

White House Threatens To Veto Pipeline Bill

BY DINA CAPIELLO
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The White House on Tuesday threatened to veto the first piece of legislation introduced in the Republican-controlled Senate, a bill approving the much-delayed Keystone XL oil pipeline, in what was expected to be the first of many confrontations over energy and environmental policy.

Hours after supporters of the bipartisan bill, which is sponsored by all 54 Senate Republicans and six Democrats, announced its introduction, the White House said for the first time that President Barack Obama would veto it.

"If this bill passes this Congress, the president wouldn't sign it," White House spokesman Josh Earnest said Tuesday, saying legis-



Obama

lation shouldn't undermine the review process underway at the State Department or circumvent a pending lawsuit in Nebraska over its route.

It's "premature to evaluate the project before something as basic as the route of the pipeline has been determined," he said.

The two main sponsors, Sen. Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., and Sen. John Hoeven, R-N.D., said Tuesday morning they had enough votes to overcome a filibuster of the bill but not a presidential veto. Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, in one of his first acts, moved to put it directly on the Senate calendar. The House is expected to vote and pass a bill approving the \$5.4 billion

project, which was first proposed in 2008, on Friday.

"The President threatening to veto the first bipartisan infrastructure bill of the new Congress must come as a shock to the American people who spoke loudly in November in favor of bipartisan accomplishments," McConnell said.

Hoeven said if the president chooses to veto the bill, he would work to attach it to a broader energy package or must-pass spending bills.

Manchin, whose office reached out to the White House earlier in the day, told reporters the veto threat was a surprise that "slapped down" a bipartisan effort before it even got started.

"It's just wrong. It's just not the way you do business," said Manchin, the only Democrat remaining in the West Virginia delegation. "If this is

the start of things, it is a sad beginning."

The bill is identical to one that failed to pass the Senate by a single vote in November, when Democrats were in control and Sen. Mary Landrieu of Louisiana pushed for a vote to save her Senate seat. She lost to Republican Rep. Bill Cassidy, who sponsored the successful House bill approving the pipeline.

But now the odds of passage are much improved with the Republican takeover of the Senate. The bill will also test Republicans' commitment to more open debate. Hoeven and Manchin said they welcomed additions to the bill, which they hoped would increase support.

In a letter to Democrats from their leadership obtained by the AP, Sen. Chuck Schumer of New York and Sen. Debbie Stabenow of Michigan said the Keystone bill was "the first opportunity to demonstrate that we will

be united, energetic and effective in offering amendments that create a clear contrast with the Republican majority."

Among the ideas suggested in the letter were measures to prohibit exporting the oil abroad, to ensure American iron, steel and other goods were used in the pipeline's construction and to match every job created by the pipeline with an investment in clean energy.

In recent months, Obama has been increasingly critical of the project, and has resisted prior efforts to fast-track the process. At his year-end news conference, Obama said the pipeline would benefit Canadian oil companies but would not be a huge benefit to American consumers, who are already seeing low prices at the pump thanks to oil prices, which on Monday dipped to a nearly six-year low and were sharply down again Tuesday.

Bomber's Sentence Depends On Jury

BOSTON (AP) — To try to save him from the death penalty in the Boston Marathon bombing, Dzhokhar Tsarnaev's lawyers will probably look for jurors who are intellectually curious and eager to learn about other cultures and religions.

Prosecutors, in turn, will not doubt try to pick conservative, patriotic types who have steady work habits, have lived comfortable lives and are particularly sensitive to the randomness of the terror attack.

Such is the conventional wisdom among jury consultants and other legal experts who say the question of whether Tsarnaev receives a death sentence will be all but decided during jury selection.

Tsarnaev, 21, is accused of taking part in the twin bombing at the finish line of the race on April 15, 2013, killing three people and wounding more than 260. He is also charged in the slaying of an MIT police officer.

Prosecutors say Dzhokhar and his brother, Tamerlan — ethnic Chechens who had lived in the United States for about a decade — carried out the attack in retaliation for U.S. wars in Muslim countries. Tamerlan, 26, died in a gunbattle with police days after the bombing.

Obama Pledges Against Violence, Drugs

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama pledged to stand with Mexico against "the scourge of violence and the drug cartels" as he met Tuesday with President Enrique Pena Nieto amid concern over the unsolved abduction of 43 Mexican college students last September.

Protesters in front of the White House questioned what happened to the students who are presumed dead, allegedly at the hands of local officials and police in league with a drug cartel. The dozens gathered in the city's first winter snowfall were a smaller version of the massive street protests that have occurred in Mexico calling for Pena Nieto's resignation.

