

'Robo-Signing' Is Still A Rampant Issue

By The Associated Press

Mortgage industry employees are still signing documents they haven't read and using fake signatures more than eight months after big banks and mortgage companies promised to stop the illegal practices that led to a nationwide halt of home foreclosures.

County officials in at least three states say they have received thousands of mortgage documents with questionable signatures since last fall. Lenders say they are working with regulators to fix the problem but cannot explain why the practice, known collectively as "robo-signing," has continued.

Last fall, the nation's largest banks and mortgage lenders, including JPMorgan Chase, Wells Fargo, Bank of America and an arm of Goldman Sachs, suspended foreclosures while they investigated how corners were cut to keep pace with the crush of foreclosure paperwork.

Critics say the new findings point to a systemic problem with the paperwork involved in home mortgages and titles. And they say it shows that banks and mortgage processors haven't acted aggressively enough to put an end to widespread document fraud in the mortgage industry.

London Police Face Probes In Scandal

LONDON (AP) — Britain's tabloid phone-hacking scandal enveloped the London police force Monday with the rapid-fire resignations of two top officers amid claims of possible illegal eavesdropping, bribery and collusion. U.K. officials immediately vowed to investigate.

Prime Minister David Cameron, feeling the political heat from his own close ties to individuals within Rupert Murdoch's media empire, cut short his trip to Africa and called an emergency session of Parliament for Wednesday so he could address lawmakers on the scandal.

U.K. lawmakers on Tuesday will grill Murdoch, his son James and Rebekah Brooks, the ousted chief executive of Murdoch's U.K. newspaper arm, in a widely anticipated televised public hearing on the scandal. Lawmakers hope to learn more about the scale of phone hacking by U.K. journalists and who — if anyone — in Murdoch's empire was aware of what allegedly took place at the now-defunct News of the World tabloid.

One of the first voices to blow the whistle on the phone hacking — former News of the World journalist Sean Hoare — was found dead Monday in Watford, about 25 miles (40 kilometers) northwest of London. Police said the death was being treated as unexplained but was not considered suspicious, according to Britain's Press Association.

Hoare was quoted by The New York Times saying that phone hacking — listening to the voice mail of celebrities, politicians, other journalists or even murder victims — was widely used and even encouraged at the News of the World under then-editor Andy Coulson, Cameron's former communications chief who was arrested this month in the scandal.

GOP WH Candidates Pressured Into Pledges

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican presidential contenders may be feeling nostalgic for the days when a candidate could focus on just one pledge: the oath of office.

With pledges spreading like kudzu on the campaign trail, candidates this year are being asked — in some cases, pressured — to profess their fealty to a whole host of positions: supporting marriage, opposing taxes, reducing the deficit, fighting abortion and gay rights and more.

And these aren't just bland statements of support for broad ideals. There's a 14-point "marriage vow," a three-pronged "cut, cap and balance" declaration on the national debt, a four-point "pro-life leadership presidential pledge" and a deficit-reduction promise tied to the "Lean Six Sigma" method of reducing wasteful spending.

Boomers Worry About Cancer, Memory Loss

WASHINGTON (AP) — Baby boomers say their biggest health fear is cancer. Memory loss comes in second. But heart disease and diabetes should be atop that list, too, given the size of boomers' waistlines.

A new poll finds baby boomers are more obese than other generations, setting them up for unhealthy senior years.

An Associated Press-LifeGoesStrong.com poll indicates that even those who aren't obese need to do more to stay fit.

Most baby boomers say they get some exercise at least once a week. But only about a quarter report working up a sweat four or five times a week. That's what the average person needs to reach the recommended amount of two-and-a-half hours a week.

OBITUARIES

Darwin Bendt

TEA — Darwin Arthur Bendt, age 77, passed away Sunday, July 17, 2011.

Funeral service will begin at 10:30 a.m. on Wednesday, July 20 at Trinity Lutheran Church in Tea.

Visitation will begin at noon on Tuesday, July 19 at George Boom Funeral Home, Sioux Falls with the family present to greet friends from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Darwin Arthur Bendt was born on November 23, 1933 in Watertown, SD to Arthur and Alice (Brandt) Bendt. He grew up in Clear Lake, SD and graduated from Clear Lake High School. In 1958 he met Judith Behlings and they were married on October 15, 1960 in Revillo, SD. Together they had four children.

Darwin worked as a manager for Dakota Coop Telecommunications. He retired to Milbank, SD and later moved to Tea. He enjoyed hunting, fishing, reading and spending time with his grandchildren.

