

NATION/WORLD DIGEST

Partisan Bickering Delays Spill Legislation

WASHINGTON (AP) — Partisan disagreements in the Senate will delay passage of legislation responding to the Gulf oil spill until at least September, when Congress returns from its summer recess.

The House is scheduled to vote on its bill Friday but will be out of town by the time the Senate takes up its version next week — meaning Congress would have to wait to reconcile the differences. The Senate might not have the 60 votes needed to advance the Democrats' energy and oil spill legislation, anyway. Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky has criticized it.

On Thursday, Senate Democrats slammed Republicans for opposing their provision eliminating the \$75 million cap on economic liability from an oil spill. McConnell pitched an alternative that he said wouldn't put small independent oil producers out of business.

Google Search Still Working In China

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Google says its search engine and several other services are working normally in mainland China after previously reporting the service had been completely blocked.

The company's system for tracking Internet access may have misinterpreted what was happening to its search, mobile and advertising services in China, according to a Google statement issued late Thursday.

That probably caused a minor blockage to be exaggerated in a status report updated each day on Google's website.

The initial alert about Google's search engine being completely cut off from China raised questions about whether the country's communist government was retaliating against the company for taking a stand against its online censorship policies.

Army: Rising Suicide Rate Reflects Risk

WASHINGTON (AP) — An Army report on the record number of soldier suicides says the trend is part of a rise in risky behavior including drunk driving and drug abuse in a military stretched to the breaking point by the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The report says the Army is failing its soldiers by missing signs of trouble, or by looking the other way as commanders try to keep to tight schedules required to meet deployment schedules.

The Army vice chief of staff, Gen. Peter Chiarelli, said Thursday that statistics on levels of drug and alcohol abuse, car accidents and crime suggests that soldiers are taking more risks while discipline has slipped.

The Army counted 160 suicides last year, the highest total ever.

US To press China, Others On Iran Sanctions

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Obama administration is making a concerted push to get China and other key nations in Asia, the Middle East and South America to enforce tough international sanctions against Iran and enact their own penalties.

Senior U.S. officials said Thursday they would travel soon to China, Japan, South Korea and the United Arab Emirates to demand compliance with the U.N. Security Council measures imposed on Iran over its suspect nuclear program. Those sanctions apply to Iranian institutions involved in its nuclear and missile development programs.

The officials also say they will warn China in particular about new U.S., European, Canadian and Australian sanctions that can punish foreign firms that do business with Iran's energy sector. China has vast energy needs and has large investments in Iran.

Rep. Block Small Business Lending Bill

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Republicans have blocked a bill to increase small business lending, dealing a setback to President Barack Obama's jobs agenda.

The bill would have created a \$30 billion government fund to help community banks increase lending to small businesses, combining it with about \$12 billion in tax breaks aimed at small businesses. Some Republicans, however, likened it to the unpopular bailout of the financial industry.

Democrats and Republicans will continue to negotiate amendments to the bill. But Thursday's vote will make it difficult for Congress to pass the bill before lawmakers go on their summer vacation.

Fed Official Eyes Revival Of Crisis Program

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Federal Reserve official says the central bank should revive a crisis-era program to buy government debt if the country seems headed toward a bout with deflation.

James Bullard, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, makes the case in comments to reporters and in a paper released Thursday. The weak economy poses the risk that the United States could tip into a Japanese-like bout of deflation, he says. That's a widespread and prolonged drop in prices of goods, values of homes and stocks, and in wages.

Bullard, a voting member on the Fed's main policy-setting committee, thinks the deflation risk is low. Buying government debt would energize the economy and nip deflationary forces. Last year, the Fed bought up to \$300 billion worth of Treasury securities.

6K Graves At Arlington Could Be Wrong

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Senate Democrat says that as many as 6,600 graves at Arlington National Cemetery could be misidentified because managers there didn't do their job properly.

Sen. Claire McCaskill, D-Mo., spoke at a hearing Thursday, where the cemetery's former superintendent and deputy superintendent were scheduled to testify.

McCaskill says she believes that between 4,900 and 6,600 graves may be unmarked or mislabeled on cemetery maps.

The estimate far exceeds one given by Army investigators last month that some 211 remains could be affected by the graves scandal.

Obama Defends Education Policies To Critics

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama says the country's long-term economic success will be tied to the success of the nation's schools.

Speaking at the centennial convention of the National Urban League, Obama says he won't tolerate a status quo where United States lags behind other countries in education achievements.

The National Urban League was one of eight civil rights organizations that released a report this week calling the president's \$4.35 billion education initiative an ineffective approach for failing schools. The report says federal data shows that just 3 percent of the nation's black students and less than 1 percent of Latino students are affected by the first round of the administration's "Race to the Top" competition.

