

Burwell Issues Warning To Congress

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congress and the states will need to find an answer if the Supreme Court strikes down the federal subsidies that are a foundation of President Barack Obama's health care law, his health secretary told lawmakers Wednesday.

Sylvia Burwell also said the president would reject any proposals restoring those subsidies that Republican lawmakers have already produced because all would roll back crucial elements of the overhaul law, in effect repealing it. "Something that repeals the Affordable Care Act is something the president will not sign," she said.

Burwell's comments to the House Ways and Means Committee marked a continuation of Obama administration efforts to pressure Republicans should the justices void subsidies that help millions afford health insurance. A decision is expected this month.

The GOP runs Congress, and 26 of the 34 states likely to be hardest hit by such a decision have Republican governors.

Lawyers Push For Woodfox Release

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Lawyers for the last of the Angola Three still behind bars are arguing for his immediate release, saying he poses no flight risk and needs urgent medical care.

The attorneys for Albert Woodfox filed papers Wednesday opposing the state of Louisiana's efforts to keep him behind bars.

A judge Monday ordered Woodfox's immediate release, but the state won an emergency stay to keep him behind bars while the two sides argue the matter before an appeals court.

The Angola Three is a group of inmates made famous by their extensive stays in isolation at the Louisiana State Penitentiary in Angola.

Woodfox was accused in 1972 of killing a guard, but courts have overturned his two convictions in the case. The state maintains he's guilty and wants to retry him.

Manhunt For 2 Escaped Killers Expands

DANNEMORA, N.Y. (AP) — The manhunt for two escaped killers expanded to campsites and boat slips in Vermont on Wednesday, and State Police said a female prison staff member being questioned may have had a role in helping the men.

At a news conference outside the maximum-security prison, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo and Vermont Gov. Peter Shumlin said investigators learned that the inmates had talked before last weekend's breakout about going to neighboring Vermont.

"We have information that suggests they thought New York was going to be hot. Vermont would be cooler, in terms of law enforcement," Shumlin said on Day 5 of the search. "And that a camp in Vermont might be a better place to be. We do not."

He and other officials would not say how authorities learned that information.

New York State Police Superintendent Joseph D'Amico also said that a prison employee — identified in news reports as Joyce Mitchell, a training supervisor at the prison tailor shop — had befriended the killers and "may have had some role in assisting them."

Amtrak Engineer Wasn't On Cellphone

WASHINGTON (AP) — The engineer in last month's fatal Amtrak crash wasn't using his cellphone to talk, text or download anything just before the train sped off the tracks, investigators said Wednesday, addressing one big question about what might have caused the accident but only deepening the mystery of what did.

Eight people were killed and about 200 were injured in the crash in Philadelphia. For reasons still unknown, the train accelerated to 106 miles per hour in the minute before it entered a curve where the speed limit is 50, investigators have said previously. In the last few seconds the brakes were applied with maximum force, but the train was still traveling at over 100 mph when it left the tracks.

In its updated report Wednesday, the National Transportation Safety Board said an examination of the cellphone of the engineer, Brandon Bostian, also indicated he didn't access the train's Wi-Fi system while he was operating the locomotive.

Bostian suffered a head injury in the May 12 crash, and his attorney has said he doesn't remember anything after the train pulled out of Philadelphia's 30th Street Station, the last stop before the derailment.

Bostian provided investigators with his passcode to the phone, allowing them access to the data, the NTSB said.

Pope Creates Tribunal For Abuse Cases

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis took the biggest step yet to crack down on bishops who cover up for priests who rape and molest children, creating a new tribunal inside the Vatican to hear cases of bishops accused of failing to protect their flock.

The initiative, announced Wednesday, has significant legal and theological implications, since bishops have long been considered masters of their dioceses and largely unaccountable when they bungle their job, with the Vatican stepping in only in cases of gross negligence.

That reluctance to intervene has prompted years of criticism from abuse victims, advocacy groups and others that the Vatican had failed to punish or forcibly remove bishops who moved predator priests from parish to parish, where they could rape again, rather than report them to police or remove them from ministry.

The Vatican said Francis had approved proposals made by his sexual abuse advisory board, which includes survivors of abuse as well as experts in child protection policies. The proposals call for a new mechanism by which the Vatican can receive and examine complaints of "abuse of office" by bishops, and bring them to trial in a Vatican tribunal.

A special new judicial section, with permanent staff, will be created inside the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith "to judge bishops with regard to crimes of the abuse of office when connected to the abuse of minors," a Vatican statement said.

Iraq Still In Disarray One Year After ISIS Took Mosul

BY VIVIAN SALAMA
Associated Press

BAGHDAD — The Islamic State group gave only three options for the soldiers and police officers guarding Mosul, Iraq's second-largest city, when they neared it a year ago: Repent, run or die.

Many ran. Those who resisted died, often gruesomely in mass killings filmed and uploaded to the Internet, only fueling fear of the extremists.

