

Senate Passes Trade Legislation

WASHINGTON (AP) — In a triumph of divided government, the Republican-controlled Congress passed major trade legislation Wednesday that was long-sought by President Barack Obama but vehemently opposed by most lawmakers in his party.

The measure to strengthen Obama's hand in global trade talks cleared the Senate on a vote of 60-38, and will go to the White House for his signature — less than two weeks after it was temporarily derailed in the House in an uprising of Democratic lawmakers who argued it would cost American jobs.

A companion bill, to renew an expiring program of federal aid for workers disadvantaged by imports, passed by voice vote less than an hour later. Final approval in the House is expected on Thursday.

The rapid sequence of events capped the end of a back-and-forth struggle that played out slowly over months, with Obama, Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., on one side, and the union-backed Democratic leadership of the House and Senate on the other.

The pace accelerated dramatically less than two weeks ago, when House Democrats prevailed in an early showdown that sent the White House and congressional GOP leaders into a rescue operation.

US Government Let Down Hostages

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama conceded Wednesday that the U.S. government had let down the families of Americans held hostage by terrorists and promised they would not face criminal prosecution for paying ransoms to their loved ones' captors.

"These families have already suffered enough and they should never feel ignored or victimized by their own government," Obama said as he detailed the results of a six-month review of U.S. hostage policy.

The president said for the first time that U.S. government officials can communicate directly with terrorists and help families negotiate for the release of hostages. More than 30 Americans are being held hostage abroad, White House officials said.

The review was sparked by sharp criticism of the Obama administration from families of Americans kidnapped by the Islamic State, al-Qaida and other groups. Families have complained about receiving confusing and contradictory information from the government and bristled at threats of prosecution for considering paying terrorists to secure the release of hostages.

By clearing the way for payment of ransom without fear of criminal charges, Obama is essentially allowing families to take actions the U.S. government has long said put Americans at risk. While the government will continue to abide by prohibitions on paying ransoms or making other concessions to terrorists, the Justice Department indicated it would ignore the law in situations involving families.

US Accused Of Spying On Ally - France

PARIS (AP) — Embarrassed by leaked conversations of three successive French presidents and angered by new evidence of uninhibited American spying, France demanded answers Wednesday and called for an intelligence "code of conduct" between allies.

France's foreign minister summoned the U.S. ambassador to respond to the WikiLeaks revelations, while President Barack Obama spoke by phone with his French counterpart. And all eyes were fixed on the top floor of the U.S. Embassy after reports that a nest of NSA surveillance equipment was concealed there, just down the block from the presidential Elysee Palace.

"Commitments were made by our American allies. They must be firmly recalled and strictly respected," Prime Minister Manuel Valls said. "Being loyal doesn't mean falling into line." Obama told Hollande in the phone conversation Wednesday that the U.S. wasn't targeting his communications, the White House said. Obama said the U.S. was abiding by a commitment that he made in 2013 not to spy on the French leader after Edward Snowden disclosed the extent of NSA surveillance powers.

That pledge came a year after the last of the revelations in the new Wikileaks trove, which date from 2006 to 2012 and appear to capture top French officials talking candidly about relations with Germany, Greece's economy and American spying on allies.

Nato Must Address Cyberdefense

BRUSSELS (AP) — NATO must improve its ability to defend itself against cyberattacks before it tries to build its offensive cyberwarfare capabilities, Defense Secretary Ash Carter told alliance leaders Wednesday amid rising tensions with Russia, which has proven its willingness to launch computer-based attacks against other nations.

Carter's message runs counter to some experts and leaders who believe NATO should begin to develop cyberweapons, in order to deter opponents in the 21st century.

Senior defense officials said cybersecurity was one theme of Carter's remarks to the allies and to defense ministers he's met with in recent days. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly.

According to senior defense officials, Carter also wants NATO's cybercenter of excellence, which he visited in Estonia, to be more than a think tank. They said he wants the center to take on a more active role in helping allies counter cyberthreats.

To help that along, Carter has announced that the U.S. will use its military cyber-expertise to help allies assess their vulnerabilities and reduce the risk to their critical infrastructure.

Power Slowly Being Restored In Storm

TRENTON, N.J. (AP) — Utility crews were working around the clock to clear toppled trees and other debris as power was slowly being restored to the hundreds of thousands of people in the Northeast who were affected by a fast-moving ferocious storm system that caused two deaths.

The line of storms — which packed heavy rains, lightning and dangerous winds — also knocked down transmission lines and wires as it thundered through eastern Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Connecticut on Tuesday night.

In Pennsylvania, PECO said about 121,000 homes and businesses remained without power late on Wednesday afternoon. In New Jersey, nearly 180,000 homes and businesses were without electricity around the same time.

Officials said full service might not be restored to some customers until the weekend. For others, it may even be longer.

As S.C. Honors Victims, Alabama Lowers Flags

BY SEANNA ADCOX, JEFFREY COLLINS AND JONATHAN DREW
Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. — State senator and pastor Clementa Pinckney was carried Wednesday into the Statehouse where he served the people for nearly 20 years, becoming the first African-American since Reconstruction to rest in honor in the South Carolina Rotunda. Hours later, his congregation returned to the scene of a massacre, keeping up his work of saving souls.

Meeting for Wednesday night Bible study exactly one week after Pinckney and eight others were fatally shot, a crowd of people packed the basement of Charleston's Emanuel African Methodist Church where the shootings took place to show their faith and restore their sanctuary.

"Because of our faith we have shown up once more again to declare that Jesus lives and because he lives, we can face tomorrow," interim pastor Norvel Goff intoned before a gathering that included several family members of shooting victim Myra Thompson.