The case has come to signify an engrained abuse of authority and corruption in Mexico, and sparked indignation that federal authorities took 10 days to intervene. Pena Nieto has drawn criticism for saying it was time to "move beyond" the case just weeks after their abduction and taking a month to meet with their families.

Obama was under pressure from groups including Human Rights Watch and the AFL-CIO to press Pena Nieto to take the case more seriously. Mexican officials initially said they did not expect Obama to raise it, but he did by pledging U.S. support.

Obama told reporters in the Oval Office that Americans have been following the "tragic events surrounding the students whose lives were lost." He said Pena Nieto described reforms he's initiated around the issues that were raised.

Shiite Militias Try To Keep Sunnis Out

RAWASHID, Iraq (AP) — Sunni residents of this tiny village north of Baghdad are all gone. Their homes now have Shiite graffiti scrawled on the walls. Shiite banners, many emblazoned with images of revered saints, are hoisted on the roofs.

The only people here now are Shiite fighters, who nearly two weeks ago helped Iraqi forces wrest the town from the Islamic State group. Outside one of the homes the fighters have occupied, their leader sat with his men on a recent day, warming themselves by a fire where tea brewed.

He made it clear: They have no intention of allowing the Sunnis back, accusing them of supporting the extremists.

"If we allow the residents of this village to return to their homes, they will do it all over again to us," said Adnan Hassan, 59. The militants used the village to fire mortars at the nearby, mainly Shiite city of Balad — and they still hold villages only a few miles away.

"These are our lands. They were taken away from us centuries ago," he told The Associated Press, pointing to the orchards and lush farmlands surrounding the village's relatively affluent homes.

Slaves Freed From South Korean Farms

MOKPO, South Korea (AP) — Life as a salt-farm slave was so bad Kim Jong-seok sometimes fantasized about killing the owner who beat him daily. Freedom, he says, has been worse.

In the year since police emancipated the severely mentally disabled man from the remote island farm where he had worked for eight years, Kim has lived in a grim homeless shelter, where he has been preyed upon and robbed by other residents. He has no friends, no job training prospects or counseling, and feels confined and deeply bored.

"I want to go back," Kim, 41, said during a recent interview in the shelter near Mokpo, the southwestern mainland port that is the gateway to dozens of salt islands where a months-long investigation by The Associated Press found that slavery still thrives, an open secret among locals.

"I feel trapped here," he said. Kim's plight illustrates the continuing failure of one of Asia's richest countries to help workers who have been enslaved on the farms — often people with mental or physical disabilities. Three other disabled ex-slaves also told the AP that they wanted to return to the salt farms because of their misery and sense of aimlessness in the crowded homeless shelters that officials placed them in.

Divers Search For Plane Wreckage

PANGKALAN BUN, Indonesia (AP) — At least two divers plunged into the choppy waters early Wednesday during a break in the bad weather to search for two large objects suspected of being chunks of the fuselage of the AirAsia plane that crashed more than one week ago, an Indonesian official said.

A U.S. Navy ship, the USS Fort Worth, detected the latest two objects on Tuesday at a depth of 28 meters (92 feet) near the Karimata Strait off Indonesia.

"We will start to identify the wreckage, which appears to be part of the jet's body, as quickly as possible," Indonesian search and rescue operation coordinator Tatang Zainudin said, adding that teams equipped with a remote-operated vehicle will also try to capture images of the objects.

So far, seven objects suspected to be parts of the plane have been detected by sonar on the ocean floor, but strong currents, silt and mud have kept divers from seeing or reaching them.

Florida Could Become The Deep South's Prime Gay Wedding Destination

BY JASON DEAREN AND
MELISSA NELSON-GABRIEL
Associated Press

YULEE, Fla. — With gay marriage now legal in Florida, same-sex couples from around the Deep South crossed the border Tuesday as the Sunshine State became a prime regional destination for gay and lesbian weddings still banned back home.

Out-of-state couples lined up outside county courthouses early Tuesday in the Panhandle and northern Florida counties. Some drove for hours to get marriage licenses at the first opportunity.

"As soon as we heard about the ruling we pretty much decided on a whim to come yesterday," said Scott Singletary, 22. "We wanted to make sure to do it as soon as possible, in case (the law) changed."

On that point, Florida's gay and lesbian weddings seem more secure than the first same-sex nuptials held years ago in other states.

