

## NATION/WORLD DIGEST

## Gov't To Shrink Home Loans To Aid Jobless

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Obama administration will announce Friday a plan to reduce the amount some troubled borrowers owe on their home loans, two people briefed on the matter said.

The two people declined to be identified because the program had not yet been announced. Details could not immediately be learned. But earlier in the day, Herbert Allison, an assistant Treasury secretary, told reporters officials are close to expanding the administration's \$75 billion foreclosure relief effort.

The administration is also expected Friday to announce aid for homeowners who have lost their jobs.

The White House scheduled a briefing for reporters on housing policy at 10 a.m. Friday.

## McCain, Palin To Campaign Together In AZ

PHOENIX (AP) — John McCain and Sarah Palin will be back on the campaign trail together.

Friday will be their first time campaigning together since McCain lost the presidential election a year and a half ago with Palin as his running mate.

This time, they have a different prize in sight: McCain's Senate seat.

The Arizona senator is in the midst of the toughest re-election battle of his Senate career. Former congressman and conservative talk-radio host J.D. Hayworth is mounting a challenge in the Republican primary.

Palin will help McCain trump his conservative credentials at rallies in Tucson on Friday and the Phoenix suburb of Mesa on Saturday. The former running mates also will hold a fundraiser in Phoenix on Friday.

## Thief Nabbed Asking Officer For Directions

OREM, Utah (AP) — Utah police say a man accused of stealing two phones from a convenience store was arrested when he flagged down the investigating officer and asked for directions.

Police say the officer noticed that John White matched the description a store clerk gave of the thief, and the address White wanted turned out to be the same one the officer was checking.

The address had been left on a slip of paper the thief left at a gas station.

White was arrested Tuesday after the officer found he had both phones, along with a small amount of marijuana.

Police say charges are pending.

## Priest Accused Of Molesting 200 Deaf Boys

VATICAN CITY (AP) — The Vatican on Thursday strongly defended its decision not to defrock an American priest accused of molesting some 200 deaf boys in Wisconsin and denounced what it called a campaign to smear Pope Benedict XVI and his aides.

Church and Vatican documents showed that in the mid-1990s, two Wisconsin bishops urged the Vatican office led by then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger — now the pope — to let them hold a church trial against the Rev. Lawrence Murphy. The bishops admitted the trial was coming years after the alleged abuse, but argued that the deaf community in Milwaukee was demanding justice from the church.

An American protester in Rome on Thursday called the Murphy case an "incontrovertible case of pedophilia."

Despite the extensive and grave allegations against Murphy, Ratzinger's deputy at the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith ruled that the alleged molestation had occurred too long ago and that Murphy — then ailing and elderly — should instead repent and be restricted from celebrating Mass outside of his diocese.

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## Pentagon Eases Ban On Gays

BY ANNE FLAHERTY  
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — The Pentagon made it harder to boot gays out of the military Thursday, acting on its own while Congress considers President Barack Obama's goal of lifting the ban on gays serving openly.

Defense Secretary Robert Gates approved new rules to ease enforcement of the 1993 congressional ban, saying the changes reflect "common sense and common decency."

The new guidelines, meant to keep the "don't ask, don't tell" law from being used to launch witch hunts or settle grudges, represent the first significant step by the administration to address what Obama calls an injustice. The changes would tighten the rules for evidence when someone reports that a soldier is gay and put higher-ranking officers in charge of dismissal proceedings.

An estimated 13,000 people have been discharged under the law. Although most of the dismissals have been the result of gay service members outing themselves, advocates for repeal of the law say it has been used to drum out capable soldiers who never made their sexuality an issue.

Gates said the changes, effective immediately, are "an important improvement in the way the law is put into practice," short of repealing it. The changes give "a greater measure of common sense and common decency for handling what are complex and difficult issues for all involved," he told a Pentagon news conference.

