



J.M. EDDINS JR./MCT
Tracy Martin, the father of Trayvon Martin, speaks at the House Caucus on Black Men and Boys in Washington Wednesday.

Martin's Father Testifies On Capitol Hill

WASHINGTON (AP) — The father of Trayvon Martin told black lawmakers Wednesday he is now dedicated to making sure people know who his 17-year-old really was and to prevent the trial of George Zimmerman, the man who shot him dead but was acquitted, to define the youth.

"I always say Trayvon was my hero. He saved my life. Not to be there in his time of need is real troublesome, not to be able to save my son's life," Tracy Martin said.

Martin opened comments by a panel of experts brought together by House members who formed the Congressional Caucus on Black Men and Boys to focus more attention on issues disproportionately affecting black men and boys. Some of those issues include unemployment, incarceration and racial profiling.

Trying to counter what he described as slander against his son, Martin said he wouldn't allow the verdict to sum up his son.

"I vow to do everything in my power not to give up the fight for him, not only the fight for Trayvon but for so many other young black and brown boys in this country," he said.

Congressional caucuses are made up of members of the House who share interest in a given issue and want to focus attention on it while suggesting possible legislative responses. They include special group caucuses such as the Congressional Hispanic Caucus.

Dozens Feared Dead In Spanish Crash

MADRID (AP) — A train derailed in northwestern Spain on Wednesday night, toppling passenger cars on their sides and leaving at least one torn open as smoke rose into the air. Dozens were feared dead, with possibly even more injured.

Authorities did not immediately release casualty figures. But a photographer at the scene said he saw dozens of what appeared to be dead bodies being extracted from the wreck by emergency workers. Spanish National TV showed footage of what appeared to be several bodies covered by blankets alongside the tracks next to the damaged train wagons.

The photographer, Xabier Martinez, told The Associated Press that he also spoke to two injured train passengers who said they felt a strong vibration before the derailling.

The accident occurred on high-speed tracks near the train station in Santiago de Compostela, 95 kilometers (60 miles) south of El Ferrol. Rescue workers were seen in the television images caring for people still inside some of the wagons.

Food Stamp Work Requirements Eyed

WASHINGTON (AP) — About 47 million Americans received food stamps last year, but only a relative few are required to work or look for a job as a condition of receiving the aid.

Now, House Republicans are considering whether the work requirement should be strengthened as they seek cuts to the \$80 billion-a-year program, which has doubled in cost over the last five years. One in seven Americans used the federal food aid last year.

A small group of GOP lawmakers met Wednesday to discuss trimming the program, now called the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP. One approach discussed in the meeting was a proposal by Rep. Steve Southerland, R-Fla., that would allow — but not require — individual states to test work requirements.

The push to pass a food stamp bill came after House GOP leaders stripped the domestic food aid from a farm bill that passed the chamber earlier this month following the defeat of a combined food-farm bill. Conservatives had demanded greater cuts in the food stamp program, so GOP leaders said they would take up the issue separately. But it's unclear if they will be able to find enough consensus within their caucus to move on the issue quickly — or at all.

Weiner Faces Calls To Halt Mayoral Bid

NEW YORK (AP) — Anthony Weiner pressed ahead with his bid for mayor Wednesday despite growing calls for him to drop out over a new sexting scandal, saying the campaign is too important to abandon over "embarrassing personal things" becoming public.

Rivals, newspaper editorial pages and at least one former New York congressional colleague urged the Democrat to quit the race a day after he acknowledged exchanging raunchy messages and photos online even after the same sort of behavior destroyed his congressional career two years ago.

"I think he should pull out of the race. I think he needs serious psychiatric help," Rep. Jerrold Nadler, D-N.Y.

Weiner brushed off such calls as he prepared to testify at a public housing hearing and participate in a candidate forum in the evening.

"I have posited this whole campaign on a bet, and that is that, at the end of the day, citizens are more interested in the challenge they face in their lives than in anything that I have done, embarrassing, in my past," he told an encampment of reporters as he left his Manhattan home in the morning.

Lawyer: Snowden Staying In Russia

MOSCOW (AP) — National Security Agency leaker Edward Snowden, who fled to Moscow's airport a month ago, aims to stay in Russia for the near future and learn the country's culture and language, his lawyer said Wednesday.

To get him started, Anatoly Kucherena said he gave Snowden a copy of "Crime and Punishment," Dostoyevsky's lengthy novel about the torment and redemption of a man who thought himself outside the law.

