

State Of The Union

Obama To Make Middle-Class Pitch In Speech

BY JULIE PACE
AP White House Correspondent



Obama

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama is turning to his biggest television audience of the year to pitch tax increases on the wealthiest Americans and put the new Republican Congress in the position of defending top income earners over the middle class.

As Obama continues to signal what he will propose during Tuesday's State of the Union address, senior administration officials said during the weekend that he will call for raising the capital gains rate on top income earners and eliminating a tax break on inheritances. The revenue generated by those changes would fund new tax credits and other cost-saving measures for middle-class taxpayers, officials said.

Tax increases are rarely welcomed by congressional Republicans, who now hold majorities in the House and the Senate for the first time in Obama's presidency. Obama's tax proposals will likely be dismissed, if not outright ignored, by lawmakers outside the Democratic Party's liberal base.

"Are they going to agree on everything? Absolutely not. I think we should have a debate in this country between middle class economics and trickle-down economics and see if we can come to an agreement on the things we do agree on," White House senior adviser Dan Pfeiffer said Sunday on CBS's "Face the Nation." He

said the theme of the speech would be "middle-class economics."

Rep. Adam Kinzinger, R-Ill., said he had heard all five of President Barack Obama's State of the Union addresses, which are filled with proposals both good and bad. But he said the president has fallen short by failing to establish close ties to Congress.

"He's never reached out to Congress and Democrats will tell you the same thing. You can't get your proposals done unless you're willing to have a relationship with an important branch of government," Kinzinger said on ABC's "This Week."

Obama also is expected to call for lawmakers to make community college free for many students, increase paid leave for workers and enact broad cybersecurity rules. Administration officials disclosed details on

the tax proposals on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the proposals by name ahead of the president's speech.

The centerpiece of the president's tax proposal is an increase in the capital gains rate on couples making more than \$500,000 per year to 28 percent, the same level as under President Ronald Reagan. The top capital gains rate has already been raised from 15 percent to 23.8 percent during Obama's presidency.

Obama also wants to close what the administration is calling the "trust fund loophole," a change that would require estates to pay capital gains taxes on securities at the time they're inherited. Officials said the overwhelming impact of the change would be on the top 1 percent of income earners.

While GOP leaders have said they share Obama's desire to reform the nation's complicated tax code, the party has long been opposed to many of the proposals the president will outline Tuesday. For example, most Republicans want to lower or eliminate the capital gains tax and similarly want to end taxes on estates, not expand them.

Administration officials pointed to a third proposal from the president as one they hope Republicans would support: a fee on the roughly 100 U.S. financial firms with assets of more than \$50 billion. Officials said the fee is similar to a proposal from former Republican Rep. Dave Camp of Michigan, who led the tax-writing Ways and Means Committee. Camp's plan, however, was part of a larger proposal to lower the overall corporate income tax rate.

Ukraine Vows To Reassert Control

KIEV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine's president vowed Sunday to reassert government control over eastern regions as the army unleashed a counter-offensive against Russian-backed separatist fighters vying for command over the airport in the city of Donetsk.

The separatist stronghold was shaken by intense outgoing and incoming artillery fire over the weekend as a bitter battle rages for the air terminal and surrounding areas.

Streets in Donetsk, which was home to 1 million people before unrest erupted in spring, were completely deserted Sunday and the windows of apartments in the center were rattled by incessant rocket and mortar fire.

The warring sides exchanged rocket fire along several points in the roughly 350-kilometer (220-mile) front line.

Regional authorities loyal to the government said two children, aged 7 and 16, were killed when a rebel shell hit their home in Vuhlehirsk, a town 75 kilometers (45 miles) northeast of Donetsk.

Hezbollah Official: Israeli Strikes Kill 6

BEIRUT (AP) — An Israeli strike in Syria on Sunday killed the son of a slain top Hezbollah commander and at least five other fighters in a move that could ratchet up tensions with the powerful Lebanese Shiite movement, which recently boasted of rockets that can hit any part of the Jewish state.

Hezbollah militants in towns and villages along the border with Israel went on high alert, said an official from the group. In the Shiite-dominated areas of south Lebanon and Beirut, the streets emptied quickly as residents feared an escalation. Hezbollah-run al-Manar TV warned that Israel was "playing with fire that puts the security of the whole Middle East on edge."

In a statement issued to the media, Hezbollah identified one of the six slain men as Jihad Mughniyeh, the son of Imad Mughniyeh, a top Hezbollah operative assassinated in 2008 in Damascus. Hezbollah blames Israel for the killing and has long vowed to avenge his death.