The collapse of Iraqi security forces, which received billions of dollars in aid and training from the U.S. during its occupation, haunts this divided country today, a year after the Islamic State group seized Mosul and a third of the country. Its sectarian divides grow deeper as millions remain displaced, military gains have seen militant counterattacks and a U.S.-led campaign of airstrikes appears not to have changed the stalemate.

What can change the situation is unclear, as lower oil prices sap the Iraqi economy, the U.S. limits its involvement on the ground and the Iraqi people as a whole continue to suffer.

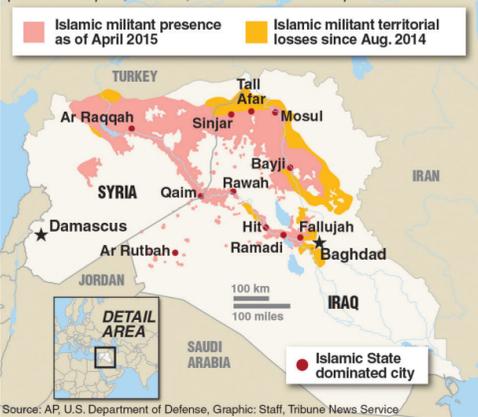
"There's no salary, no job, no life," said a 31-year-old former soldier named after the country's former dictator Saddam Hussein, who saw his young son killed as his family fled Mosul for Irbil in Iraq's Kurdish region. "And if you have a child and he gets sick, you can't treat him."

On June 10, 2014, the Islamic State group took full control of Mosul, part of its lightning sweep from its territory in war-ravaged Syria and Iraq's Anbar province. Videos quickly emerged of the extremists waving their trademark black flags in parades down Mosul's streets or driving Iraqi forces' U.S.-made Humvees, as darker films of their massing killings followed.

Weeks later, Islamic State leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi reportedly spoke at Mosul's main mosque and the group declared a "caliphate" over territory it controlled, demanding the loyalty of the world's Muslims. A U.S.-led air campaign began in August targeting the group, the number of strikes now numbering around 1,900.

Militants slowly losing ground

Although Islamic State militants are slowly losing territory, the White House has decided to send several hundred more troops to Iraq to expand training of Iraqi forces aiming to help Iraq retake the provincial capital, Ramadi, which the militants captured last month.



While Shiite militias advised by Iran and Iraqi forces have recaptured Tikrit, Saddam's hometown, the battle on the ground appears at the least locked in stalemate — or at the worst, not in Iraq's favor. Former Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki, a Shiite who stepped down in August amid calls for his resignation, is widely blamed for the corruption and incompetence in Iraq's armed forces after he replaced top Sunni commanders with his own loyalists.

The Islamic State group's advance merely exposed the rot, as entire units collapsed and soldiers stripped off their uniforms as they fled, leaving behind large caches of U.S.-supplied weapons.

Iraqi Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi has vowed to empower Sunni tribesmen through the formation of a national guard, which would oversee security in the Sunni heartland — areas predominantly under Islamic State control today. But the force has failed to get off the ground and many remain suspicious of the Shiite-led government in Baghdad.

Meanwhile, the U.S. remains hesitant to become too involved in the war after U.S. President Barack Obama withdrew all American ground forces at the end of 2011. There now are slightly

fewer than 3,100 U.S. troops in Iraq training and advising local forces, but they are not fighting on the front line. The White House said Wednesday the U.S. will send up to 450 more troops to Iraq to boost the training of local forces.

"We have made significant progress in pushing back ISIL ... but we've also seen areas like in Ramadi where they're displaced in one place and then they come back in in another," Obama said Monday, referring to the Islamic State group by an alternate acronym. "And they're nimble, and they're aggressive, and they're opportunistic."

Former U.S. Ambassador to Iraq Zalmay Khalilzad told The Associated Press that any real solution in Iraq will require greater involvement from neighboring countries.

"Without the involvement of Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey, working together, it will be difficult — if not impossible — to achieve any realistic solutions," Khalilzad said.

Economically, Iraq also finds itself unable to pay for the war it needs to fight. Plummeting oil prices — down 43 percent from a year ago — have dealt a major shock to Iraq, which relies on oil for 90 percent of its revenues. Unemployment stands at 25 percent.

At least 40 percent of

the country's workforce — about 5 million people — is employed by the government, which is struggling to pay salaries. That includes civil servants in Islamic State-held areas, who still receive salaries which are then taxed by the militants, according to residents in Mosul and Fallujah who spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retribution.

"We have no choice," Ahmad Chalabi, a former deputy prime minister and chairman of parliament's finance committee, told the AP in February. "What will this say about the loyalty of the Iraqi government if we stop paying our citizens, regardless of where they live?"

Pressure is mounting on the Iraqi government to stabilize the country and preventing further discontent, particularly among Sunnis living in militant-held areas and Kurds living in semi-autonomous northern Iraq. Some fear the country could be split into three parts otherwise, including a Shiite-dominated south.

