months after the Republican-led state legislature passed it in 2011.

The law required abortion providers to place an ultrasound image next to a pregnant woman so she can view it, describe its features, and offer the patient the chance to listen to the heartbeat. The law required abortion providers to describe the dimensions of the embryo or fetus and the presence of external members and internal organs if they were present and viewable. The patient was not required to watch the display or listen to the explanation.

"The state has not established that the speech-and-display provision directly advances a substantial state interest in regulating health care, especially when the state does not require the patient to receive the message and the patient takes steps to avoid receipt of the message," Eagles wrote.

Executive Director South Dakota Wheat Commission
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