

NATION/WORLD DIGEST

Court Affirms Bans On Aid To Terrorist Groups

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court upheld the government's authority Monday to ban aid to designated terrorist groups, even when that support is intended to steer the groups toward peaceful and legal activities.

The court left intact a federal law that the Obama administration considers an important tool against terrorism. But human rights organizations say the law's ban on providing training and advice to nearly four dozen organizations on a State Department list squanders a chance to persuade people to renounce extremism.

The justices voted 6-3 to reject a free-speech challenge from humanitarian aid groups to the law that bars "material support" — everything from money to technical know-how to legal advice — to foreign terrorist organizations.

The aid groups were only challenging provisions that put them at risk of being prosecuted for talking to terrorist organizations about nonviolent activities.

But Chief Justice John Roberts said in his opinion for the court that material support intended even for benign purposes can help a terrorist group in other ways.

Obama To Announce New Health Benefits

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama on Tuesday will announce new health insurance benefits for consumers, marking the first 90 days since he signed landmark legislation to expand coverage.

The announcement will follow a private meeting between administration officials, several state insurance commissioners, and CEOs of major insurance companies, amid concerns over continued premium hikes, the White House said. Obama is expected to attend at least part of the session.

Consumers who buy their policies directly faced increases averaging 20 percent this year, according to a survey released Monday by the Kaiser Family Foundation. Although most Americans are covered on the job, about 14 million purchase insurance on the individual market and have the least bargaining power when it comes to costs.

Obama's announcement will cover regulations to implement a so-called patient's bill of rights provided under the new law, said administration allies who were briefed in advance and spoke on condition of anonymity ahead of the official announcement.

White House Disputes Kyl's Border Claim

WASHINGTON (AP) — The White House on Monday disputed a Republican senator's claim that President Barack Obama refuses to secure the Mexican border until Congress agrees to a wide-ranging overhaul of immigration laws.

Sen. Jon Kyl of Arizona told a Tea Party gathering in North Phoenix, Ariz., on Friday of his recent private meeting with Obama in the Oval Office. Kyl, the Senate's second-ranking GOP leader, said he pressed Obama to secure the border against illegal immigrants.

Kyl told the group: "The problem is, he said, 'If we secure the border, then you all won't have any reason to support comprehensive immigration reform.'"

"They want to get something in return for doing their duty," Kyl told the group.

The White House denied the account over the weekend, and Obama spokesman Bill Burton restated that position Monday when questioned by reporters.

AP: Gay Workers To Get Family Leave

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Labor Department intends to issue regulations this week ordering businesses to give gay employees equal treatment under a law permitting workers unpaid time off to care for newborns or loved ones.

Labor Secretary Hilda Solis planned to announce Wednesday that the government would require employers to extend the option that has been available to heterosexual workers for almost two decades, two officials briefed on the plan said Monday. Neither was authorized to speak publicly ahead of the announcement.

The move, coming less than five months before November's congressional elections, seemed likely to incite conservatives and Republicans who stood in lockstep against the Obama administration's earlier efforts to repeal a ban on gays and lesbians serving openly in the military. It also appeared likely to be popular with loyal Democrats and organized labor.

AP: White House Budget Chief To Step Down

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Democratic official tells The Associated Press that President Barack Obama's top budget official, Peter Orszag, plans to step down later this year.

The exacting timing of Orszag's resignation is not clear.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity because the decision has not been announced.

Orszag has been one of the administration's more prominent faces.

Report: Van der Sloot Retracts Confession

AMSTERDAM (AP) — A Dutch newspaper that interviewed Joran van der Sloot in his prison cell in Lima, Peru, said Monday he has retracted his confession to the killing of a young woman there.

De Telegraaf said the 22-year-old Dutchman claims he only signed papers admitting killing Stephany Flores because he was intimidated by police and had been promised he would be transferred to the Netherlands if he confessed.

"I was very scared and confused during the interrogations and wanted to get away," the paper quoted him as saying. "In my blind panic, I signed everything, but didn't even know what it said."

Van der Sloot is the main suspect in Flores' May 30 killing in a Lima hotel, exactly 5 years after the still unsolved disappearance of U.S. teen Natalee Holloway on Aruba. He met both women in casinos, and both were last seen alive in his company.

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NYC Bomb Suspect Pleads Guilty

Man Was Indicted On 10 Counts Of Terrorism

BY TOM HAYS
Associated Press Writer

NEW YORK — A Pakistan-born U.S. citizen pleaded guilty Monday to carrying out the failed Times Square car bombing, saying he wanted it known that unless the U.S. stops attacking Muslim lands, "we will be attacking U.S."

Faisal Shahzad, 30, entered the plea in U.S. District Court in Manhattan just days after a federal grand jury indicted him on 10 terrorism and weapons counts, some of which carried mandatory life prison sentences.

Shahzad made the plea and an accompanying statement as U.S. District Judge Miriam Goldman Cedarbaum began asking him a lengthy series of questions to ensure he understood his rights. She did not immediately accept the plea.

Cedarbaum asked Shahzad if he understood he might spend the rest of his life in prison. He said he did.

At one point, she asked him if he was sure he wanted to plead guilty.

He said he wanted "to plead guilty and 100 times more" to let the U.S. know that if it did not get out of Iraq and Afghanistan, halt drone attacks and stop meddling in Muslim lands, "we will be attacking U.S."

The Bridgeport, Conn., resident was arrested trying to leave the country May 3, two days after a gasoline-and-propane bomb failed to ignite in an SUV parked near a Broadway theater.

