

FBI: No Sign Of Remains Of Jimmy Hoffa Found

OAKLAND TOWNSHIP, Mich. (AP) — Beneath a swimming pool, under a horse farm and now a weed-grown field north of Detroit. For at least the third time in a decade, FBI agents grabbed shovels and combed through dirt and mud in the search for Jimmy Hoffa's remains or clues to the disappearance of the former Teamsters boss.

Once again, the search was futile. "Certainly, we're disappointed," Detroit FBI chief Robert Foley told reporters Wednesday as federal and local authorities wrapped up another excavation that failed to turn up anything that could be linked to Hoffa, who has been missing since 1975.

Many people interested in the mystery assume Hoffa ran afoul of the mob and was whacked.

"Right now the case remains open," Foley said. "At this point, if we do get logical leads and enough probable cause that warrant the resources to do an investigation, then we'll continue to do so."

U.S. Scrambles To Save Talks With Taliban

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — Hopes dimmed for talks aimed at ending the Afghan war when an angry President Hamid Karzai on Wednesday suspended security negotiations with the U.S. and scuttled a peace delegation to the Taliban, sending American officials scrambling to preserve the possibility of dialogue with the militants.

What provoked the mercurial Karzai and infuriated many other Afghans was a move by the Taliban to cast their new office in the Gulf nation of Qatar as a rival embassy. The Taliban held a ribbon-cutting ceremony Tuesday in which they hoisted their flag and a banner with the name they used while in power more than a decade ago: "Political Office of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan."

U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry spoke with Karzai on the phone, telling him that his concerns were justified and that he would work to resolve the issue.

An American official, speaking anonymously because he was not authorized to disclose the information, said he still expects to have the first public meeting with Taliban representatives in the next few days in Qatar but that no exact meeting date has been set.

Nevertheless, the militants' attempt at a publicity coup clearly played to Karzai's longstanding distrust of both the Taliban and the United States, who had announced Tuesday that they would pursue negotiations in the Qatari capital of Doha — at least initially without the Afghan government.

Bill: 25 Percent Decline In Illegal Immigration

WASHINGTON (AP) — Illegal immigration into the United States would decrease by only 25 percent under a far-reaching Senate immigration bill, according to an analysis by the Congressional Budget Office that also finds the measure reduces federal deficits by billions.

Supporters of the legislation moving toward a vote on the Senate floor seized on the deficit-reduction findings by Congress' nonpartisan scorekeeping agency, along with the agency's forecast that the immigration measure would boost economic growth as millions of workers join the workforce and begin to pay taxes.

But the CBO report also found that the bill, which takes steps to prevent people coming to the U.S. illegally while offering the hope of citizenship to some 11 million people already here without authorization, does not come close to ending illegal immigration. Indeed some aspects of the bill would make the problem worse, the report said.

"Unauthorized residents would find it harder both to enter the country and to find employment while unauthorized. However, other aspects of the bill would probably increase the number of unauthorized residents — in particular, people overstaying their visas issued under the new programs for temporary workers," the CBO report said, adding that the net annual flow of unauthorized residents would decrease by about 25 percent compared to current law.

That would amount to 2.5 million fewer immigrants coming to the U.S. illegally over the next 20 years than would happen under current law, the CBO said.

U.S., Cuba Agree To Resume Migration Talks

HAVANA (AP) — The United States and Cuba have agreed to resume bilateral talks on migration issues next month, a State Department official said Wednesday, the latest evidence of a thaw in chilly relations between the Cold War enemies.

Havana and Washington just wrapped up a round of separate negotiations aimed at restarting direct mail service, which has been suspended since 1963. Both sets of talks have been on hold in recent years in a dispute over the fate of U.S. government subcontractor Alan Gross, who is serving a 15-year jail sentence in Havana after he was caught bringing communications equipment onto the island illegally.

The migration talks will be held in Washington on July 17. The State Department official, who was not authorized to discuss the matter publicly, spoke on condition of anonymity.

"Representatives from the Department of State are scheduled to meet with representatives of the Cuban government to discuss migration issues," the official said, adding that the talks were "consistent with our interest in promoting greater freedoms and respect for human rights in Cuba."

Word of the jump-started talks sparked an angry reaction from Cuban-American Republican Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen of Florida, who blasted the Obama administration for what she saw as a policy of appeasement.

Actor James Gandolfini Dead At Age 51

LOS ANGELES (AP) — HBO and James Gandolfini's managers say the actor famous for his role in "The Sopranos" has died in Italy.

The cable channel, and managers Mark Armstrong and Nancy Sanders, say the 51-year-old Gandolfini (gan-dahl-FEE-nee) died Wednesday while on holiday in Rome.

In a statement, HBO called the actor a great talent and a gentle and loving person.

Gandolfini played conflicted mob boss Tony Soprano in the groundbreaking HBO series that aired from 1999 to 2007.

His film credits included "Zero Dark Thirty" and "Killing Them Softly," and he appeared in the Broadway production "God of Carnage."