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Dems, GOP Eye Ariz. Immigration Ruling

BY CHARLES BABINGTON
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — On the surface, a judge's decision to block tough provisions of Arizona's immigration law was a defeat for the state's Republican governor and a win for the Democratic Obama administration. But neither party is sure it will play out that way politically, either this fall or beyond.

Keeping the illegal-immigration issue burning might help some Republican candidates, who need a fired-up conservative base, campaign strategists in both parties said Thursday. And the federal ruling might let Republicans campaign for tougher immigration enforcement without embarrassing scenes of police officers demanding documents from U.S. citizens of Hispanic descent, a widely predicted fallout of Arizona's pending law.

But if the GOP appears too zealous, it runs a longer-term risk of alienating Hispanic voters, one of the fastest-growing constituencies.

A handful of Republicans pounced on U.S. District Judge Susan Bolton's decision Wednesday to block provisions of the Arizona law. One of them would require officers to check a person's immigration status while enforcing other laws if there's a reasonable suspicion the person is in the country illegally.

The Republican Governors Association issued a fundraising e-mail from Arizona Gov. Jan Brewer, asking for help in the ongoing fight to implement the law. And Colorado Senate hopeful Jane Norton's campaign conducted robo-calls telling Republican voters of her support for the measure.

But beyond Arizona, where street demonstrations took place on Thursday, many politicians took a wait-and-see stance. In Washington, top Republican lawmakers and party officials made statements about jobs,

energy, taxes, health care, campaign finance and passport fraud, but there was hardly a whisper about immigration.

Democrats were nearly as quiet, aside from the Congressional Hispanic Caucus calling for a comprehensive solution to the issue.

The people plotting campaign strategy say illegal immigration can be an emotional but unpredictable issue. Many Americans express concerns about unlawful entries and the impact on wages and government resources. But they also talk about the power of deportation to break up families, and other matters.

Joanna Burgos of the National Republican Congressional Committee said the judge's ruling may help GOP candidates in close races in Arizona and south Texas. In these areas, where some illegal immigrants have smuggled drugs and committed violent crimes, she said, the issue is seen as a matter of security far more than one of civil rights or economic well-being.

Elsewhere this fall, Burgos said, jobs, health care and perhaps energy will probably overshadow immigration.

Washington-based GOP consultant Ron Bonjean agreed that immigration will not dominate the fall elections, although he predicted some Republican candidates will try to show "that the problem needs to be solved."

Bonjean said Republicans must proceed carefully with Hispanic voters. Republicans can hurt themselves for years to come if they appear unduly hostile to immigrants who came here illegally years ago, or seem indifferent to the rights of those here legally.

"The immigration issue is so sensitive," Bonjean said. "While Republicans are using it to fire up conservatives and independents, they'll have to find ways to talk about it without alienating Hispanic voters."

Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, said Thursday

that Democrats are wrong to say Republicans are hiding prejudices behind the banner of national safety.

"There are some people who think that it's a trick, that when we say it's border security, that we're not interested in a broader immigration bill," Cornyn said in an interview at the Capitol. "I stand ready, willing and able to engage, but it's going to take some presidential leadership."

Democrats also were trying to sort out the Arizona ruling's impact.

It showed that the Obama administration, which sued Arizona to block the law's implementation, had a viable legal argument that the response to illegal immigration should be national, not piecemeal. But Bolton's ruling also underscored the fact that a Democratic-controlled Congress and White House have failed to find a comprehensive solution to the problem.

White House press secretary Robert Gibbs acknowledged that President Barack Obama's immigration stand may give some Democratic candidates heartburn this fall, but he said Obama doesn't make decisions "based on polling."

Obama believed that challenging the Arizona law "was the right thing to do," Gibbs told reporters. The next step, he said, "will be harder, and that is comprehensive immigration reform."

He urged all of this year's federal candidates to discuss their ideas openly.

The Arizona law promises opportunities for exploitation across the political spectrum. In Reno, Nev., two social justice organizations, the Progressive Leadership Alliance of Nevada and the Common Roots Collaborative, were using the law to promote voter registration in Hispanic neighborhoods.

"This is like the sleeping giant is waking up," said PLAN volunteer Elvira Diaz. "That's what we are."

Panel Hits Rangel With 13 Ethics Charges

BY LARRY MARGASAK AND LAURIE KELLMAN
Associated Press Writers

WASHINGTON — House investigators accused veteran New York Rep. Charles Rangel of 13 violations of congressional ethics standards on Thursday, throwing a cloud over his four-decade political career and raising worries for fellow Democrats about the fall elections.

The allegations include failure to report rental income from vacation property in the Dominican Republic and hundreds of thousands of dollars in additional income and assets on his financial disclosure statements.

