

US, Cuba Plan To Open Embassies

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama will announce Wednesday that the U.S. and Cuba have finalized an agreement to reopen embassies in each other's capitals, a major step in ending hostilities between the Cold War foes, a senior administration official said.

The U.S. and Cuba have been negotiating the reestablishment of embassies following the historic December announcement that they would move to restore ties after a half-century of animosity. The U.S. embassy in Havana is expected to open in July.

For Obama, ending the U.S. freeze with Cuba is central to his foreign policy legacy as he nears the end of his presidency. Obama has long touted the value of direct engagement with global foes and has argued that the U.S. embargo on the communist island just 90 miles south of Florida was ineffective.

The official insisted on anonymity because the official was not authorized to speak publicly about the matter ahead of the president.

The White House said Obama will deliver a statement on Cuba from the Rose Garden on Wednesday morning. Secretary of State John Kerry, who is in Vienna for nuclear negotiations with Iran, is also expected to speak about the embassy openings.

Job Bush Has Paid Rate Of 36 Percent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican presidential candidate Jeb Bush has earned nearly \$29 million since leaving the Florida governor's mansion and paid an effective federal income tax rate of roughly 36 percent in the past three decades, according to tax returns released by his campaign on Tuesday.

In an effort designed to show a commitment to transparency, Bush posted the tax returns on a website that outlines his work history since 1981, including most of the time that has passed since the two-term Florida governor left office in 2007. In those recent years, Bush has served on numerous corporate boards and has seen his income rise sharply.

"Today, I'm releasing 33 years of tax returns — more than any presidential candidate in history," Bush wrote on the website.

From 2007 to 2013, Bush reported nearly \$29 million in total income. His primary occupation during that time was as a consultant, although he also made nearly \$10 million giving speeches from 2007 through the end of last year.

Bush earned nearly \$7.4 million in total income in 2013, the year covered by the most recent tax return released.

Gay Marriage Fight Turns To Clerks

MOREHEAD, Ky. (AP) — Rowan County Clerk Kim Davis shut her blinds at work Tuesday to block the view of rainbow-clad protesters outside. They carried flowers and flags and signs saying "you don't own marriage." They chanted "do your job."

Moments later, she told a lesbian couple who walked in asking for a license to try another county.

Davis is among a handful of public officials across the Bible Belt so repulsed by the thought of enabling a same-sex marriage that they are defying the U.S. Supreme Court and refusing to issue a license to anyone, gay or straight.

"It's a deep-rooted conviction; my conscience won't allow me to do that," Davis told The Associated Press. "It goes against everything I hold dear, everything sacred in my life."

Some judges and clerks in Alabama and Texas have done the same, ordering their offices in the name of religious liberty and free speech to issue no marriage licenses at all.

Foes See 'Blueprint' For Death Penalty

ATLANTA (AP) — A strongly worded dissent in the U.S. Supreme Court's narrow decision this week upholding the use of an execution drug offered a glimmer of hope to death penalty opponents in what they considered otherwise a gloomy ruling. One advocate went so far Tuesday as to call it a blueprint for a fresh attack on the legality of capital punishment itself.

But even those who see Justice Stephen Breyer's dissent as a silver lining think it will take time to mount a viable challenge.

And Breyer's words don't change the fact that the Supreme Court has consistently upheld capital punishment for nearly four decades. The five justices forming the majority in Monday's decision made it clear they feel that states must somehow be able to carry out the death penalty.

In disagreeing with the 5-4 ruling that approved Oklahoma's use of an execution drug, Breyer, joined by Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, called it "highly likely that the death penalty violates the Eighth Amendment," which protects against cruel and unusual punishment.

"It was a sweeping and powerful dissent that issues an invitation that we should accept, which is to make the case for why today the death penalty itself is no longer constitutional," said Cassandra Stubbs, director of the Capital Punishment Project of the American Civil Liberties Union.

USOC Leaders Decide To Stay On Course

REDWOOD CITY, Calif. (AP) — U.S. Olympic Committee leaders say they're sticking with Boston as their candidate for the 2024 Olympics.