The younger Mughniyeh is one of the most prominent Hezbollah officials to die in Syria since the group entered the fray in 2012, fighting alongside President Bashar Assad's forces against the Sunni-led rebellion.

The dead also included another senior Hezbollah commander, Mohammed Issa, and at least one Iranian national with the group, the statement said.

Fallujah Still Under ISIS Control

BAGHDAD (AP) — Nearly every night for a year, mortar and sniper fire from Islamic State group militants has pinned down outgunned Iraqi troops on the edge of Fallujah.

The city, the first to fall to the Sunni extremists a year ago this month, exemplifies the lack of progress in Iraq's war against the Islamic State group, which holds a third of the country. U.S.-led airstrikes and Iranian aid have helped Iraqi troops, militiamen and Kurdish fighters take back bits around Islamic State-held territory, but recapturing it all remains far out of reach.

"We are constantly on alert and don't sleep very much," said Saad al-Sudani, an Iraqi soldier among the beleaguered troops outside of Fallujah. "We are waiting for any kind of support."

The fall of Fallujah in January 2014 started the Islamic State group's dramatic blitz across Iraq. In June, the extremists captured Iraq's second-largest city, Mosul, then swept south toward Baghdad in a march that put almost all the Sunni-majority regions of northern and western Iraq into its hands. The Iraqi military crumbled, with troops often dropping their weapons and fleeing.

A year later, the extremists still rule Fallujah, which saw some of the heaviest fighting of the U.S.-led war of 2003.

ISIS Releases 200 Yazidis In Iraq

ALTON KUPRI, Iraq (AP) — The Islamic State group released about 200 Yazidis held for five months in Iraq, mostly elderly, infirm captives who likely slowed the extremists down, Kurdish military officials said Sunday.

Almost all of the freed prisoners are in poor health and bore signs of abuse and neglect. Three were young children. The former captives were being questioned and receiving medical treatment on Sunday in the town of Alton Kupri.

Gen. Shirko Fatih, commander of Kurdish peshmerga forces in the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk, said it appears the militants released the prisoners because they were too much of a burden.

"It probably became too expensive to feed them and care for them," he said.

Tens of thousands of Yazidis fled in August when the Islamic State group captured the northern Iraqi town of Sinjar, near the Syrian border. But hundreds were taken captive by the group, with some Yazidi women forced into slavery, according to international rights groups and Iraqi officials.

Record 6 Million Attend Manila Mass

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — A crowd estimated at a record 6 million people by officials poured into Manila's rain-soaked streets and its biggest park Sunday as Pope Francis ended his Asian pilgrimage with an appeal for Filipinos to protect their young from sin and vice so they can instead become missionaries of the faith.

The crowd estimate, which could not be independently verified, included people who attended the pope's final Mass in Rizal Park and surrounding areas, and lined his motorcade route, said the chairman of the Metropolitan Manila Development Authority, Francis Tolentino.

The Vatican spokesman, the Rev. Federico Lombardi, said the Vatican had received the figure officially from local authorities and that it was a record, surpassing the 5 million who turned out for St. John Paul II's final Mass in the same park in 1995.

Francis dedicated the final homily of his weeklong Asia trip, which began in Sri Lanka, to children, given that the Mass fell on an important feast day honoring the infant Jesus. His focus was a reflection of the importance that the Vatican places on Asia as the future of the church since it's one of the few places where Catholic numbers are growing — and on the Philippines as the largest Catholic nation in the region.

"We need to see each child as a gift to be welcomed, cherished and protected," Francis said in his homily. "And we need to care for our young people, not allowing them to be robbed of hope and condemned to a life on the streets."



E. JASON WAMBSGANS/ CHICAGO TRIBUNE/TNS

A mother coyote on the sidewalk of the 1300 block of Larrabee Street in Chicago.

Coyotes Finding New Home In Downtown Chicago

BY DAWN RHODES

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CHICAGO — Coyotes usually try to avoid human contact.

Yet animal experts say an increasing number of coyotes are setting up shop in one of most dense urban labyrinths: downtown Chicago.

The seemingly incongruous marriage between coyotes and a people-packed habitat has occurred naturally, according to Stan Gehrt, an Ohio State University professor who specializes in coyote research in Cook County, which includes Chicago. Gehrt said he and his team know of no deliberate efforts to release coyotes into the downtown area.

"They're all homegrown coyotes, all born and bred in Chicago," Gehrt said.