Grateful for having shared his life are his wife, Judy Bendt, Tea, SD; son, Barry (Kristine) Bendt, Tea, SD; daughter, Paula (Frank) Heirigs, Tea, SD; daughter, Carol (Perry) Edblom, Tea, SD; son, Steven (Diane) Bendt, Viborg, SD; 11 grandchildren, Elvis (Monica), Katie (Matt), Tyler (Holly), Ashley, Allison, Jared (Courtney), Devin, Caleb, Cody, Morgan, and Gabrielle; 4 great-grandchildren; sister, Carolyn (Lee) Trumm, Watertown, SD.

Darwin was preceded in death by his parents; son-in-law, Terry Christensen; grandson, Daniel Bendt.

A complete obituary and online registry is available at www.georgeboom.com.

Yankton Press & Dakotan
July 19, 2011



Bendt

urday, July 2, 2011, at a Bed and Breakfast in New Ulm, Minn., due to a fire at that facility.

A memorial service is being planned for 11 a.m. Saturday, July 23, at the Knight of Columbus Hall, Hartington, Neb., with the Rev. Jeffrey Loseke officiating.

Arrangements are under the direction of Wintz Funeral Home, Hartington.

Mervin Durham

LAKE ANDES — Mervin Eugene Durham, 71, died on Saturday, July 16, 2011, at Avera St. Benedict Hospital, Parkston.

Funeral services are at 10:30 a.m. today (Tuesday) at St. Marks Catholic Church, Lake Andes, with burial following in St. Ann's Catholic Cemetery, Geddes.

Arrangements are by Koehn Bros. Funeral Home, Lake Andes.

Marilyn Siecke

VERMILLION — Marilyn J. Siecke, 72, of Vermillion died Monday, July 18, 2011, at Touchstone Living Center, Sioux City.

Funeral arrangements are pending with Kober Funeral Home, Vermillion.

DEBT SHOWDOWN

Obama Threatens Veto Of Cuts

BY DAVID ESPO
AP Special Correspondent

WASHINGTON — Courting confrontation and compromise alike, House Republicans shrugged off President Barack Obama's threat to veto legislation to cut federal spending by trillions of dollars on Monday while simultaneously negotiating with him over more modest steps to avert a potential government default.

The Republican bill demands deep spending reductions and congressional approval of a balanced budget amendment to the Constitution in exchange for raising the nation's debt limit. But Obama will veto it if it reaches his desk, the White House said, asserting the legislation would "lead to severe cuts in Medicare and Social Security" and impose unrealistic limits on education spending.

In response, GOP lawmakers said they would go ahead with plans to pass the bill on Tuesday. "It's disappointing the White House would reject this commonsense plan to rein in the debt and deficits that are hurting job creation in America," Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio said.

By contrast, neither the administration nor congressional officials provided substantive details on an unannounced meeting that Obama held Sunday with the two top House Republican leaders, Boehner and Majority Leader Eric Cantor of Virginia.

Obama said late Monday the two sides were "making progress."

Several Republicans said privately the decision to vote on veto-threatened legislation is paradoxically designed to clear the way for a compromise. They said conservatives would have a chance to push their deep spending cuts through the House, and then see the measure quickly die either in the Democratic-controlled Senate or by veto.

Barring action by Congress to raise the \$14.3 trillion debt limit, the Treasury will be unable to pay all the government's bills that come due beginning on Aug. 3, two weeks from Wednesday. Administration officials, Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke and others say the result could be a default that inflicts serious harm on the economy, which is still struggling to recover from the worst recession in decades.

In a gesture underscoring the significance of

the issue, Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., announced the Senate will meet each day until it is resolved, including on weekends.

The two-pronged approach pursued by the House GOP follows the collapse of a weeks-long effort to negotiate a sweeping bipartisan plan to cut into future deficits. The endeavor foundered when Obama demanded that tax increases on the wealthy and selected corporations be included alongside cuts in benefit programs, and Republicans refused.

The failure of that effort also reflects the out-sized influence exerted by 87 first-term Republicans, many of them elected last fall with tea party backing.

As late as last Thursday, Republican leaders held a news conference to tout plans to vote this week on a proposed balanced budget amendment to the Constitution.

But the same senior Republicans emerged from a closed-door meeting of the rank and file on Friday to say the House would instead vote on an alternative — dubbed by its advocates as "Cut, Cap and Balance." No date has been set for a vote on the constitutional amendment itself.

