

## Obama Wades Into 2016 Campaign

ADDIS ABABA, Ethiopia (AP) — President Barack Obama unleashed a blistering and belittling rebuke of Republican White House hopefuls Monday, calling their attack on his landmark nuclear deal with Iran “ridiculous if it weren’t so sad.”

Standing before television cameras during a trip to Africa, Obama suggested the bellicose rhetoric from some GOP candidates was an attempt to divert attention from Donald Trump, the wealthy businessman-turned presidential contender whose popularity is confounding the Republican field.

“Maybe it gets attention and maybe this is just an effort to push Mr. Trump out of the headlines, but it’s not the kind of leadership that is needed for America right now,” Obama said during a news conference in Ethiopia.

Obama’s comments marked his most direct engagement in the race to succeed him. Until now, he’s largely limited his commentary to policy differences with Republicans, often sidestepping the names of specific candidates.

But the president’s unsparing criticism Monday — targeting candidates Mike Huckabee and Ted Cruz, as well as Trump — underscored his sensitivity to efforts to scuttle the Iran accord, which he hopes will be his signature foreign policy initiative. It also raised the prospect of an aggressive role for Obama in the 2016 presidential campaign.

## NSA To Stop Using Calling Records

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Obama administration has decided that the National Security Agency will soon stop examining — and will ultimately destroy — millions of American calling records it collected under a controversial program leaked by former agency contractor Edward Snowden.

When Congress passed a law in June ending the NSA’s bulk collection of American calling records after a six-month transition, officials said they weren’t sure whether they would continue to make use of the records that had already been collected, which generally go back five years. Typically, intelligence agencies are extremely reluctant to part with data they consider lawfully obtained. The program began shortly after the September 2001 terrorist attacks, but most of the records are purged every five years.

The NSA’s collection of American phone metadata has been deeply controversial ever since Snowden disclosed it to journalists in 2013. President Barack Obama sought, and Congress passed, a law ending the collection and instead allowing the NSA to request the records from phone companies as needed in terrorism investigations.

That still left the question of what to do about the records already in the database. On Monday, the Director of National Intelligence said in a statement those records would no longer be examined in terrorism investigations after Nov. 29, and would be destroyed as soon as possible.

The records can’t be purged at the moment because the NSA is being sued over them, the statement said.

## Boy Scouts End Ban On Gay Adults

NEW YORK (AP) — The Boy Scouts of America on Monday ended its blanket ban on gay adult leaders while allowing church-sponsored Scout units to maintain the exclusion for religious reasons.

The new policy, aimed at easing a controversy that has embroiled the Boy Scouts for years, takes effect immediately. It was approved by the BSA’s National Executive Board on a 45-12 vote during a closed-to-the-media teleconference.

“For far too long this issue has divided and distracted us,” said the BSA’s president, former Defense Secretary Robert Gates. “Now it’s time to unite behind our shared belief in the extraordinary power of Scouting to be a force for good.”

The stage had been set for Monday’s action on May 21, when Gates told the Scouts’ national meeting that the long-standing ban on participation by openly gay adults was no longer sustainable. He said the ban was likely to be the target of lawsuits that the Scouts likely would lose.

Two weeks ago, the new policy was approved unanimously by the BSA’s 17-member National Executive Committee. It would allow local Scout units to select adult leaders without regard to sexual orientation — a stance that several Scout councils have already adopted in defiance of the official national policy.

## Brown’s Autopsy: No Clear Cause Of Death

Medical examiners performing an autopsy on Bobbi Kristina Brown said Monday their initial findings turned up no obvious cause of death, while experts said the months that have passed since Brown was found face-down in a bathtub are working against authorities now tasked with solving how she died.

The Fulton County Medical Examiner’s Office said in a statement Monday afternoon that it will likely be several weeks before it can rule on a manner and cause of death for the 22-year-old daughter of Whitney Houston. The agency said its initial autopsy turned up “no significant injuries” or “previously unknown medical conditions.” It said the next step is ordering lab tests and issuing subpoenas for documents — most likely Brown’s hospital records.

