

Thousands Turn Backs At Cop Funeral

NEW YORK (AP) — Thousands of police turned their backs Sunday as Mayor Bill de Blasio eulogized an officer shot dead with his partner, repeating a stinging display of scorn for the mayor despite entreaties to put anger aside.

The show of disrespect came outside the funeral home where Officer Wenjian Liu was remembered as an incarnation of the American dream: a man who had emigrated from China at age 12 and devoted himself to helping others in his adopted country. The gesture among officers watching the mayor's speech on a screen added to tensions between the mayor and rank-and-file police even as he sought to quiet them.

"Let us move forward by strengthening the bonds that unite us, and let us work together to attain peace," de Blasio said at the funeral.

Liu, 32, had served as a policeman for seven years and was married just two months when he was killed with his partner, Officer Rafael Ramos, on Dec. 20. Liu's longtime aspiration to become a police officer deepened after the Sept. 11 terror attacks, his father, Wei Tang Liu, said through tears.

And as he finished his daily work, the only child would call to say: "I'm coming home today. You can stop worrying now," the father recalled during a service that blended police tradition with references to Buddha's teachings.

Young Survivor May Help Investigators

EDDYVILLE, Ky. (AP) — Sailor Gutzler, the 7-year-old girl who survived a plane crash, walked a mile through the cold, dark woods to safety and then helped authorities locate the wreckage and remains of her family, may not be done helping investigators.

National Transportation Safety Board investigator Heidi Moats said Sunday that Sailor is "one remarkable young lady," and she might be able to assist them in determining what brought the plane down. It is rare for someone to survive a small plane crash and Moats said they want to talk to Sailor about it.

"Having someone that is a witness (is) always helpful in the investigation, it gives us kind of a story line," Moats said.

It's not clear when investigators might talk to Sailor, who despite being bloodied and suffering a broken wrist, pulled herself from the wreckage and walked to the nearest home.

She was dressed for Florida, where her family had been visiting, and was wearing shorts, a short-sleeve shirt and only one sock when she found a home about a mile from the crash site. Authorities said she walked through thick woods and briar patches in near-freezing temperatures.

Congress Welcomes New Faces

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congress' approval rating hovers around 15 percent, but there's one group of people excited about the institution: the newly elected lawmakers who are about to join its ranks.

The House will welcome 58 freshmen this coming week, including 43 Republicans and 15 Democrats, pushing the GOP majority to 246 members, the most since the Great Depression.

In the Senate, 13 new lawmakers, all but one of them Republican, will be sworn in, flipping control of the chamber to the GOP with a 54-vote majority.

The incoming classes will bring new gender and racial diversity to Capitol Hill, with 104 women in the House and Senate and close to 100 black, Hispanic and Asian lawmakers. The newcomers include the youngest woman elected to Congress, 30-year-old Elise Stefanik of New York, and the first black Republican woman, Mia Love of Utah.

As the new members prepared to arrive on Capitol Hill, several said they brought hopes of curbing the often partisan atmosphere in Washington, showing the public that they really can govern and, just maybe, getting Congress' approval rating back up past 20 percent.

International Airport Boosts Its Power

LAS VEGAS (AP) — While the gadgets of the future are only just arriving in Las Vegas for the annual International CES show, officials at the city's main airport are updating a decades-old terminal to cater to legions of tech-savvy travelers.

By Friday at McCarran International Airport, a couple thousand outlets and USB ports under seats and inside bars and restaurants will be available for those looking for a power charge in Terminal 1 before heading home after the gadget convention.

The airport had already installed free airport-wide Wi-Fi ahead of the electronics show 10 years ago at a time when travelers had either a laptop or personal digital assistant, if that, and were at most checking e-mail or finishing up a PowerPoint presentation.

Now, there are movies to stream, virtual meetings to conduct, Internet games to play and books to download. More than 160,000 people attended the 2014 show, which takes over the Las Vegas Convention Center, the Sands Expo and several nearby hotels with more than 2 million square feet of exhibit space — or about 35 football fields.