Gay rights groups have long advocated for these changes, contending that the rules unfairly kept gay troops from seeking medical help or reporting domestic abuse for fear of being exposed and expelled.

Mike Almy, a former Air Force major who was fired in 2006 for being gay, says he believes he would have kept his job had these new guidelines been in effect at the time.

Almy was dismissed after a routine computer search turned up personal e-mails he wrote while deployed in Iraq. After the e-mails were given to his commander, he was handed discharge papers marked "homosexual admission" as the reason for leaving the service.

"It's going to stop the most vile aspects of the law," Almy said of the rules. But "it's not a substitute for full repeal, which has to come from Congress."

Gates and Adm. Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, support a repeal of the law but want to move slowly to ensure the changes won't hurt the military's effectiveness. Gates ordered a review, due Dec. 1, on how the military would imple-

ment a repeal, should Congress change the law.

"Doing it hastily is very risky," Gates said Thursday.

The changes he announced take effect immediately and apply to current as well as future cases. Pentagon officials said they were unsure how many people the new rules might affect.

Among the new guidelines is a requirement that the firing of gay enlisted personnel be done by an officer at a rank at least equivalent to a one-star general.

The guidelines also say that information supplied by third parties should be given under oath and that testimony from a person who might be seeking revenge shouldn't be allowed. No longer admissible in dismissal cases is information given in confidence to lawyers, clergy, psychotherapists or medical professionals.

As for outright repeal of the ban, it is unclear whether there is enough support in Congress.

## Congress Gives College Aid A Boost

BY JIM KUHNEN  
Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — More needy college students will have access to bigger Pell Grants, and future borrowers of government loans will have an easier time repaying them, under a vast overhaul of higher education aid that Congress passed Thursday and sent to President Barack Obama.

The legislation, an Obama domestic priority overshadowed by his health care victory, represents the most sweeping rewrite of college assistance programs in four decades. It strips banks of their role as middlemen in federal student loans and puts the government in charge.

The House passed the measure 220-207 as part of an expedited bill that also fixed provisions in the new health care law. Earlier Thursday, the Senate passed the bill 56-43.

The switch to direct government loans will result in savings to boost Pell Grants and make it easier for some workers to repay their student loans. In addition, some borrowers could see lower interest rates and higher approval rates on student loans.

The legislation has a wide reach. About half of undergraduates receive federal student aid and about 8.5 million students are going to college with the help of Pell Grants.

Sen. Tom Harkin, D-Iowa, praised the bill as a victory for middle-class families.

"Now they'll have the assurance that their

loans that are not backed by the government, and they still will have contracts to service some federal loans. But the change represents a significant loss to what has been a \$70 billion business for the industry.

Key features of the measure include: —Pell Grants would rise from \$5,550 for the coming school year to \$5,975 by 2017. Lawmakers had initially hoped to reach a \$6,900 cap.

—More eligible students could get a full Pell Grant. Most grants go to students with family income below \$20,000, but students with family income of up to \$50,000 may also be eligible.



—Some college graduates will have an easier time repaying loans. The government will essentially guarantee that workers in low-paying jobs will be able to reduce their payments. Current law caps monthly payments at 15 percent of these workers' incomes; the new law will lower the cap to 10 percent.









Savings from the measure will also go toward reducing the deficit and helping to pay for expanded health care.


The loan program caused a hitch in Democrats' plan to send the health care fixes promptly to President Obama.

Republicans forced the Senate to make a slight change to the Pell Grant portion of the bill, which required the bill to return to the House for a final vote.

Private lenders still will make student

 <p><b>FORD TAURUS</b> UP TO \$ <b>1500</b> TOTAL CASH BACK</p>	 <p><b>FORD MUSTANG</b> UP TO \$ <b>3000</b> TOTAL CASH BACK</p>	 <p><b>FORD SUPER DUTY</b> UP TO \$ <b>5000</b> TOTAL CASH BACK</p>
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