"I am not talking about the similarity of inner contradictions," Kucherena said after meeting Snowden in the transit zone of Sheremetyevo international airport, where Snowden has apparently been marooned since arriving from Hong Kong on June 23.

The day's developments left the White House — and nearly everyone else — "seeking clarity" about the status of the man who revealed details of an NSA program to monitor Internet and telephone communications.

When Snowden first arrived at Sheremetyevo, he was believed to be planning just to transfer to a flight to Cuba and then to Venezuela to seek asylum. But the United States, which wants him returned for prosecution, canceled his passport, stranding him. He hasn't been seen in public since, although he met with human rights activists and lawyers July 12.

A Royal Name: George Alexander Louis

LONDON (AP) — The little prince was in need of a name, and now, by George, he's got one.

Make that three: George Alexander Louis. The announcement Wednesday that Prince William and his wife, Kate, had selected a moniker steeped in British history came as royal officials said the new parents were seeking quiet family time away from the flashbulbs and frenzy that accompanied the birth of their first child.

While the news put to rest intense speculation over what name the couple would choose, the extreme interest around it illustrated how the 2-day-old future heir is already on his way to a lifetime of fanfare and public glare.

Kensington Palace said William and Kate were "delighted to announce" their son's name, adding that the baby will be known as "His Royal Highness Prince George of Cambridge."

Obama Turns To Economy

BY DARLENE SUPERVILLE AND JULIE PACE
Associated Press

GALESBURG, Ill. — Seeking to build momentum for looming fiscal fights, President Barack Obama on Wednesday cast himself as the champion for middle class Americans struggling to make ends meet. He chided Washington for having "taken its eye off the ball" and declared that the economy would be the "highest priority" of his second term.

Obama, in an hour-long address that was at times deeply partisan, also accused Republican lawmakers of succumbing to "an endless parade of distractions and political posturing and phony scandals." He said gridlock had only gotten worse since his re-election.

"I am here to say this needs to stop," Obama said in a speech at Knox College. "This moment does not require short-term thinking. It does not require having the same old stale debates."

Obama, as he often does when criticizing Washington, glossed over his own status as the inhabitant of the city's most powerful office.

GOP leaders quickly panned the president's remarks as a series of repackaged ideas and empty promises.

"It's a hollow shell, it's an Easter Egg with no candy in it," House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, said.

Indeed, the president's remarks were void of new policy proposals or fresh solutions for breaking Washington stalemates. And there were no new approaches presented for resolving potential showdowns with Republicans this fall over raising the nation's borrowing limit and curtailing across-the-board federal budget cuts known as the sequester.

For the president's advisers, a central goal of the speech was simply to refocus Obama's agenda squarely on the economy ahead of the fall deadlines. The first six months of his second term largely have been consumed by priorities like gun control and immigration, as well as an array of foreign policy crises and domestic controversies, including the National Security Agency's domestic spying programs and IRS scrutiny of political groups.



ZBIGNIEW BZDAK/CHICAGO TRIBUNE/MCT
President Barack Obama delivers an address on economics at Knox College in Galesburg, Ill., on Wednesday. Obama called for new spending on infrastructure and education to help grow the middle class.

While official Washington's attention was elsewhere, the economy was slowly but steadily improving. The housing market is recovering, the stock market is soaring, and unemployment, while still high at 7.6 percent, is falling.

But the White House fears that standoffs this fall over the debt ceiling and the sequester could impede that progress. The president has declared that he will not negotiate over the debt ceiling and expects Republicans to lift the borrowing limit without concessions. He's also pushing to end the federal budget cuts before they extend into the next fiscal year, which begins Oct. 1.

The president panned the sequester as a "meat cleaver" that has "cost jobs, hurt our military and gutted investments in American education."

Obama will seek to keep up his renewed economic focus in the coming weeks with a series of speeches on manufacturing, education, housing, retirement security and health care. Advisers say some of those speeches will contain more specific policy proposals, both for congressional legislation and executive action.

The president said he welcomed ideas from lawmakers of both parties, but wouldn't stand for reflexive opposition to his own initiatives.

"I am laying out my ideas to give the middle class a better shot," he said. "Now it's time for you to lay out yours."

For Obama, the day trip to Knox College marked a return to the site of his first major economic address. He spoke at the school's graduation ceremony in 2005 as a newly-elected U.S. senator. His remarks back then were strikingly similar to the themes he outlined Wednesday, including the need for the U.S. to be better prepared to compete in a global economy and a role for the government in ensuring that all Americans have access to ladders of opportunity.