Divers Resume Search For Victims

SURABAYA, Indonesia (AP) — The weather improved Monday and divers will attempt again to locate large objects on the ocean floor believed to be the fuselage of the AirAsia flight that crashed more than one week ago, killing all 162 on board.

At least five ships with equipment that can detect the plane's black boxes have been deployed to the area where the suspected plane parts were spotted, said Suryadi B. Supriyadi, Indonesia's National Search and Rescue director of operations.

"If it cannot be done by divers, we will use sophisticated equipment with capabilities of tracking underwater objects and then will lift them up," Supriyadi said.

Five large objects — the biggest measuring 18 meters (59 feet) long and 5.4 meters (18 feet) wide and believed to be the fuselage — have been detected, and Supriyadi repeated that officials expect that many passengers and crew will be found trapped inside.

Cuban Priests Welcome Closer US Ties

HAVANA (AP) — A group of Afro-Cuban Santeria priests said Saturday the path is clear for improved dialogue between the U.S. and Cuba following the government's announcement of plans to renew diplomatic ties.

The "babalawo" priests' annual "Letter of the Year" also foresaw dangers of epidemics, conflicts, environmental imbalances and the loss of religious or political leaders — general projections that have been common in past such Letters.

Lazaro Cuesta, one of the founders of the Commission of the Letter of the Year, said the planned restoration of ties, announced on Dec. 17, with the U.S. opens a period "of hope for all the world."

"Our Cuban brothers who are there (in the United States) will avoid being victims of the walls that separated us until yesterday," he said. "Those walls collapsed to create a bridge."

The commission represents about 1,000 babalawos and is independent of the government.

Another Santeria group, the government-recognized Yoruba Association issued its yearly message on Thursday. It did not mention ties with the U.S. and urged people to "avoid social indiscipline."

Santeria is a mix of Roman Catholicism and the African Yoruba tradition. The annual Letter is released each year around New Year's Day.

Trains Plus Crude Oil Equals Trouble Along The Tracks

BY CURTIS TATE

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TUSCALOOSA, Ala. — Every day, strings of black tank cars filled with crude oil roll slowly across a long wooden railroad bridge over the Black Warrior River.

The 116-year-old bridge is a landmark in this city of 95,000 people, home to the University of Alabama. Residents have proposed and gotten married next to the bridge. Children play under it. During Alabama football season, Crimson Tide fans set up camp in its shadow.

But with some timber pilings so badly rotted that you can stick your hand through them, and a combination of plywood, concrete and plastic pipe employed to patch up others, the bridge shows the limited ability of government and industry to manage the hidden risks of a sudden shift in energy production.

And it shows why communities nationwide are in danger.

"It may not happen today or tomorrow, but one day a town or a city is going to get wiped out," said Larry Mann, one of the foremost authorities on rail safety, who, as a legislative aide on Capitol Hill in 1970, was the principal author of the Federal Railroad Safety Act.

Almost overnight in 2010, trains began crisscrossing the country carrying an energy bounty that includes millions of gallons of crude oil and ethanol. Tens of thousands of tank cars and a 140,000-mile network of rail lines emerged as a practically way to move these commodities. But few thought to step back and take a hard look at the industry's readiness for the job.

Government and industry are playing catch-up with long-overdue safety improvements, like redesigning tank cars and rebuilding tracks and bridges.

Those efforts in the past year and a half may have saved lives and property in many communities. But they came too late for Lac-Megantic, Quebec, a lakeside resort town just across the Canadian border from Maine. A train derailed there on July 6, 2013, unleashing a torrent of burning crude oil into the town's center. Forty-seven people were killed.

"Sometimes it takes a disaster to get elected officials and agencies to address problems that were out there," said Rep. Michael Michaud, D-Maine, a member of the House subcommittee that oversees railroads, pipelines and hazardous materials.

Other subsequent but nonfatal derailments in Aliceville, Ala., Casselton, N.D., and Lynchburg, Va., followed a familiar pattern: huge fires and spills, large-scale evacuations and local officials furious that they hadn't been told beforehand of such shipments.

