

# Obama Celebrates July 4th At White House Barbecue

BY NATASHA T. METZLER  
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Calling the Declaration of Independence more than words on an aging parchment, President Barack Obama marked the Fourth of July on Sunday by urging Americans to live the principles that founded the nation as well as celebrate them.

"This is the day when we celebrate the very essence of

America and the spirit that has defined us as a people and as a nation for more than two centuries," Obama told guests at a South Lawn barbecue honoring service members and their families.

"We celebrate the principles that are timeless, tenets first declared by men of property and wealth but which gave rise to what Lincoln called a new birth of freedom in America — civil rights and voting rights, work-

ers' rights and women's rights, and the rights of every American," he said. "And on this day that is uniquely American we are reminded that our Declaration, our example, made us a beacon to the world."

Obama noted that people across the country were firing up their barbecues and enjoying the company of family and friends.

"Now, of course I'll admit that the backyard's a little bigger

here, but it's the same spirit," Obama said to laughter.

"Michelle and I couldn't imagine a better way to celebrate America's birthday than with America's extraordinary men and women in uniform and their families."

With first lady Michelle Obama at his side, Obama spoke from a White House balcony overlooking the South Lawn. The estimated 1,200 guests included active-duty members of the mili-

tary and their families, wounded troops, people with family members overseas, and families of troops who have died.

"Today we also celebrate all of you, the men and women of our armed forces, who defend this country we love," he told the enthusiastic group.

Sections of the crowd screamed and cheered in turn as Obama individually thanked each service branch, naming an exemplary member of each who

stood on the balcony with the president and first lady.

Obama, who wore a blue short-sleeve shirt, and his wife spent about 15 minutes shaking hands and exchanging greetings with eager members of the crowd, who pressed in to shake hands and take photos. Many of the children on hand had red, white and blue face paint and sparkly American flags decorating their skin.

## NATION/WORLD DIGEST

### Suicide Bombers Hit 2 Iraqi Cities

BAGHDAD (AP) — Vice President Joe Biden urged rival Iraqi politicians Sunday to end months of delays and select new leaders for their wobbly democracy, predicting a peaceful transition of power even as suicide bombers struck government centers in two major cities.

The attacks in Mosul and Ramadi underscored persistent fears that insurgents will exploit Iraq's political uncertainty to stoke widespread sectarian violence. Four people were killed and 25 injured in the two blasts that occurred hundreds of miles apart.

The twin explosions on the Fourth of July illustrated the vexing nature of the U.S. involvement in Iraq and its efforts to nudge the country toward stability and democracy.

At least five mortar rounds also fell in the Green Zone late Sunday when Biden was there, said Iraqi police officials. The Green Zone is the sprawling protected area in the heart of Baghdad that is home to the U.S. Embassy as well as the Iraqi parliament and prime minister's office.

There were no reported casualties, said the officials, who did not want to be identified because they were not authorized to speak to reporters. Mortars and rockets are periodically fired into the Green Zone but rarely result in casualties or damage.

### Winds Delay Oil Spill Cleanup Efforts

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Cleanup crews across the Gulf of Mexico surveyed damage done by last week's hurricane while contending Sunday with choppy seas that idled many of the boats dedicated to keeping oil from hitting vulnerable beaches and marshes.

Offshore skimming vessels were able to operate in Louisiana waters, but not off the coasts of Alabama, Mississippi and Florida, officials said.

"We've got our guys out there and they're docked and ready, but safety is a huge concern for us, especially with the smaller vessels," said Courtnee Ferguson, a spokeswoman for the Joint Information Command in Mobile, Ala.

The offshore skimming in those states has essentially been curtailed for nearly a week, thanks to weather generated earlier by Hurricane Alex, even though it was never closer than 500 miles or so to the spill.

On Sunday, huge barges used to collect oil from skimming vessels were parked at the mouth of Mobile Bay, waiting for conditions to subside as waves rose to about 5 feet high offshore.

### Komorowski Likely New Polish Pres.

WARSAW, Poland (AP) — Interim president Bronislaw Komorowski appeared to have held off a last-minute surge from the identical twin brother of the late president, who died in an April plane crash that shocked the country and forced Sunday's early election.

Exit polls showed Komorowski with a slight edge over Jaroslaw Kaczynski, who essentially conceded defeat in the presidential run-off by declaring before supporters, "I congratulate the winner."

A poll released Sunday by the TNS OBOP institute predicted Komorowski winning 53.1 percent of the vote, and Kaczynski winning 46.9 percent. A separate poll, by Millward Brown SMG/KRC, shows Komorowski with nearly 52 percent and Kaczynski with just over 48 percent.

The exit polls have a small margin of error, and official results are not expected until Monday.

Komorowski, who wants to smooth the way for the government to continue privatizing state-run companies and trim welfare benefits, didn't formally claim victory, noting that the votes were still being counted.