The economy in the surrounding Galesburg community reflects much of the underlying economic concerns facing many Americans. A Maytag plant in the town shut its doors in 2004, leaving hundreds of people unemployed. Today, the factory still sits vacant. Galesburg's unemployment rate is just under 8 percent, and nearly a quarter of its population lives in poverty.

NSA Controversy

House Rejects Effort To Halt Program

BY DONNA CASSATA
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The House narrowly rejected a challenge to the National Security Agency's secret collection of hundreds of millions of Americans' phone records Wednesday night after a fierce debate pitting privacy rights against the government's efforts to thwart terrorism.

The vote was 217-205 on an issue that created unusual political coalitions in Washington, with libertarian-leaning conservatives and liberal Democrats pressing for the change against the Obama

administration, the Republican establishment and Congress' national security experts.

The showdown vote marked the first chance for lawmakers to take a stand on the secret surveillance program since former NSA systems analyst Edward Snowden leaked classified documents last month that spelled out the monumental scope of the government's activities.

Backing the NSA program were 134 Republicans and 83 Democrats, including House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, who typically does not vote, and Democratic leader

Nancy Pelosi. Rejecting the administration's last-minute pleas to spare the surveillance operation were 94 Republicans and 111 Democrats.

It is unlikely to be the final word on government intrusion to defend the nation and Americans' civil liberties.

"Have 12 years gone by and our memories faded so badly that we forgot what happened on Sept. 11?" Rep. Mike Rogers, R-Mich., chairman of the Intelligence Committee, said in pleading with his colleagues to back the program during House debate.

Republican Rep. Justin

Amash of Michigan, chief sponsor of the repeal effort, said his aim was to end the indiscriminate collection of Americans' phone records.

His measure, offered as an addition to a \$598.3 billion defense spending bill for 2014, would have canceled the statutory authority for the NSA program, ending the agency's ability to collect phone records and metadata under the USA Patriot Act unless it identified an individual under investigation.

The House later voted to pass the overall defense bill, 315-109.

Door-To-Door Mail Delivery Could Be Cut Under House Plan

BY ANDREW MIGA
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Americans for generations have come to depend on door-to-door mail delivery. It's about as American as apple pie.

But with the Postal Service facing billions of dollars in annual losses, the delivery service could be virtually phased out by 2022 under a proposal a House panel was considering Wednesday. Curbside delivery, which includes deliveries to mailboxes at the end of driveways, and cluster box delivery would replace letter carriers slipping mail into front-door boxes.

The proposal is part of broader legislation by Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Calif., chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, designed to cut costs at the cash-strapped agency by up to \$4.5 billion a year. The Postal Service had a \$16 billion loss last year.

The agency has been moving toward curbside and cluster box delivery in new residential developments since the 1970s. The Postal Service in April began decid-



Issa

ing whether to provide such delivery for people moving into newly built homes rather than letting the developers decide.

"A balanced approach to saving the Postal Service means allowing USPS to adapt to America's changing use of mail," Issa said. "Done right, these reforms can improve the customer experience through a more efficient Postal Service."

About one in three mail customers has door-to-door delivery, Issa said. The shift would include safe and secure cluster box delivery areas, he said, especially for elderly customers who receive Social Security checks and prescriptions through the mail.

About 30 million residential addresses receive delivery to boxes at the door or a mail slot. Another 87 million residential addresses receive curbside or cluster box delivery.

Obama Taps Caroline Kennedy As US Ambassador To Japan

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama announced Wednesday that he is nominating former first daughter Caroline Kennedy as U.S. ambassador to Japan, offering the most famous living member of a prominent American family a new role of service to country.

Kennedy, an attorney and bestselling book editor, is being rewarded for helping put Obama in the White House where her father served until his assassination 50 years ago. If confirmed, she would be the first woman in a post where many other prominent Americans have served to strengthen a vital Asian tie.

Kennedy helped propel Obama to the 2008 Democratic presidential nomination in a celebrated endorsement over Hillary Rodham Clinton — the only time she's endorsed a presidential candidate other than her uncle Ted Kennedy in 1980. She played a prominent role, particularly in courting female voters by headlining swing state events for Obama during both his presidential campaigns.

She was a co-chair of Obama's vice presidential search committee and in the 2012 race served as one of 35 national co-chairs of his re-election campaign. She called Obama "the kind of leader my father wrote about in 'Profiles in Courage'" during a prime-time speech at the 2012 Democratic National Convention.

The White House announced her nomination without any particular fanfare, listing her in a news release along with other selections for administration posts. Obama said in a statement that all the choices bring "a depth of experience and tremendous dedication to their new roles," but he offered no comment specific to Kennedy.

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