Gehrt, who runs the Urban Coyote Research program, said the coyote population swelled tenfold during the 1990s. Coyotes are very territorial and only will tolerate so many living in a certain area. So some animals simply were pushed out of the suburbs and had no option but to live in the city, without the benefits of the wooded areas and semihidden corridors they favor.

Gehrt estimates that around 2,000 coyotes call downtown Chicago home, but it's likely more than that. He says they are thriving in what was considered a less-than-ideal living situation.

"Once they got there, they experienced higher reproduction, more food, and so now they have no reason to leave," he said. "People think animals living in that habitat are less fit or sick, and the opposite is actually true."

No Plea Deal Likely In Boston Marathon Bombing Case

BY ERIC TUCKER

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The focus of the Boston Marathon bombing trial figures to be as much on what punishment Dzhokhar Tsarnaev could face as on his responsibility for the attack.

With testimony expected to start later this month, the Justice Department has given no indication it is open to any proposal from the defense to spare Tsarnaev's life, pushing instead toward a trial that could result in a death sentence for the 21-year-old defendant.

In a deadly terror case that killed three people, including a child, and jolted the city, there may be little incentive for prosecutors who believe they have incontrovertible evidence to negotiate away their ability to seek the maximum penalty possible.

"There would be now, in my judgment, no reason for the government to reverse course and not let 12 citizens decide if the death penalty is appropriate," said Larry Mackey, a former Justice Department prosecutor involved

in the case of Oklahoma City bomber Timothy McVeigh, who was executed in 2001.

The prospect of a death sentence, a rare punishment in the federal system, raises the stakes of a trial that will revisit in gory detail the 2013 attack that also injured more than 260. Should the jury find Tsarnaev guilty, it would then decide in a separate penalty phase whether he should be sentenced to death. Jury selection is underway and the judge has said he hopes to begin testimony on Jan. 26.

Only three federal inmates, including McVeigh, have been put to death since 2001. Recent botched executions at the state level have placed the practice under scrutiny, with President Barack Obama directing the Justice Department last year to investigate how the death penalty is applied across the nation.

Despite his own personal reservations about the death penalty, Attorney General Eric Holder says the government is committed to seeking that punishment for Tsarnaev. Prosecutors have cited factors including a "lack of remorse," the evident premeditation involved in the attack and allegations that Tsarnaev also

killed an MIT police officer after the bombing that left an 8-year-old boy dead.

"The nature of the conduct at issue and the resultant harm compel this decision," Holder said in a statement last January.

There has been no indication the government has wavered in that decision, even though one of Tsarnaev's lawyers, Judy Clarke, has gotten prosecutors to spare the lives of multiple high-profile killers, including Unabomber Ted Kaczynski, Olympic Park bomber Eric Rudolph and Jared Loughner, who killed six people and wounded former U.S. Rep. Gabrielle Giffords.

Police Release 3 In French Terror Probe

BY GREG KELLER

Associated Press

PARIS — French police have released three female suspects from questioning, but will keep nine other people in custody as part of an anti-terror investigation connected to last week's attacks in Paris that have put Europe on high alert, officials said Sunday.

Amid the heightened European vigilance, a far-right rally in Germany planned for Monday was cancelled over a terrorism threat, Italy said it had expelled nine suspected jihadists since late December and Britain's home secretary called for new action to fight anti-Semitism in the wake of the Paris attacks.

Authorities in Belgium, meanwhile, asked Greek counterparts to extradite a man detained in Greece a day earlier in connection with a probe of a suspected plot to kill police in Belgium. On Thursday, Belgian police led a vast anti-terrorism sweep in and around Brussels and in eastern Flanders, which left two suspects dead. Authorities cited an imminent threat.

Police in at least four European countries arrested dozens of suspects in recent days in an anti-terrorism crackdown sparked by last week's bloody rampage in and around Paris. Brothers Said and Cherif Kouachi and their friend, Amedy Coulibaly, killed 17 people at the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*, a kosher grocery and elsewhere.

In Paris, prosecutor's office spokesman Denis Fauriat said nine suspects among a total 12 rounded up on Friday were facing extended interrogations for the next two days, a step allowed under tough French anti-terror laws enacted largely after bombings and other terrorism years ago in France.

The nine — eight men and a woman — were being held in a probe centering on possible logistical support given to Coulibaly. Belgian authorities say there was no apparent link between the foiled plot in Belgium and the terror attacks in Paris.

Fallout from the Paris attacks has spread. Demonstrations in support of the slain *Charlie Hebdo* journalists have been held in countries from the United States to Brazil, and violent protests against the magazine's depictions of the Prophet Muhammad have

TERROR | PAGE 18

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