The USOC board met Tuesday to discuss the Boston bid, which has been troubled by tepid polling data and active opposition.

The announcement came a day after bid leaders unveiled a new, \$4.6 billion plan with many financial details that had been missing from earlier renditions.

"I've seen their presentation five times in the last six days, and each time, it keeps getting better," USOC chairman Larry Probst said.

Probst and USOC CEO Scott Blackmun were joined at a news conference by new Boston 2024 chairman Steve Pagliuca and co-chair Roger Crandall.

Garner, Affleck Decide To Divorce

LOS ANGELES (AP) — As regulars at a local farmer's market, Ben Affleck, Jennifer Garner and their three young children looked like the perfect Hollywood family.

The stars took turns working so they could nurture their careers and their kids — devoted parents who appeared arm-in-arm at countless industry events.

"It's work, but it's the best kind of work," Affleck famously said of his marriage to Garner when he accepted the best picture Oscar for "Argo."

Now, it seems the work is done. After weeks of public speculation about their relationship, the couple announced Tuesday they plan to end their 10-year marriage with a divorce.

"We go forward with love and friendship for one another and a commitment to co-parenting our children," Garner and Affleck said in a joint statement. "This will be our only comment on this private, family matter."



New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, standing on stage with his wife and children, announces his candidacy for the Republican party nomination for president on Tuesday at Livingston High School in Livingston, N.J.

Decision 2016

Christie Enters Race, Vows Blunt Campaign

BY JILL COLVIN AND STEVE PHELPS
Associated Press

LIVINGSTON, N.J. — A tough-talking New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie launched his 2016 campaign for president Tuesday with a promise to tell voters the truth even if it makes them cringe.

The Republican governor, a one-time GOP favorite who faded and now tries to climb back, lashed out at "bickering leaders" from both political parties in a kickoff rally in the gymnasium of his old high school. And in his trademark blunt style, he told voters — and warned Republican rivals — that he's ready to be aggressive in the 2016 contest.

"You're going to get what I think whether you like it or not, or whether it makes you cringe every once in a while or not," Christie declared. He added: "I am now ready to fight for the people of the United States of America."

He went on to a town hall meeting in Sandown, New Hampshire, receiving enthusiastic applause from the standing-room crowd as he arrived with his family. "I want to be the next president of the United States and I intend to win this election," he told the meeting, held in an actual town hall.

Christie has already held nearly a dozen town halls in New Hampshire, a state key to his hopes, and plans more as he spends the next week in the state.

Christie enters a Republican presidential field that already has more than a dozen GOP candidates. Not all draw as much attention as Christie, who will compete for the same slice of the electorate as pragmatic-minded White House hopefuls such as former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush.

But it's an accomplished lineup of governors, senators and business peo-

ple. Christie's effort is largely driven by his outsized personality, and his resume, while notable, contains scattered land mines that have given many Republicans pause.

Four years ago, some of Christie's backers tried to persuade him to challenge President Barack Obama. In the years since, he won re-election with ease, but also struggled to revive New Jersey's moribund economy and fought with the state's Democratic-controlled legislature over pensions and the state budget.

While Christie's turn as head of the Republican Governors Association was widely viewed as a success in the 2014 midterm elections, he's also faced the fallout from the actions of three former aides, charged with creating politically motivated traffic jams at a bridge to retaliate against a Democratic mayor who declined to endorse Christie's re-election.

Christie has not been tied directly to wrongdoing, denies he had anything to do with the bridge closing and has seen no evidence emerge to refute that.

Still, the episode deepened the sense that he may surround himself with people who will do anything to win. He declared early in the scandal that "I am not a bully" to counter the public perception that he is just that.

The governor faces a tough sell with many conservatives, but has seemingly found his stride at times in visits to early voting states with the lively town hall meetings he's known for at home. There will be plenty more of those now that he's an affirmed candidate.