The U.S. Department of Transportation will issue new rules this month to govern the transportation of flammable liquids by rail.

"Safety is our top priority," said Kevin Thompson, a spokesman for the Federal Railroad Administration, "both in the rule-making and through other immediate actions we have taken over the last year and a half."

Nevertheless, there are other gaps



CURTIS TATE/MCCLATCHY DC/TNS
On April 30, 2014, a CSX train carrying Bakken crude oil derailed in downtown Lynchburg, Virginia. No one was injured or killed but three tank cars went into the James River, spilling 30,000 gallons of oil and igniting a fire.

in the oversight of transporting oil by rail:

- The Federal Railroad Administration entrusts bridge inspections to the railroads and doesn't keep data on their condition, unlike how its sister agency, the Federal Highway Administration, does so for road bridges.

- Most states don't employ dedicated railroad-bridge inspectors. Only California has begun developing a bridge-inspection program.

- The U.S. Department of Transportation concluded that crude oil from North Dakota's Bakken shale region posed an elevated risk in rail transport, so regulators required railroads to notify state officials of large shipments of Bakken crude. However, the requirement excluded other kinds of oil shipments by rail, including those from Canada, Texas, Wyoming, Colorado and Utah.

- While railroads and refiners are reserving the newest, sturdiest tank cars available for Bakken trains, they, too, have ruptured in derailments, and Bakken and other kinds of oil are likely to be moving around the country in a mix of older and newer cars for several more years.

U.S. railroads moved only 9,500 cars of crude oil in 2008 but more than 400,000 in 2013, according to industry figures. In the first seven months of 2014, trains carried 759,000 barrels a day on more than 200,000 cars — 8 percent of the country's oil production, according to the federal Energy Information Administration.

The energy boom, centered on North Dakota's Bakken region, was made possible by hydraulic fracturing, or fracking, a horizontal drilling method that unlocks oil and gas trapped in rock formations. It was also made possible by the nation's extensive rail system.

Crude by rail has become profitable for some of the world's richest men. Warren Buffett, the billionaire investor, bought BNSF Railway in 2009. It's since become the nation's leading hauler of crude oil in trains. Bill Gates, the Microsoft founder and philanthropist, is the largest shareholder in Canadian National, the only rail company that has a direct route from oil-rich western

Canada to the refinery-rich Gulf Coast.

Although the price of oil has fallen more than 50 percent since last January and rapidly in recent weeks, crude by rail shows few signs of slowing down. The six largest North American railroads reported hauling a record 38,775 carloads of petroleum in the second week of December.

"We anticipate that crude by rail is going to stay over the long term," said Kevin Birn, director at IHS Energy, an information and analysis firm and a co-author of a recent analysis of the trend.

Regulatory agencies and the rail industry may not have anticipated the sudden increase in crude oil moving by rail. However, government and industry had long known that most of the tank cars pressed into crude oil service had poor safety records. And after 180 years in business, U.S. railroads knew that track defects were a leading cause of derailments.

Railroads are taking corrective steps, including increased track inspections and reduced train speeds. They have endorsed stronger tank cars and funded more training for first responders.

Ed Greenberg, a spokesman for the Association of American Railroads, the industry's principal trade group, said railroads began a "top-to-bottom review" of their operations after the Quebec accident.

But the industry continues to resist other changes, including calls for more transparency. The dominant Eastern railroads, Norfolk Southern and CSX, sued Maryland to stop the state from releasing information about crude-oil trains.

The industry also seeks affirmation from the courts that only the federal government has the power to regulate railroads. The dominant Western carriers, BNSF and Union Pacific, joined by the Association of American Railroads, sued California over a state law that requires them to develop comprehensive oil spill-response plans.

The \$1.1 trillion spending bill Congress approved in December includes a requirement that the DOT issue its final rule by Jan. 15.