Obama Urges 'Bold' Nuclear Cuts

BY JULIE PACE

AP White House Correspondent

BERLIN — Summoning the harsh history of this once-divided city, President Barack Obama on Wednesday cautioned the U.S. and Europe against "complacency" brought on by peace, pledging to cut America's deployed nuclear weapons by one-third if Cold War foe Russia does the same.

The president also declared that his far-reaching surveillance programs had saved lives on both sides of the Atlantic, as he sought to defend the controversial data-mining to skeptical Europeans.

Speaking against the soaring backdrop of the Brandenburg Gate, Obama said that "bold reductions" to the U.S. and Russian nuclear forces were needed to move the two powers away from the war posture that continues to seed mistrust between their governments.

"We may not live in fear of nuclear annihilation, but as long as nuclear weapons exist, we are not truly safe," Obama said as he closed a three-day visit to Europe, his first trip to the continent since winning re-election.

Obama is grappling with both domestic disputes and foreign policy challenges that have distracted from his second term agenda. Two matters — the fierce civil war in Syria and the U.S. government's domestic surveillance program — trailed Obama in Germany, as well as during the Group of 8 summit in Northern Ireland earlier this week.

Privacy-protective Germany was particularly eager for answers about the sweeping programs run by the National Security Agency. Chancellor Angela Merkel used a news conference with Obama Wednesday to appeal for "due diligence" in evaluating the privacy concerns, though she avoided a direct public confrontation with the president.

"There needs to be proportionality," she said of the U.S. programs. "This is going to be an ongoing battle."

Obama offered a lengthy defense of the court-approved surveillance of Internet and phone records, describing it as a targeted effort that has "saved lives."

"We know of at least 50 threats



CLAUDIA HIMMELREICH/MCT

President Barack Obama arrives for a 26-hour visit in Berlin, Germany. Protesters at Checkpoint Charlie ("You are leaving the American Sector") told him he was welcome but NSA policies were not.

that have been averted because of this information, not just in the United States but in some cases threats here in Germany," he said.

The centerpiece of the president's visit was the afternoon speech at the Brandenburg Gate, where the Berlin Wall once stood, marking divisions between East and West Germany. Obama, standing behind a pane of bulletproof glass, spoke from the gate's East front, a location that would have been inaccessible to an American president in an earlier era.

The president's address drew inevitable comparisons to John F. Kennedy's famous "Ich bin ein Berliner" (I am a Berliner) speech exactly 50 years ago, as well as Obama's own thunderous welcome when he arrived in the city as a presidential candidate in 2008. More than 200,000 people filled the streets near Berlin's Victory Column for that address, a reflection of Europe's high hopes for the rising American political figure.

Now in his fifth year as president, Obama remains popular in Europe. But the crowd that gathered to hear him speak Wednesday was far smaller and less exuberant than it was in 2008 — just 4,500 people wilting in the sun on an unseasonably warm June day.

Obama took off his suit coat as he opened his remarks, telling the crowd, "We can be a little more informal among friends." Still, sweat beaded on his face as he read off a

paper copy of his text because of problems with the teleprompter he normally relies on.

The wide-ranging address enumerated a litany of challenges facing the world, punctured by Obama's calls for the West to reignite the spirit that Berlin displayed as many citizens struggled to reunite the city during the Cold War.

"Today's threats are not as stark as they were half a century ago, but the struggle for freedom and security and human dignity, that struggle goes on," he said. "And I come here to this city of hope because the test of our time demands the same fighting spirit that defined Berlin a half-century ago."

The president commended Germany and other European nations for leading the way in tackling climate change, an issue he has pledged to make a priority in his second term. And he reiterated his desire to shut the Guantanamo Bay detention center, a comment that was enthusiastically received by the German crowd despite the president's failure to achieve the same goal during his first term.

Obama's nuclear pledges signaled an effort by the White House to revive a national security matter that has languished in recent years. But he set no deadlines for reaching a negotiated agreement with the Russians and his proposals were quickly questioned by

officials in Moscow.

Russian foreign affairs official Alexei Pushkov told the Interfax news agency the proposals needed "serious revision so that they can be seen by the Russian side as serious and not as propaganda proposals." And Yuri Ushakov, foreign policy aide to President Vladimir Putin, told reporters that Moscow had already told the White House that any further arms reduction would have to involve countries besides just Russia and the United States.

"The situation is now far from what it was in the '60s and '70s, when only the USA and the Soviet Union discussed arms reduction," Ushakov said.

Obama also faced questions during his news conference with Merkel on deepening U.S. involvement in Syria and potential pitfalls in efforts to peacefully wind down the U.S.-led war in Afghanistan.

On Syria, Obama pointedly refused to detail steps his government has recently taken to arm rebels seeking to overthrow Syrian President Bashar Assad. U.S. officials have confirmed that the administration has approved weapons and ammunition shipments to the opposition.

"I cannot and will not comment on specifics around our programs related to the Syrian opposition," Obama said.