Emboldened by his political successes in heavily Democratic New Jersey, he seems himself as a leader who can work across Washington's bitter partisan divide.

"We need this country to work together again, not against each other,"

he said with his wife, Mary Pat and their four children standing behind him. He promised to lead a White House that would "welcome the American people no matter what party, no matter what race or creed or color."

Yet Christie also jabbed President Barack Obama's "weak and feckless foreign policy" and called Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Rodham Clinton the president's "second mate."

"America is tired of hand-wringing and indecisiveness and weakness in the Oval Office," he said. "We need to have strength and decision-making and authority back in the Oval Office. And that is why today I am proud to announce my candidacy for the Republican nomination for president of the United States of America."

In 2012, Christie was seen as the charismatic, pragmatic governor who burst onto the scene in made-for-YouTube moments. He gained national attention with a landmark deal in which the state's public sector unions agreed to higher health care costs and retirement ages in exchange for promised payments into the state's chronically underfunded pension season.

Christie's fortunes have certainly changed.

Now, Christie has been eclipsed by others in a pack of more than dozen rivals. And his poll numbers at home have sunk to record lows. New Jersey's economy is lagging and there have been nine credit downgrades on Christie's watch.

Christie grew up in Livingston, a town about 20 miles west of New York City, and served as class president at the high school. His high school friends were among the first to receive word that Christie would be launching his campaign at their old school.

Greece's Bailout Expires, Country Defaults On IMF Payment

BY ELENA BECATOROS AND DEREK GATOPOULOS
Associated Press

ATHENS, Greece — Greece slipped deeper into its financial abyss after the bailout program it has relied on for five years expired at midnight Tuesday and the country failed to repay a loan due to the International Monetary Fund, deepening fears over whether it will be able to remain in the eurozone.

With its failure to repay the roughly 1.6 billion euros (\$1.8 billion) to the IMF, Greece became the first developed country to fall into arrears on payments to the fund. The last country to do so was Zimbabwe in 2001.

After Greece made a last-ditch effort to extend its bailout, eurozone finance ministers decided in a teleconference late Tuesday night that there was no way they could reach a deal before the deadline.

"It would be crazy to extend the program," said

Dutch Finance Minister Jeroen Dijsselbloem, who heads the eurozone finance ministers' body known as the eurogroup. "So that cannot happen and will not happen."

"The program expires tonight," Dijsselbloem said.

The brinkmanship that has characterized Greece's bailout negotiations with its European creditors and the IMF rose several notches over the weekend, when Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras announced he would put a deal proposal by creditors to a referendum on Sunday and urged a "No" vote.

The move increased fears the country could soon fall out of the euro currency bloc and Greeks rushed to pull money out of ATMs, leading the government to shutter its banks Monday and impose restrictions on banking transactions for at least a week. Greeks are now limited to ATM withdrawals of 60 euros (\$67) a day and cannot send money abroad or make international payments without special permission.

But in a surprise move late Tuesday, Deputy Prime Minister Yannis Dragasakis hinted that the government might be open to calling off the popular vote, saying it was a political decision.

The government decided on the referendum, he said on state television, "and it can make a decision on something else." It was unclear, however, how that would be possible as Parliament has already voted for it to go ahead.

With its economy teetering on the brink, Greece suffered its second sovereign downgrade in as many days when the Fitch ratings agency lowered it further into junk status, to just one notch above the level where it considers default inevitable.

The agency said the breakdown of negotiations "has significantly increased the risk that Greece will not be able to honor its debt obligations in

the coming months, including bonds held by the private sector."

Fitch said it now considered a default on privately-held debt "probable."

Hopes for an 11th-hour deal were raised when the Greek side announced it had submitted a new proposal Tuesday afternoon, and the eurozone's 19 finance ministers held a teleconference to discuss it.

But those hopes were quickly dashed.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel said she ruled out further negotiations with Greece before Sunday's popular vote on whether to accept creditors' demands for budget reforms.

"Before the planned referendum is carried out, we will not negotiate over anything new," the DPA news agency quoted Merkel as saying.

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