Other charges focused on Rangel's use of congressional staff and stationery to raise money for a college center in New York named after him; accepting favors and benefits from the donors that may have influenced his congressional actions; use of a subsidized New York apartment as a campaign office instead of a residence; and misuse of the congressional free mail privilege.

"Even though they are serious charges, I'm prepared to prove that the only thing I've ever had in my 50 years of public service is service," Rangel told reporters Thursday night. "That's what I've done and if I've been overzealous providing that service, I can't make an excuse for the serious violations."

The charges came as lawyers for Rangel and the House ethics committee worked out a plea deal, according to people familiar with the talks. But Republicans on the ethics committee indicated it was too late.

The deal between the lawyers has little meaning if the committee members don't approve it, and Republicans insisted — at the first meeting of a House panel deciding Rangel's fate — that the case go forward with an ethics trial. The panel is evenly divided between Democrats and Republicans.

"Mr. Rangel was given multiple opportunities to settle this matter. Instead, he chose to move forward to the public trial

phase," said Rep. Jo Bonner of Alabama, the senior Republican on the ethics panel.

Chairman Zoe Lofgren, D-Calif., has made clear that she wants the committee to be unanimous — leaving little chance for agreement without Rangel capitulating on virtually all counts.

Many Democrats had urged Rangel to settle the case to avoid the prospect of televised hearings right before November congressional elections that will determine which party controls Congress next year.

However, as Thursday's public airing of the charges drew nearer, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi seem resigned to the case proceeding.

"The chips will have to fall where they may politically," she told reporters. Pursuing ethics cases against House members is "a serious responsibility that we have," she said.

The alleged violations of House standards of conduct also include using congressional letterhead to solicit donations for a center for public service to bear Rangel's name on the New York campus of the City College of New York.

Rangel was also accused of accepting a rent-stabilized property in Manhattan for his campaign office and initially not paying federal taxes on the Dominican Republic property.

The ethics panel said Rangel failed to report rental income on his original tax returns for 1998 through 2006 from the Dominican Republic villa. It also said he violated federal laws in addition to House ethics rules, including the 1989 Ethics Reform Act, Postal Service laws and government service codes.

The ethics charges, agreed upon after a two-year probe, were read in a public session of the Committee on Standards of Official Conduct, as the ethics committee is formally known.

Rangel, 80, did not attend.

In New York's Harlem, where Rangel is the only congressman most residents have ever known, two people reflected different opinions of the veteran lawmaker, who has a mid-September primary.

Pentagon: Leak May Go Beyond Military

BY ANNE GEARAN
AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON — A criminal investigation into the leak of tens of thousands of secret Afghanistan war logs could go beyond the military, Defense Secretary Robert Gates said Thursday, and he did not rule out that WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange could be a target.

"The investigation should go wherever it needs to go," Gates said.

Gates would not be more specific, waving off questions about whether Assange or media outlets that used the WikiLeaks material could be subjects of the criminal probe. But he noted that he has asked the FBI to help in the investigation "to ensure that it can go wherever it needs to go."

The Army is leading an inquiry inside the Defense Department into who downloaded some 91,000 secret documents and passed the material to WikiLeaks, an online archive that describes itself as a public service organization for whistle-blowers, journalists and activists.

The Pentagon inquiry is looking most closely at Pvt. Bradley Manning, an Army intelligence specialist who was already charged with leaking other material to the website.

The FBI would presumably handle aspects of the investigation that involve civilians outside the Defense Department, and the Justice Department could bring charges in federal court.

Gates and Adm. Mike Mullen, chairman of the Joint

Chiefs of Staff, called the release of the documents that WikiLeaks calls its "Afghan War Diary" deeply damaging and potentially life-threatening for Afghan informants or others who have taken risks to help the U.S. and NATO war effort.

Theirs was the most sober assessment of the ramifications of the leak Sunday of raw intelligence reports and other material dating to 2004.

"Mr. Assange can say whatever he likes about the greater good he thinks he and his source are doing, but the truth is they might already have on their hands the blood of some young soldier or that of an Afghan family," Mullen said.

Assange told the Australian Broadcasting Corp. in an interview aired Thursday that WikiLeaks had contacted the White House — via *The New York Times* acting as intermediary — and offered to let government officials go through the documents to make sure no innocent people were identified. The White House did not respond to the approach, he said.

Assange dismissed allegations that innocent people or informants had been put in danger by the publication of the documents.

"We are yet to see clear evidence of that," he said in the Australian Broadcasting interview.

Gates said that the Pentagon is tightening rules for handling classified material in war zones as a result of the leak. He did not mention Manning by name, and Pentagon officials caution that Manning may not be the sole target of the Army inquiry.

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