Authorities said Shahzad immediately cooperated, delaying his initial court appearance for two weeks as he spilled details of a plot meant to sow terror in the world-famous Times Square on a warm Saturday night when it was packed with thousands of potential victims.

The bomb apparently sputtered, emitting smoke that attracted the attention of an alert street vendor, who notified police, setting in motion a rapid evacuation of blocks of a city still healing from the shock of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attack on the World Trade Center.

According to the indictment issued last week, Shahzad received a total of \$12,000 prior to the attack from the Pakistani Taliban through cash drop-offs in Massachusetts and Long Island.

Attorney General Eric Holder said the Pakistani Taliban "facilitated Faisal Shahzad's attempted attack on American soil."

Shahzad was accused in the indictment of receiving explosives training in Waziristan, Pakistan, during a five-week trip to that country. He returned to the United States in February.

The indictment said he received \$5,000 in cash on Feb. 25 from a co-conspirator in Pakistan and \$7,000 more on April 10, allegedly sent at the co-conspirator's direction.

Shahzad, born in Pakistan, moved to the United States when he was 18.

Pakistan has arrested at least 11 people since the attempted attack. An intelligence official has alleged two of them played a role in the plot. No one has been charged.

Three men in Massachusetts and Maine suspected of supplying money to Shahzad have been detained on immigration charges; one was recently transferred to New York.



JOHN FITZHUGH/BILOXI SUN HERALD/MCT

Bay St. Louis firefighter Mike King, right, looks at a white foamy substance that was floating on the surface of the Bay of St. Louis along the Mississippi Gulf coast Monday. An unknown substance appeared in the bay on Sunday, alarming residents who became concerned that it was from oil from the Deepwater Horizon.

Locals Voice Opposition To Drilling Moratorium

BY RICHARD FAUSSET AND MOLLY HENNESSY-FISKE
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NEW ORLEANS — Inside New Orleans' federal court-house Monday, a judge was deliberating the points of law that could determine the fate of the Obama administration's six-month moratorium on deep-water drilling.

Outside, Lucy Lailhenge was marching up and down Poydras Street with a sign that offered a more blunt line of reasoning: "If you support the moratorium, stop using oil and gas!"

Lailhenge, 52, says she can smell the spilled oil in the Gulf of Mexico from her home in suburban Chalmette, and she worries about the crude despoiling nearby wetlands. Yet on the whole, the oil industry has been good to Lailhenge — very good. With a high-school degree, she pulls down white-collar money as a title analyst for a drilling company. It's a common story in a state where the offshore oil and gas industry alone has an

estimated \$3 billion economic impact.

"I just think it's ridiculous to shut down a whole industry and ruin thousands of lives to punish one company," she said. "We've had a lot of fatalities on the bridges. You don't see them shutting down the bridges."

That argument, echoed by Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal, the oil industry, and a multitude of regular Gulf-dwelling folk living close to the disaster, is at the heart of a lawsuit challenging the moratorium, which was filed earlier this month by companies that provide ships and supplies to the offshore rigs.

The plaintiffs, led by marine company Hornbeck Offshore Services LLC, argue that the government overstepped its bounds in issuing the May 28 moratorium that halted work on 33 deep-water rigs. They also argue that there is nothing to suggest that deepwater drilling "is more dangerous today than it was on the day immediately preceding the tragic incident involving the Deepwater Horizon."

House, Senate Reach Accord On Debit Cards

BY JIM KUHNHENN
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Limits on the fees banks charge merchants who accept debit cards would not apply to government-issued cards, under a tentative House-Senate deal aimed at easing worries raised by state treasurers.

The agreement announced Monday softens a Senate provision in a broad financial regulation bill that requires the Federal Reserve to limit the amount banks collect from merchants for every debit card transaction.

Separately, House negotiators tentatively agreed to accept a Senate proposal to set up a consumer financial protection bureau as an independent agency inside the Federal Reserve. The House and the Obama administration had wanted a stand alone agency.

The debit card provision, approved by the Senate last month 64-33, aimed to save retailers billions of dollars in debit card fees. Merchants said the charges resulted in inflated costs to consumers.

Under the tentative deal, the limits would not cover debit cards issued by the federal or state governments, which use the cards for programs such as unemployment or child support payments. Several state treasurers argued that restricting fees paid by merchants could force banks to increase charges for the cards to states.

Merchants typically pay between 1 and 2 percent of a debit

card transaction to banks and the credit card networks, mainly Visa and MasterCard. Most of the money goes to the banks.

The agreement requires the Federal Reserve to set limits on those fees, based on what it considers "reasonable and proportional" to the cost to banks. The agreement allows the Fed, in determining the fee amount, to consider the banks' costs of protecting against debit card fraud. The changes also would require the Fed to regulate only the fees set by banks, not by the credit card networks such as Visa and MasterCard. The bulk of the fees are imposed by banks.

The legislation already contains an exclusion for banks with less than \$10 billion in assets. But bankers say the exemption doesn't help because small banks would still have to cut their fees to remain competitive.

The deal was struck by Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., lead sponsor of the debit card proposal, and Democratic Reps. Carolyn Maloney and Gregory Meeks of New York, both members of a House-Senate panel working out differences between the two chambers' financial regulation bills. The original House legislation did not contain restrictions on debit card fees. Banks and credit unions have been battling retailers in a lobbying war over the fees. The Senate's vote to have the Fed set limits caught the financial industry by surprise, adding yet another front to their efforts to soften the bill's impact.

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