

## Congress Threatens To Curtail NSA

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a heated confrontation over domestic spying, members of Congress said Wednesday they never intended to allow the National Security Agency to build a database of every phone call in America. And they threatened to curtail the government's surveillance authority.

Top Obama administration officials countered that the once-secret program was legal and necessary to keep America safe. And they left open the possibility that they could build similar databases of people's credit card transactions, hotel records and Internet searches.

The clash on Capitol Hill undercut President Barack Obama's assurances that Congress had fully understood the dramatic expansion of government power it authorized repeatedly over the past decade.

The House Judiciary Committee hearing also represented perhaps the most public, substantive congressional debate on surveillance powers since the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Previous debates have been largely theoretical and legalistic, with officials in the Bush and Obama administrations keeping the details hidden behind the cloak of classified information.

That changed last month when former government contractor Edward Snowden leaked documents to the *Guardian* newspaper revealing that the NSA collects every American's phone records, knowing that the overwhelming majority of people have no ties to terrorism.

## House GOP Pushes Obamacare Delay

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans pressed ahead Wednesday on delaying key components of President Barack Obama's signature health care law, emboldened by the administration's concession that requiring companies to provide coverage for their workers next year may be too complicated.

The House has scheduled votes later Wednesday to delay the law's individual and employer mandates, the 38th time the GOP majority has tried to eliminate, defund or scale back the program since Republicans took control of the House in January 2011.

The votes were a chance to score political points, as the legislation is going nowhere in the Democratic-controlled Senate. Still, public unease with the law and the Republican attacks clearly caused consternation at the White House.

Eager to counter the Republican criticism, Obama plans to deliver remarks Thursday focusing on rebates that consumers are already receiving from insurance companies under the health care law.

White House spokesman Jay Carney said Obama will draw attention to the 8.5 million consumers who have received an average consumer rebate of about \$100. Carney also highlighted reports that some states are already anticipating lower premiums under the Affordable Care Act.

## Experts Say Cuba Explanation Credible

HAVANA (AP) — North Korea on Wednesday repeated Cuba's assertion that the antiquated weapons systems found on a cargo ship in Panama were headed to the Asian country for repair. But while the explanation is potentially credible, it leaves troubling questions unresolved, international arms experts say.

Acting on intelligence it hasn't publicly described, Panama seized the rusting, 34-year-old North Korean freighter Chong Chon Gang on July 11 as it headed toward the Caribbean entrance of the Panama Canal on its way to the Pacific and its final destination of North Korea.

Hidden under about 240,000 white sacks of raw brown Cuban sugar, Panamanian officials found shipping containers with parts of a radar system for a surface-to-air missile defense system, an apparent violation of U.N. sanctions that bar North Korea from importing sophisticated weapons or missiles.

The North Korean Foreign Ministry commented on the seizure for the first time Wednesday, saying: "This cargo is nothing but aging weapons which (North Korea) are to send back to Cuba after overhauling them according to a legitimate contract."

A Foreign Ministry spokesman, who was not named by the official Korean Central News Agency, said "the Panamanian investigation authorities rashly attacked and detained the captain and crewmen of the ship on the plea of 'drug investigation' and searched its cargo but did not discover any drug."

## Study: Police Recording Millions Of License Plates

WASHINGTON (AP) — You can drive, but you can't hide.

A rapidly growing network of police cameras is capturing, storing and sharing data on license plates, making it possible to stitch together people's movements whether they are stuck in a commute, making tracks to the beach or up to no good.

For the first time, the number of license tag captures has reached the millions, according to a study published Wednesday by the American Civil Liberties Union based on information from hundreds of law enforcement agencies. Departments keep the records for weeks or years, sometimes indefinitely, saying they can be crucial in tracking suspicious cars, aiding drug busts, finding abducted children and more.

Attached to police cars, bridges or buildings — and sometimes merely as an app on a police officer's smartphone — scanners capture images of passing or parked vehicles and pinpoint their locations, uploading that information into police databases.

Over time, it's unlikely many vehicles in a covered area escape notice. And with some of

the information going into regional databases encompassing multiple jurisdictions, it's becoming easier to build a record of where someone has been and when, over a large area.

While the Supreme Court ruled in 2012 that a judge's approval is needed to use GPS to track a car, networks of plate scanners allow police effectively to track a driver's location, sometimes several times every day, with few legal restrictions. The ACLU says the scanners are assembling a "single, high-resolution image of our lives."



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## Filibuster Fight

BY ALAN FRAM  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Senate voted by the slimmest margin Wednesday to end a filibuster against President Barack Obama's choice to head the Labor Department, as this week's agreement averting a poisonous partisan clash over nominations and the chamber's rules barely survived its toughest test so far.

By 60-40, senators rejected Republican objections and voted to halt delaying tactics aimed at killing Thomas Perez's nomination to become labor secretary.

It takes 60 votes to end filibusters. With all 52 Democrats and both Democratic-leaning independents voting to halt the delays, Republicans supplied the minimum number of votes needed to keep Perez's selection alive — six.