North Korea Blasts US For Sanctions Over Sony Attack

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea on Sunday criticized the United States for slapping sanctions on Pyongyang officials and organizations for a cyberattack on Sony Pictures — the latest fallout from a Hollywood movie depicting the fictional assassination of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un.

An unnamed spokesman for North Korea's Foreign Ministry, in rhetoric that closely mirrors past statements, denied any role in the breach of tens of thousands of confidential Sony emails and business files and accused the United States of "groundlessly" stirring up hostility toward Pyongyang. The spokesman said the new sanctions would not weaken the country's 1.2-million-strong military.

The spokesman told the North's official media mouthpiece, the Korean Central News Agency, that the sanctions show America's "inveterate repugnancy and hostility toward the DPRK," referring to the North's official name, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

"The policy persistently pursued by the U.S. to stifle the DPRK, groundlessly stirring up bad blood toward it, would only harden its will and resolution to defend the sovereignty of the country," the spokesman said.

The United States on Friday sanctioned 10 North Korean government officials and three organizations, including Pyongyang's primary intelligence agency and

state-run arms dealer, in what the White House described as an opening move in the response toward the Sony cyberattack.

The sanctions might have only a limited effect, as North Korea already is under tough U.S. and international sanctions over its nuclear and missile programs. President Barack Obama also warned Pyongyang that the United States was considering whether to put North Korea back on its list of state sponsors of terrorism, which could jeopardize aid to the country on a global scale.

American officials portrayed the sanctions as a swift, decisive response to North Korean behavior that they said had gone far over the line. Never before has the U.S. imposed sanctions on another nation in direct retaliation for a cyberattack on an American company.

There have been doubts in the cyber community, however, about the extent of North Korea's involvement. Many experts have said it's possible that hackers or even Sony insiders could be the culprits, and questioned how the FBI can point the finger so conclusively.

Sen. Robert Menendez of New Jersey, the outgoing chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said the sanctions announced Friday were "a good first step" but didn't go far enough.

Menendez told CNN's "State of the Union" on Sunday that he had written to

Secretary of State John Kerry, urging him to consider putting North Korea back on the list of state sponsors of terrorism, "which would have far more pervasive consequences."

The 10 North Koreans singled out for sanctions didn't necessarily have anything to do with the attack on Sony, senior U.S. officials said. Anyone who works for or helps North Korea's government is now fair game, especially North Korea's defense sector and spying operations, they said.

North Korea has expressed fury over "The Interview," an anti-Pyongyang Sony comedy starring Seth Rogen and James Franco. It has denied hacking Sony, but called the act a "righteous deed."

Sony initially decided to call off the film's release after movie theaters decided not to show the film. After Obama criticized that decision, Sony released the movie in limited theaters and online.

Questions remain about who was behind a nearly 10-hour recent shutdown of North Korean websites. The United States never said whether it was responsible, but North Korea's powerful National Defense Commission blamed the U.S. and hurled racial slurs at Obama, calling him a reckless "monkey in a tropical forest."

Such hateful comments are not new: Pyongyang has similarly attacked other U.S. officials and called South Korea's female president a prostitute.

Nuclear Talks A Matter Of Heart

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said Sunday that ongoing nuclear negotiations with world powers are a matter of "heart," not just centrifuges ahead of talks next week in Geneva.

Speaking to an economic conference in Tehran, Rouhani both countered hard-line critics worried Iran will give up too much while also attempting to signal his administration remains open to negotiation with the six-nation group leading the talks.

"If we are ready to stop some types of enrichment which we do not need at this time, does it mean we have compromised our principles and cause?" Rouhani asked.

He responded: "Our cause is not linked to a centrifuge. It is connected to our heart and to our willpower."

On Jan. 15, Iranian negotiators will meet in Geneva with officials from the U.S., Russia, China, Britain, France and Germany, hoping to hammer details out of a final deal. Iran reached an interim, one-year deal with world powers in November 2013 to freeze its nuclear program in exchange for the easing of some sanctions. Negotiators later agreed to extend talks until June 30, with hopes of reaching a rough deal in March.