



Johnny Cash Tribute Set For Yankton • **1B**

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Syria Has Crossed 'Red Line,' Obama Says

With Evidence Of Chemical Weapons, U.S. Steps Up Support To Rebels

BY MATTHEW LEE AND JULIE PACE
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama has authorized sending weapons to Syrian rebels for the first time, U.S. officials said Thursday, after the White House disclosed that the United States has conclusive evidence President Bashar Assad's government used chemical weapons against opposition forces trying to overthrow him.

Obama has repeatedly said the use of chemical weapons would cross a "red line," suggesting it would trigger greater American intervention in the two-year crisis.

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., one of the strongest proponents of U.S. military action in Syria, said he was told Thursday that Obama had decided to "provide arms to the rebels," a decision confirmed by three U.S. officials. The officials cautioned that decisions on the specific type of weaponry were still being finalized, though the CIA was expected to be tasked with teaching the rebels how to use the arms the White House had agreed to supply.

Still, the White House signaled that Obama did plan to step up U.S. involvement in the Syrian crisis in response to the chemical weapons disclosure.

"This is going to be different in both scope and scale in terms of what we are providing," said Ben Rhodes, Obama's deputy national security adviser.

The U.S. has so far provided the Syrian rebel army with rations and medical supplies.

Thursday's announcement followed a series of urgent meetings at the White House this week that revealed deep divisions within the administration over U.S. involvement in Syria's civil war. The proponents of more aggressive action — including Secretary of State John Kerry — appeared to have won out over those wary of sending weapons and ammunition into a war zone where Hezbollah and Iranian fighters are backing Assad's armed forces, and al-Qaida-linked extremists back the rebellion.

Obama still opposes putting American troops on the ground in Syria and the U.S. has made no decision on operating a no-fly zone over Syria, Rhodes said.

U.S. officials said the administration could provide the rebels with a range of weapons, including small arms, ammunition, assault rifles and a variety of anti-tank weaponry such as shoulder-fired remote-propelled grenades and other missiles. However, a final decision on the inventory has not been made, the officials said.

Most of those would be weapons the opposition forces could easily use and not require much additional training to operate. Obama's opposition to deploying American troops

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RANDY DOCKENDORF/P&D
Menno freehand airbrush artist Mickey Harris (right) congratulates Michael Fitzmaurice of Hartford after Fitzmaurice — the only living Medal of Honor recipient in South Dakota — signed the hood of a 1956 Thunderbird. Vietnam War veteran Ronnie Rains of Texas purchased the vintage car and will sell it at auction to raise funds for the Wounded Warriors Family Support organization.

A Sign Of The Times



EMILY NIEBRUGGE/P&D

A 1956 Thunderbird has become a work of art, as Menno freehand airbrush artist Mickey Harris has created the Medal of Honor theme for the car to be sold at auction. As part of the car's patriotic symbolism, Harris has incorporated a dash board with dog tags for each of the nation's 79 living Medal of Honor recipients.

S.D. Veteran Provides First Medal Of Honor Signature For Menno Artist's Project

BY RANDY DOCKENDORF
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MENNO — Michael Fitzmaurice has signed routine things in his life, but his latest signature could change countless lives.

The Hartford man didn't place his "John Hancock" on a check or document — or any paper, for that matter.

With pen in hand, he became the first to sign the hood of a 1956 Ford Thunderbird on display Thursday at the Classic Collision auto body shop in Menno. The car's artwork honors the nation's living Medal of Honor winners, including Fitzmaurice — the only remaining Medal of Honor winner in South Dakota.

"I have signed a lot of stuff, but this is only my second car that I have ever signed," the Hartford veteran said with a smile. "I'm pretty excited about being the first to sign this car."

Nationally-renowned airbrushing artist Mickey Harris works out of the Menno shop. Using his freehand style, he is painting the restored Thunderbird with a Medal of Honor theme. The dashboard features dog tags with the names of every living Medal of Honor recipient. The car also contains patriotic symbols and powerful scenes of military battles.