The U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear a request by Florida Attorney General Pam Bondi to maintain the state's marriage ban until a final resolution. After she was sworn in to a second term on Tuesday, Bondi said her top attorneys are reviewing whether to continue the state's appeal.

Singletary and Dustyn Batten, 23, of Waycross, Georgia, woke before dawn to make the nearly two-hour drive into Florida's Nassau County. They had been planning a commitment ceremony in Jacksonville, but were thrilled to learn they could actually get married now that Florida's gay marriage ban was lifted.

Walt Disney World and other top Florida destinations



JOE CAVARETTA/SUN SENTINEL/TNS

Broward County Judge Kathleen McHugh marries Melissa Keller, left, and Joanne Stiger of Pembroke Pines just after midnight, at the Broward County Courthouse in Fort Lauderdale, Fla. The couple became the first gay couple to marry in Broward County.

have offered commitment ceremony packages for years, but wedding planners and hotels and resorts are sensing a new tourism boom with more couples wanting weddings.

"I've been fielding a ton of calls from out of state," said Rachel McMurray, a licensed wedding officiant who married a lesbian couple on Jacksonville's courthouse steps Tuesday. "Even if their state doesn't recognize the marriage, it gives them a sense of legitimacy."

"My phone's been blowing up," said Shanie McCowen, who owns Rainbow Bells, a wedding planning company in Boca Raton. She said she normally gets four or five wedding inquiries a week, but fielded about 30 on Sunday and Monday alone, and now expects

more business from Georgia and Alabama.

County tourism boards have already changed their advertising: "Finally we all do" is the headline on Broward's tourism home page, over a picture of a gay couple in wedding attire on the beach.

Thirty-six states, including 70 percent of the nation's population, now allow gay marriage. From South Carolina up the East Coast, court rulings and legislatures have gradually opened the door to same-sex weddings.

Not so in the rest of the South: Gays and lesbians are still denied marriage rights in a swath of states from Texas to Georgia as well as Arkansas, Missouri, Kentucky and Tennessee.

Robert Lewis, 70, and

Duber Gomez-Fonseca, 37, together for nine years, rolled in from Jackson, Mississippi, to wed, even though their home state won't recognize their bond. "Hopefully it will just be a matter of months before all 50 states do this," Lewis said as they joined dozens of couples outside the Escambia County courthouse in Florida's Panhandle.

St. Petersburg already hosts the largest gay pride parade south of Atlanta, but tourism officials are seeing an increase in hotels and resorts offering gay wedding packages there. David Downing, interim executive director of Visit St. Pete Clearwater, said that LGBT "imagery" has been blended into ad campaigns they run in New York and Chicago.



Drop in Corn Prices Due to Trade Disruption with China

If you lost corn profits, you will want to read this.

The drop in corn prices due to disruptions in international trade has affected every corn grower in America. If you suffered loss in your corn profits, please join our friends and agricultural professionals at one of our Town Hall meetings listed below. Many of our neighbors will be there, along with local lawyers to answer your questions and offer a solution to recovering your losses. We know you'll want to be a part of that discussion. Your opinions are welcomed, and we look forward to seeing you there. Snacks and beverages will be provided at no charge.

• Corn Growers - Town Hall Meeting Schedule •

Thursday - January 8
8 am
Chrome Country Inn
211 US 18 in Algona, IA

10:30 am
Softtail Saloon
8111 1st Avenue in Superior, IA

3 pm
Kings Pointe
1520 E. Lakeshore Dr., Storm Lake, IA

6:30 pm
Golden Pheasant
44028 Iowa highway 3 in Remsen, IA

Friday - January 9
8 am
Best Western - Minerva's
1607 SD50 in Yankton, SD

8 am
Ramada Inn
1525 W. Havens in Mitchell, SD

11 am
Best Western
2000 Dakota Ave S. in Huron, SD

1 pm
McCrorry Gardens
632 22d Ave. in Brookings, SD

Friday - January 9
2 pm
The Depot
715 3rd Street West in Redfield, SD

5 pm
Ramada Inn
2727 6th Ave. SE in Aberdeen, SD

5 pm
Ramada Inn
1500 E. College Drive in Marshall, MN

Saturday - January 10
8 am
Jubba's
219 South Main St. in Blue Earth, MN

11 am
AmericInn
240 Stadium Road in Mankato, MN

Check us out online:
www.LostCornIncome.com

These Town Hall events have been scheduled and are sponsored by your neighboring agricultural professionals:

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Yankton, SD 57078
605-665-0574

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