"It is a powerful testimony that they are able to come," Goff said of Thompson's relatives, who were applauded by those in the audience.

The killings appear to be creating waves of soul-searching that are reverberating far beyond the historic black church and the state Capitol where Pinckney's widow and two young daughters met his horse-drawn carriage, evoking memories of black and white images of other slain civil rights figures five decades earlier.

In state after state, the Confederate symbols embraced by the shooting suspect have suddenly come under official disrepute. Gov. Nikki Haley started the groundswell Monday by calling on South Carolina lawmakers to debate taking down the Confederate battle flag flying in front of the



TRACY GLANTZ/THE STATE/TNS

John Miller, who is against the removal of the Confederate flag, attends a rally to show support for the removal of the Confederate battle flag from the South Carolina Statehouse in Columbia, S.C. Miller was one of a handful of people showing support for keeping the flag on the statehouse grounds.

Statehouse. But Alabama's governor was able to act much more swiftly, issuing an executive order that brought down four secessionist flags on Wednesday.

In Montgomery, where the Confederacy was formed 154 years ago and where Jefferson Davis was elected president, Gov. Robert Bentley, a conservative Republican, compared the banner to the universally shunned symbols of Nazi Germany, a stunning reversal in a region where the flag has played a huge cultural role.

The iconic Confederate battle flag in particular "is offensive to some people because unfortunately, it's like the swastika; some people have adopted that as part of their hate-filled groups," Bentley explained.

In South Carolina, making any changes to "heritage" symbols requires a two-thirds supermajority of both houses of the state legislature. Prodded by Haley, lawmakers voted overwhelmingly for a

debate later this summer, but few wanted to risk ugly words during a week of funerals.

As mourners filed by Pinckney's open casket, a makeshift drape over a huge second-floor window obscured the secessionist battle flag outside, only emphasizing how quickly this symbol of Southern pride has fallen into official disrepute.

The 41-year-old Pinckney, named lead pastor at "Mother Emanuel" in 2010, spent a lot of time in the lobby where, at one point in the day, five state senators and two former governors greeted mourners. Pinckney arrived at the Statehouse as a page, and in 1997 became the youngest African-American member elected to the House at that time. He became a senator in 2001.

Those honoring him also had to file past a statue of John C. Calhoun, the vice president who argued in the 1820s and 1830s that slavery was a "positive good," and that states should be able to pick the federal laws they

want to follow.

Other conservative Republicans weighed in around the country Wednesday.

Both of Mississippi's U.S. senators and a U.S. representative endorsed removing the Confederate symbol from the flag the state has flown since Reconstruction, even though the state's voters decided to keep it back in 2001. Sen. Thad Cochran declared his intentions a day after Attorney General Jim Hood, the only Democrat holding statewide office in Mississippi, said "You've got to ask yourself the question: What would Jesus do in this circumstance?"

Other lawmakers and activists took aim at symbols including a bust of Confederate general and Ku Klux Klan leader Nathan Bedford Forrest in Tennessee's Senate, a sculpture of Confederate President Jefferson Davis in the Kentucky Rotunda, the vanity license plates used by thousands of motorists and Minnesota's Lake Calhoun.

BY MELINDA DESLATTE
Associated Press

KENNER, La. — Pitching himself as a "doer" in a field of talkers, Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal declared his candidacy for the 2016 Republican presidential nomination Wednesday and set about trying to distinguish himself from better known rivals.

It's a long-shot effort for an accomplished but overshadowed governor, and his prospects will depend in large measure on his continued courtship of evangelical voters. But several other contenders also are determined to win over that group.

"We have a bunch of great talkers running for president," Jindal said at his opening rally. "We've had enough of talkers. It's time for a doer. I'm not running for president to be somebody. I'm running for president to do something."

An Oxford-educated son of Indian immigrants, Jindal can point to a political career filled with many achievements in a short time: a position as state health secretary when he was merely age 24, election to Congress at 32 and election as governor four years later.

But the GOP lineup does not lack seasoned politicians, some with much more star power. Jindal quickly struck at one of them, accus-

ing former Florida Gov. Jeb Bush of wanting Republicans to "hide our conservative ideals."

"But the truth is if we go down that road again, we will lose again," Jindal said.

Jindal announced his campaign online earlier Wednesday. Video clips on his website showed Jindal and his wife, Supriya, talking to their three children about the campaign to come.

Aides discussed Jindal's plans to focus on social conservatives, as he has done for months in extensive travels, and highlight his reputation as a leader steeped in policy.

Jindal intends to present himself as "the youngest candidate with the longest resume," citing an extensive background in public policy and government, strategist Curt Anderson said.

In his speech, the Louisiana governor sought to position himself as an outsider: "I am running for president without permission from headquarters in Washington, D.C."

Unpopular at home, Jindal waited until the state legislative session had ended and lawmakers found a way to close a \$1.6 billion budget gap before he scheduled his presidential announcement. But he has been building his campaign for months with trips to key presidential voting states, particularly Iowa, where he has focused on Christian conservatives.



Source: U.S. Congress, OnTheIssues.org

Jindal Is In The Republican Race, Too

Raised a Hindu but a convert to Catholicism as a teenager, Jindal is competing for the evangelical vote with several contenders, including Texas Sen. Ted Cruz and former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee.

While Jindal will continue to focus on "religious liberty," Anderson said, he aims to prove a candidate can be "both smart and Christian." And in recent weeks, Jindal has worked to showcase more of the policy wonk reputation that got him elected governor, rather than just focusing on cultural issues.

He has drawn distinctions from other GOP contenders by noting he has published "detailed plans" on health care, defense, education and energy policy.

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