### 5 Killed In Tex. Air Ambulance Crash

ALPINE, Texas (AP) — An air ambulance crashed shortly after takeoff from a West Texas airport Sunday, killing all five people on board.

The crash happened about 12:15 a.m. about a mile east of Alpine-Casparis Municipal Airport, about 200 miles southeast of El Paso. The twin-engine Cessna 421 had just taken off for Midland International Airport in Midland, when it went down in an open area, according to the Federal Aviation Administration.

The aircraft was carrying a patient and his wife to Midland, the Texas Department of Public Safety said. It identified the dead as 78-year-old patient Guy Richard Folger of Alpine, his 59-year-old wife, Mary Folger; two flight nurses, 49-year-old Sharon Falkener of Fort Davis, and 42-year-old Tracy Chambers of Alpine; and 59-year-old pilot Ted Caffare of Beaumont.

Caffare was apparently trying to make an emergency landing when the plane hit a rut in the muddy field, overturned and burned, the DPS said.

The FAA listed the aircraft as registered to O'Hara Flying Service II LP of Amarillo. Company owner Denny O'Hara declined to comment to The Associated Press.

### McCain: Steele Must Assess Future

WASHINGTON (AP) — The embattled head of the GOP isn't getting an endorsement from Sen. John McCain.

McCain says party chairman Michael Steele's recent comments about the Afghanistan war are "wildly inaccurate" and inexcusable.

The Arizona Republican says Steele needs to assess whether he can still function in his job and must make "an appropriate decision" about his future.

At a recent GOP fundraiser, Steele called the U.S. commitment of troops in Afghanistan a mistaken "war of Obama's choosing."

The war began after the Sept. 11 attacks, when George W. Bush was president. McCain tells ABC's "This Week" that it's "America's war and we can't afford to fail."

Some Republicans want Steele to resign because of his remarks.

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## Ex-champ Crashes NYC Hotdog Eating Contest

BY VERENA DOBNIK  
Associated Press Writer

NEW YORK — A Japanese eating champion who sat out this year's Coney Island Fourth of July hot dog contest apparently couldn't resist the temptation to hotdog afterward — and got arrested.

Six-time champion Takeru Kobayashi was sitting in a jail cell Sunday after the annual Nathan's Famous International Hot Dog Eating Contest.

Earlier in the day, Joey "Jaws" Chestnut gobbled his way to a fourth consecutive championship. But he was suddenly upstaged by the surprise appearance of his biggest rival, Kobayashi, who crashed the eating platform after Chestnut's win and wrestled with police.

"Let him eat! Let him eat!" the crowd chanted as officers handcuffed the world's No. 3 professional eater, dubbed "The Tsunami."

The 32-year-old Kobayashi did not compete this year because he refused to sign a contract with Major League Eating — the fast food equivalent of the NFL. On his Japanese-language blog, he said he wanted to be free to enter contests sanctioned by other groups.

But a few days ago, he told Japan's Kyodo News: "I really want to compete in the (Coney Island) event."

Wearing a black T-shirt that said "Free Kobi," Kobayashi mingled with the crowd, standing inside a police-barricaded pen just under the stage. When the eating ended, he slipped up the stage stairs.

Then, several security officers appeared and tried to usher him off. He grabbed a metal police barricade with both hands, clutching it tightly as the officers pulled at him. Finally, they dragged him down the stairs, with Kobayashi resisting vehemently.

He was expected to spend the night in jail awaiting an appearance in Brooklyn Criminal Court on charges of resisting arrest, trespassing and obstructing governmental administration.

"There's a contract dispute, so they weren't giving him his freedom," said Kobayashi's interpreter and publicist, Maggie James.

## Mexico's Elections Besieged By Drug Gangs

CIUDAD VICTORIA, Mexico (AP) — More than a dozen Mexican states held elections Sunday after campaigning besieged by assassinations and scandals that displayed drug cartels' power. The party that ruled Mexico for 71 years hoped to capitalize on frustrations over the bloodshed and gain momentum in its bid to regain the presidency in two years.

The elections for 12 governors, 14 state legislatures and mayors in 15 states are the biggest political challenge yet for the government of President Felipe Calderon, who is deploying troops and federal police to wrest back territory from drug traffickers.

The Institutional Revolutionary Party, which held on to power for seven decades through a system of largess and corruption that many considered a quasi-dictatorship, has recovered popularity amid frustration with Mexico's surging drug gang violence.

The party, known as the PRI, held up the assassination of its gubernatorial candidate in the northern state of Tamaulipas as evidence Calderon has failed to bring security despite the presence of tens of thousands of troops in drug trafficking hot spots.

Leaders of Calderon's conservative National Action Party, in turn, have insinuated the PRI protects drug traffickers in Tamaulipas, the birthplace of the Gulf cartel, and in the northern state of Sinaloa, the cradle of the cartel by the same name.

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