When completed, the car will be taken in September to the Medal of Honor reunion in Gettysburg, Pa. The goal is to collect signatures from as many of the nation's 79 surviving Medal of Honor recipients as possible.

"This will make it a very, very rare car, and we thought it was appropriate that the first signature come from South Dakota," Harris said.

The Thunderbird will be showcased during a national tour. The vehicle will eventually be placed on the auction block with the Barrett-Jackson company. All proceeds will go to the Wounded Warriors Family Support organization, benefiting injured service members and their families.

Menno mayor Darrell Mehlhaf welcomed the audience to Thursday's program, opening with an introduction of area veterans from the World War II, Korea and Vietnam eras.

"People need to thank the veterans, and that didn't always happen," Mehlhaf said.

Fitzmaurice said he was just performing his mission when he was hit by shrapnel while serving in Vietnam in 1970-71.

"I received my Medal of Honor in 1973, but I never thought about medals (in Vietnam). I was just fighting to stay alive," he said. "I never figured I would survive. It must have been a Higher Power."

Fitzmaurice spoke with reverence about those who never made it home.

"I'm nothing special," he said. "I just did what I had to do."

Thursday's program recognized Ronnie Rains, a Vietnam War veteran from Odessa, Texas, who bought the 1956 Thunderbird at auction.

Rains told the *Press & Dakotan* that he has restored cars for many years. The Thunderbird isn't the first time he bought a car for the purpose of benefiting a cause.

"We have the sale of these cars, and the money raised goes for charities," he said. "Most of the time, (the cars) are donated

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Shelterbelt Needs Dwindling

Area Producers Clearing Out Trees To Open Up Land

BY DEREK BARTOS
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As the winds of the Dust Bowl of the 1930s wreaked havoc on topsoil throughout the Great Plains, farmers took action by planting shelterbelts to protect their land.

Today, thanks to modern farming techniques and higher commodity prices, many of those trees are being uprooted in south-eastern South Dakota and north-eastern Nebraska. This was especially true last fall, when an early harvest gave farmers more time to do the work.

"There have been more tree sites removed in the last few years than in the previous decade," said Doug Henderson, a soil conservation technician with the Natural Resources Conservation Service in Yankton.

Henderson said that with the newer farming equipment and techniques that are currently available, shelterbelts are not



PHOTO: LISA HARE

This photo taken in April shows the brush remains of a tree grove that was cut down in Knox County, Neb., to open the land up for crop production. With corn prices remaining high, more producers are clearing away old shelterbelts for crop-planting purposes.

needed as much as they were decades ago to control soil erosion.

"When you get out on those fields where we used to plant windbreaks, even those that are the most susceptible to wind erosion can be controlled with simple tillage practice changes like no-till," he said.

While those tillage practices have been available for several years, Henderson said many farmers haven't had the financial incentive to remove the trees.

However, producers are now clearing out their land to plant more crops and take advantage of higher prices, he said.

"The math didn't work until corn went to \$7. Now it does work," he said. "It's not free to clear these acres, and you don't recoup your investment in the first year, or even 10 years in some cases."

While more and more shelter-

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Online Auction To Determine Yankton Post Office's Fate

BY NATHAN JOHNSON
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The former post office in downtown Yankton will be sold via an online auction.

The *Press & Dakotan* reported earlier this week that the facility would be auctioned off, and now more details of how it will occur have emerged.

According to Peter Nowacki, a spokesman for the U.S. Postal Service (USPS), the property will be listed on the General Services Administration's (GSA) auction website realestatesales.gov when the auction commences. Although the auction is expected to begin soon, no date has been finalized.

"The sales solicitation, or Invitation for Bid (IFB), will contain information including the starting bid and minimum bid increment," Nowacki said. "GSA structures its auction to encourage maximum

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