In so doing, the GOP seemed to signal that while they would adhere to the agreement, their ranks bristling with unhappiness over the deal itself and against Perez in particular. In the deal announced Tuesday, top Republicans agreed to end delays against seven stalled Obama nominations and Democrats promised to drop efforts to change Senate rules to limit filibusters.



Perez

"What I'm saying to my Republican colleagues is, I don't care what deal you cut," said Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., a leader of the opposition to Perez. "How could you possibly agree to move forward on a nomination when the nominee refuses to comply with a congressional subpoena?"

Republicans voting to end the Perez filibuster were Sens. John McCain of Arizona, an architect of this week's deal, Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, Susan Collins of Maine, Bob Corker of Tennessee, Mark Kirk of Illinois and Lisa Murkowski of Alaska.

It was not clear when the Senate would vote on final confirmation of Perez's nomination, but it was expected soon.

Minutes earlier, senators voted 82-17 to approve Fred Hochberg to a second

Perez is a top Justice Department official whom Republicans have criticized for his handling of a whistle-blower case against the city of St. Paul, Minn., and for not heeding a congressional subpoena that sought his personal emails in that case.

four-year term to head the Export-Import Bank, which provides financing for U.S. exporters.

"We have now started a new era, I hope, a new normal here in the Senate" of increased bipartisan cooperation, said Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., as the day began.

But a day after the agreement on nominations was announced and largely hailed by both parties, conservatives and other Republicans made their unhappiness with Perez — and the overall deal — clear.

"Why would you want somebody in the Cabinet thumbing their noses at the elected representatives of the people of this country," Sen. Charles Grassley of Iowa, one of the chamber's senior Republicans, said of Perez.

"It seems to me the implication is we're supposed to simply routinely rubber-stamp everyone," said Sen. Patrick Toomey, R-Pa. "There can't be any objections ever, whatsoever. Well, that's not what the Constitution calls for."

Sen. Ben Cardin, D-Md., said Perez and the Justice Department had responded to all "reasonable requests" from Congress for information and said, "He's a professional, he listens and tries to make the right judgment."

# Sizzling Heat Blankets Much Of U.S.

BY DAVID B. CARUSO  
Associated Press

NEW YORK — From South Dakota to Massachusetts temperatures surged to potentially dangerous levels Wednesday as the largest heat wave of the summer stretched out and stagnated, with relief in many parts of the country still days away.

Most states in the U.S. had at least one region where the temperature hit 90 degrees, according to the National Weather Service, though the worst heat was in the Midwest to Northeast. Humid air just made it all feel worse, with heat indexes in some places over 100.

In New York City, where it was 96 degrees, sidewalk food vendor Ahmad Qayumi said that by 11 a.m., the cramped space inside his steel-walled cart got so hot, he had to turn off his grill and coffee machine.

"It was just too hot. I couldn't breathe," he said, turning away a customer who asked for a hamburger. "Just cold drinks," he said.

Amid the heat, officials in Washington D.C.'s Maryland suburbs worked to keep a failing water main from cutting off hundreds of thousands of people, just when they needed it most. People in Prince George's County were asked not to run their faucets, water their lawns or flush toilets to keep the water system from emptying during emergency repairs.

Firefighters in southern California faced brutally hot — but dangerously dry — conditions as they battled a wildfire outside Palm Springs. Temperatures could go as high as 105 and humidity could go as low as 1 percent by the afternoon, said Tina Rose, a spokesman for the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection. The fire has already consumed seven homes.

It was hot enough to buckle highway pavement in several states. Firefighters in Indianapolis evacuated 300 people from a senior living community after a power outage knocked out the air conditioning. The state of Illinois opened cooling centers. The Environmental Protection Agency said the heat was contributing to air pollution in New England.

At the World Trade Center reconstruction site in New York City, workers building a rail hub dripped under their hardhats, thick gloves and heavy-duty boots. Some wore towels around their necks to wipe away the sweat.

"We're drinking a lot of water, down under by the tracks, in and out of the sun all day — very hot," said carpenter Elizabeth Fontanez, of the Bronx, who labored with 20 pounds of tools and safety equipment strapped to her waist. Since the heat wave began, she said she has been changing shirts several times during her shifts.

Officials blamed hot weather for at least one death. A 78-year-old Alzheimer's patient died of heat exhaustion after wandering away from his northern Kentucky home Tuesday in temperatures that rose to 93 degrees.

Limited relief, in the form of a cold front, was expected

to begin dropping south from Canada starting Thursday, before sweeping through the Midwest and into the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast regions by Saturday. That will bring lower temperatures, but also possibly severe thunderstorms, said weather service spokesman Christopher Vaccaro.

New Mexico and parts of Texas turned out to be rare outposts of cool air Wednesday — but not without trouble of their own: heavy rains prompted flood watches and warnings in some areas. More than five inches of rain fell in 24 hours in Plainview, north of Lubbock, according to the National Weather Service.



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