Experts said time is definitely an enemy in Brown’s case. Any drugs she might have taken passed from her bloodstream long ago. Physical injuries would have been healing even as Brown remained largely unresponsive. If police overlooked any physical evidence at Brown’s home after she was hospitalized Jan. 31, recovering it nearly six months later may be impossible.

Dr. Michael Baden, former medical examiner for New York City, has performed more than 20,000 autopsies during a career spanning more than 45 years. He said the first obstacle for forensic pathologists in Brown’s case will be a living body’s ability to mend itself and erase medical evidence.

“Normally, when we do autopsies, we do them in people who freshly died. Things like toxicology and injuries are clear,” said Baden, who helped investigate high-profile cases including the deaths of comedian John Belushi and civil rights worker Medgar Evers. “Because she was in the hospital for a long time, any drugs that may have been in the body will be gone after a few days. Injuries, if there were any injuries, would be changed by the length of time, the healing process.”

# California Seeing More Wildfires, But Sustaining Less Damage

BY SCOTT SMITH

Associated Press

FRESNO, Calif. — The number of California wildfires so far this year is up, but the acreage burned is smaller, the result of favorable weather and more firefighters who can quickly be dispatched to coral flames, fire officials say.

Since Jan. 1, about 5,200 fires have burned on state and federal lands, according to the U.S. Forest Service. That’s 10 percent more than last year, but the 74,000 acres is 6 percent smaller.

Spurts of unseasonably rainy weather combined with the availability of hundreds of additional firefighters paid for with emergency drought funding have made a big difference, California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection spokesman Daniel Berlant said.

“We’ve had more firefighters early,” he said. “That’s allowed us to be more aggressive.”

Cal Fire oversees state land and private property between forests and cities, while the Forest Service is responsible for 21 million acres in 18 national forests.

So far this year, state firefighters have responded to nearly 3,900 blazes — a 41 percent increase from the same period last year, according to Cal Fire. The fires have burned 28 percent less area than last year.

Cal Fire’s map of fire activities showed nine blazes across the state Monday.

One broke out Monday afternoon north of Sacramento, forced residents from their homes and destroyed power lines. It was believed set, and an arrest was made, said Michelle Eidam of the



ERIC PAUL ZAMORA/FRESNO BEE/TNS

**A helicopter flies away from a burning ridge after dropping water on the Willow Fire on July 27 near Bass Lake, Calif.**

Sacramento Metropolitan Fire District, who declined to provide details.

The fire burned 430 acres, but firefighters were making good progress.

Meantime, another wildfire was threatening about 450 structures in the tiny wooded communities of Bass Lake and Cascadel Woods north of Fresno. Residents were notified to prepare to evacuate.

Elsewhere, campgrounds were evacuated and residents were put on alert as a wildfire threatened hundreds of structures in Sierra National Forest. The fire that broke out Saturday and chewed through more than 2 square miles of dry timber. The cause was under investigation.

Firefighters were trying

to take advantage of mild weather before an expected spike in temperatures to triple digits later in the week, said fire spokesman Raj Singh, a spokesman for Sierra National Forest.

“We’re trying to hit it hard today and tonight,” Singh said.

Four firefighters were hurt Sunday while battling a blaze that threatened 1,800 buildings in the rugged Sierra Nevada foothills northeast of Sacramento. One had serious, non-life threatening injuries and remained hospitalized.

Berlant said scattered wet weather has been the biggest factor helping firefighters contain fires more quickly during the fourth year of the drought. However, those storms often have been fol-

lowed by hot, dry spells such as the one expected later this week.

The state has increased its radio and television campaign, reminding campers of the drought and high danger of fire in the wilderness. People cause 95 percent of fires, so getting the message out is important, Berlant said.