Meanwhile, nearly 3 million Iraqis like Hussein now live in refugee camps or squat in unofficial shelters. According to the United Nations, 8.2 million Iraqis — about a quarter of the country's population — will need humanitarian assistance this year.

And as the war grinds on, authorities acknowledge many refugees may never return — with towns destroyed in the fighting and infrastructure severely damaged.

"We will be lucky if we get half of them back to their original homes," said Mowafak al-Rubaie, Iraq's former national security adviser.

All the while, anger simmers.

"We thought it wouldn't take longer than one week or one month," said Ayad Mohammed, 35, who fled Mosul last year. "But the military leaders with their big salaries and bank accounts abroad and their nice cars and who took their families outside, they never cared about us. And the politicians we voted for, I wish I chopped my finger and not voted for them because they are responsible for me and my children being here, along with all these people."

Lawyer: Prior Calls Took 'Emotional Toll' On Officer

BY DAVID WARREN
Associated Press

DALLAS — A Texas police officer had answered back-to-back suicide calls and was fraught with emotion when he responded to a report of a fight at a pool party where he wrestled a black teenage girl to the ground, his lawyer said Wednesday, hours after activists called for prosecutors to charge him.

Attorney Jane Bishkin said David Eric Casebolt, known to friends and family as Eric, apologizes for his treatment of the girl and to others offended by his actions Friday at a community pool in the Dallas suburb of McKinney.

"With all that happened that day, he allowed his emotions to get the better of him," Bishkin said.

However, the attorney for Dajerria Becton, the 15-year-old girl whom Casebolt subdued, said that while her client's family appreciated Casebolt's apology, his stress is not an adequate defense.

"There are appropriate ways to handle stress, and Officer Casebolt's actions were in no way appropriate," Hannah Stroud said Wednesday. Stroud also said the family will not decide on a next step until she and the city have completed their fact-finding, but they believe excessive force violated Dajerria's civil rights.

Casebolt's first call that day was to an apartment complex where a man had fatally shot himself in front of his wife and children, Bishkin said. The former officer of the year, who resigned Tuesday, then went to a home where a teenager was threatening to kill herself by jumping from the roof of her parents' home.

"Eric's compassion during these two incidents is a testament to his character," Bishkin said, acknowledging that

they had taken an "emotional toll" and made him reluctant to respond to the pool party. Ultimately, he did after hearing a violent assault had occurred, she said.

Cellphone video taken by people at the pool show Casebolt running after black teens and ordering them to the ground, then forcing the teen girl onto her stomach and placing his knees on her back. At one point, he drew his firearm after two young black men charged forward in apparent protest of the girl's treatment but holstered the weapon when two other officers intervened.

Police say officers were responding to reports of teens unauthorized to use the pool who were jumping a fence to gain entry. Residents of the middle-class neighborhood have said teens attending an end-of-school party at the pool and adjacent park were acting unruly.

Local and national civil rights groups held a protest Wednesday in front of the McKinney Police Department, asking that prosecutors charge the 41-year-old white ex-corporal for his actions. Police Chief Greg Conley has called his actions "indefensible."

"We will keep on assembling and protesting until this officer is charged," said Dominique Alexander with the Next Generation Action Network, based in the Dallas suburb of Grand Prairie.

Grand juries too often have sided with police accounts of violent encounters with minorities, according to Pamela Meanes, president of the Washington, D.C.-based National Bar Association, the nation's oldest association of predominantly black lawyers and judges. That pattern has changed with the proliferation of cellphones, she told media.

"I wonder what the narrative would

be if there was no tape from this particular scene," she said.

Bishkin said Casebolt was "not targeting minorities," adding, "he also detained a white female, who you do not see on the video."

The protesters did not specify what charge should be filed against Casebolt, but Heath Harris, a former Dallas County prosecutor who's representing the one person charged in the fracas, said video appears to show Casebolt could be accused of a misdemeanor count of official oppression, which covers the mistreatment or unlawful detention of people by a public servant. The Collin County district attorney's office did not respond to a call seeking comment.

Meanes acknowledged teens at the pool should have done more to comply with police orders.

"I think it's a good opportunity for America to have a conversation about mutual respect," she said.

McKinney police have said charges, including evading arrest, against Harris' client, 18-year-old Adrian Martin, will be dropped. Harris said Martin does not intend to sue for being arrested and jailed.

"What his family is more interested in is making sure other kids don't find themselves in a similar situation," Harris said.

Meanwhile, Bishkin said death threats against Casebolt have forced him and his family to leave their home for an undisclosed location.

Daniel Malenfant, president of the McKinney Fraternal Order of Police, said Casebolt hopes his resignation will "restore peace in the community."

"He was a dedicated and decorated officer, who in this instance was placed in a high-stress environment that he was not completely prepared for," Malenfant said.

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