The president also tried to explain away a surprise announcement that Afghan President Hamid Karzai was suspending talks with the U.S. on a new security deal in protest over the handling of initial peace negotiations with the Taliban. Obama announced the Taliban talks only one day prior, praising Karzai as he did as "courageous."

Obama said the U.S. had anticipated "there were going to be some areas of friction, to put it mildly, in getting this thing off the ground. That's not surprising. They've been fighting there for a long time" and mistrust is rampant. But he said it was important to pursue a parallel track toward reconciliation even as the fighting continued, and it would be up to the Afghan people as to whether that effort ultimately bore fruit.

Fed. Suggests It's Closer To Slowing Bond Purchases

BY MARTIN CRUTSINGER

AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON — Chairman Ben Bernanke ended weeks of speculation Wednesday by saying the Federal Reserve will likely slow its bond-buying program this year and end it next year because the economy is strengthening.

The Fed's purchases of Treasury and mortgage bonds have helped keep long-term interest rates at record lows. A pullback in its extraordinary \$85 billion-a-month program would likely mean higher rates on mortgages and other consumer and business loans.

Anticipating higher rates, investors reacted Wednesday by selling both stocks and bonds. The Dow Jones industrial average closed down 206 points. The yield on the 10-year Treasury note closed at 2.33 percent. In early May, it was 1.63 percent.

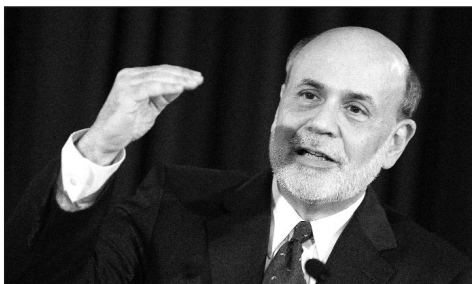
Investors have been selling bonds and driving up yields since last month after vague signals from the Fed that higher long-term rates might be coming.

After a two-day policy meeting, the Fed upgraded its outlook for unemployment and economic growth. In a statement, the Fed said the "downside risks to the outlook" had diminished since fall. Fed members voted to continue the pace of its bond-buying program for now.

At a news conference afterward, Bernanke said the Fed would slow its bond buying later this year as long as the economy sustained its improvement.

He said the pullback in purchases would occur in "measured steps" and could end by the middle of 2014. By then, he thinks unemployment will be around 7 percent.

Asked why the Fed's statement made no mention of scaling back the bond purchases, Bernanke said he had been "deputized" to clarify the Fed's policy and how it might vary depending on the economy's health.



OLIVIER DOULIERY/ABACA PRESS/MCT

Federal Reserve Board Chairman Ben Bernanke speaks at a news conference at the Federal Reserve System in Washington, DC. The Federal Open Market Committee announces its economic projections, revealing how its members expect growth, employment and inflation to evolve in the years ahead.

He likened any reduction in the Fed's bond purchases to a driver letting up on a gas pedal rather than applying the brakes. He stressed that even after the Fed ends its bond purchases, it will continue to maintain its vast investment portfolio, which will help keep long-term rates down.

The ultra-low borrowing rates the Fed has engineered have been credited with helping fuel a housing comeback, support economic growth, drive stocks to record highs and restore the wealth America lost to the recession. Investors now think the days of record-low rates are over.

"There's fear you'll see an expanding economy, which has a tendency to push up interest rates," said Jack Ablin, chief investment officer of BMO Private Bank.

Some investors worry that higher rates will cause investors to shift money out of stocks and into higher-yielding bonds. Others fear the economy might not be ready to absorb higher rates and that consumers and businesses could pull back on borrowing.

Talley Leger, a strategist at Macro Vision Research, said investors had become hooked on the Fed's efforts to keep rates at record lows.

"Markets are asking for expansion of already stimulative policies, and they're not getting it," Leger said. "It's like drug supplier and an addict."

Bernanke suggested that increased home prices and household wealth, a stronger construction industry and steady consumer spending would help support economic growth and offset higher mortgage rates.

"Generally speaking, financial conditions are improving," he said.

The Fed's more upbeat forecast helps explain why it thinks record-low rates may soon no longer be necessary. Low rates help fuel economic growth. But they also raise the risk of high inflation and dangerous bubbles in assets like stocks or real estate.

In its statement, the Fed also said it would maintain its plan to keep short-term rates at record lows at least until unemployment reaches 6.5 percent.

In its updated economic forecast, Fed officials predicted that unemployment will fall to 7.2 percent or 7.3 percent at the end of this year from 7.6 percent now. They think the rate will be between 6.5 percent and 6.8 percent by the end of 2014, better than its previous projection in March of 6.7 percent to 7 percent.

The Fed also said inflation was running below its 2 percent long-run objective, but noted that temporary factors were partly the reason. It said inflation could run as low as 0.8 percent this year. But it predicts it will pick up next year to between 1.4 percent and 2 percent.

David Robin, co-head of the futures and options desk at the brokerage Newedge, said he didn't think Bernanke's upbeat assessment matches an economy that's just "muddling along."

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