President Appoints Cordray To Lead Consumer Agency

BY JULIE PACE
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama moved Monday to get a new consumer protection bureau up and running, introducing a former Ohio attorney general as director, in an apparent acknowledgment that the woman who masterminded the agency couldn't win Senate confirmation.

In a Rose Garden ceremony under sunny skies, Obama announced he has chosen Richard Cordray to head the new Consumer Financial Protection Bureau. At the same time, Obama vowed to resist any efforts to block its work.

"We are going to stand up this bureau and ensure it is doing the right thing for middle-class families all across the country," the president said.



OLIVIER DOULIERY/ABACA PRESS/MCT
President Barack Obama nominates Richard Cordray as the Director of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) during an event in the Rose Garden at the White House in Washington Monday. Cordray served as Attorney General of Ohio from January 2009 to January 2011.

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau was a central feature of a law Congress passed last year that overhauled the rules that govern the financial sector. The agency will serve as a government watchdog over mortgages, credit cards and other forms of lending when it officially begins its work on July 21.

Obama and Cordray were joined by Elizabeth Warren, a special assistant to the president who had been charged with getting the agency started. Warren is widely considered the architect of the bureau, and consumer groups wanted her to be named as its leader. But she was strongly opposed by Republicans and would have faced a difficult path to confirmation.

The president applauded Warren's work as an advocate for the American public.

"She's become perhaps the leading voice in our country on behalf of consumers," he said. "She's done it while facing some very tough opposition."

Some progressive groups, while complimentary of Cordray, made their continued preference for Warren known.

"With her track record of standing up to Wall Street and fighting for consumers, Elizabeth Warren was the best qualified to lead the bureau that she conceived," said Stephanie Taylor, co-founder of the Progressive Change Campaign Committee.

The White House deflected questions about whether Obama chose Cordray to lead the bureau to avoid a protracted fight for Warren.

"The president is focused on moving this forward and he thinks Richard Cordray is the absolute right person to do the job," Obama spokesman Jay Carney said.

But Republicans have already threatened to block Senate confirmation for Cordray as well. The 52-year-old is considered a Warren ally and has been working with her as director of enforcement for the agency.

Republicans fought fiercely against the creation of the bureau last year and have been trying to place restrictions on its work. In

May, all Senate Republicans joined in a letter to Obama threatening to withhold their support for any nominee to the position if the White House didn't seek significant changes to the agency.

Warren said there were already adequate restrictions placed on the agency, and it was time for lawmakers to move on.

"We had this fight," she said. "The agency is here to do a job, a job that desperately needs to be done."

On Monday, Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., reiterated Republican opposition to the bureau in its current form, saying "we'll insist on serious reforms to bring accountability and transparency to the agency before we consider any nominee to run it."

The financial industry has also expressed concerns about the agency, worrying that it would restrict new products just when companies are seeking to replace profits squeezed by the new financial rules.

Petraeus Hands Over Command Of Afghan War

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Gen. David Petraeus handed over command of the Afghan war to Marine Gen. John Allen on Monday as the U.S. and its international partners prepare to withdraw over the next few years.



Petraeus

Petraeus, widely credited with turning the tide in Iraq, left to take over the CIA with his signature counterinsurgency strategy having yet to deliver a safer Afghanistan or push the Taliban to reconcile with the country's Western-backed government.

Allen is known for helping turn Sunni insurgents against al-Qaida in Iraq in one of that war's most pivotal stages. In Afghanistan, he will be tasked with the overseeing the start of the American troop withdrawal this month even as insurgents step up the violence and attacks on high-profile Afghans, including the assassination last week of President Hamid Karzai's powerful half brother and the slaying of a close Karzai aid on Sunday.

Allen said the drawdown of U.S. forces and the transition of some areas to Afghan control this week does not mean international forces are easing up in their campaign to defeat the Taliban insurgency, though he acknowledged the fight won't be easy.

"It is my intention to maintain the momentum of the campaign," Allen said at the handover ceremony in the Afghan capital. "There will be tough days ahead. I have no illusions about the challenges."

USDA

From Page 1

USDA also has made other programs available to assist farmers and ranchers, including the Supplemental Revenue Assistance Program (SURE), which was approved as part of the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008; the Emergency Conservation Program; Federal Crop

Insurance; and the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program. Interested farmers may contact their local USDA Service Centers for further information on eligibility requirements and application procedures for these and other programs. Additional information is also available online at http://disaster.fsa.usda.gov

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