“It’s difficult,” he said. “We really struggle making sure we don’t sound like a broken record.”

John Heil, a spokesman for the U.S. Forest Service, said camping on Forest Service land isn’t expected to drop much because of fires. On average, there are 35 million visits to campgrounds each year on Forest Service lands in California.

# US, Turkey Plan For ‘Safe Zone’ Free Of IS In Northern Syria

BY ZEINA KARAM AND JULIE PACE

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Turkey and the United States have agreed on the outlines of a plan to rout the Islamic State group from a strip of Syrian territory along the Turkish border — a plan that opens the possibility of a safe haven for tens of thousands of displaced Syrians but one that also sets up a potential conflict with U.S.-backed Syrian Kurdish forces in the area.

The move further embroils Turkey, a key NATO ally, in Syria’s civil war, and also catapults it into a front-line position in the global war against IS.

A senior Obama administration official said Monday that U.S. discussions with Turkey about an IS-free zone focused on a 68-mile stretch still under IS control. The U.S. has been conducting airstrikes there, which will accelerate now that the U.S. can launch strikes from Turkish soil, the official said.

No agreement between Turkey and the U.S. has yet been finalized, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity under regulations.

In Washington, State Department spokesman John Kirby said that any joint military efforts with Turkey would not include the imposition of a no-fly zone. The U.S. has long rejected Turkish and other requests for a no-fly zone to halt Syrian government air raids, fearing it would draw U.S. forces further into the civil war.

While details of the buffer-zone plan

have yet to be announced, Turkish Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said Ankara and Washington have no intention of sending ground troops into Syria but wanted to see Syria’s moderate opposition forces replace IS near the Turkish border.

“Moderate forces like the Free Syrian Army will be strengthened, a structure will be created so that they can take control of areas freed from ISIL, air cover will be provided. It would be impossible for them to take control of the area without it,” Davutoglu told Turkey’s A Haber television. ISIL is an alternate acronym for the Islamic State group.

The discussions came amid a major tactical shift in Turkey’s approach to IS. After months of reluctance, Turkish warplanes started striking militant targets in Syria last week, and allowed the U.S. to launch its own strikes from Turkey’s strategically located Incirlik Air Base.

Turkey has also called a meeting of its NATO allies for Tuesday to discuss threats to its security and its airstrikes. Davutoglu said “NATO has a duty to protect” Turkey’s border with Syria and Iraq, and that Ankara will seek the alliance’s support for its actions at the meeting in Brussels.

But a Turkish-driven military campaign to push IS out of territory along the Turkish border is likely to complicate matters on the ground.

U.S.-backed Kurdish fighters in Syria, who have been the most successful in the war against IS, control most of the 910 kilometers (565 miles) boundary

with Turkey, and have warned Ankara against any military intervention in northern Syria.

The Islamic State controls roughly a 60-mile stretch of that border, wedged between Turkish-backed insurgents with Islamist ideologies to the left and Kurdish forces from the People’s Protection Unit, known as the YPG, to the right.

The Turkish-U.S. plan raises the question of which Syrian rebel forces would be involved in a ground operation against IS. The U.S. has long complained about having no reliable partners among them. Defense Secretary Ash Carter acknowledged earlier this month that the U.S. has only 60 trainees in a program to prepare and arm thousands of moderate Syrian rebels in the fight against IS militants.

The Obama administration official said the U.S.-led coalition was looking to anti-IS forces such as Syrian Kurds and the Free Syrian Army. He did not elaborate.

Syria’s main Kurdish militia — the YPG or the People’s Protection Units — is affiliated with the Kurdistan Workers’ Party, or PKK, which has waged a decades-long insurgency in Turkey and maintains bases in remote parts of northern Iraq.

Nawaf Khalil, head of the Germany-based Kurdish Center for Studies, said Ankara is likely trying to limit advances by the Syrian Kurdish forces by using the war against IS as a pretext and to steer Washington away from the YPG, but “this will not work.”

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