

Chavez's Body To Be Permanently Displayed

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Venezuela's acting president says Hugo Chavez's embalmed body will be permanently displayed in a glass casket so that "his people will always have him."

Vice President Nicolas Maduro says the remains will be put on permanent display at the Museum of the Revolution, close to the presidential palace where Chavez ruled for 14 years. Maduro says the president will lie in state first for at least another seven days.

A state funeral for Chavez attended by some 33 heads of government is scheduled to begin Friday morning. Tens of thousands have already filed past his glass-topped casket at a military academy following a seven-hour procession on Tuesday which took his body from the hospital where he died.

Armed Militants A Wild Card In Venezuela

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Carlos Torres opens the wire-fence gate to a neighborhood controlled by the La Piedrita gang that even police don't enter without permission.

"Loyal to Comandante Chavez," reads a banner just inside the 23 of January redoubt in western Caracas. The poor neighborhood is home to a small army of pistol-toting young men who, like Torres, see themselves as guardians of President Hugo Chavez's "socialist revolution."

These die-hard Chavistas say there is no way they will let Venezuela's "oligarchy" and its alleged Washington patrons to return to power.

"That would cost us blood, sweat and tears, but they won't be back," he said.

If Chavez's populist system is indeed threatened by domestic and foreign foes as his anointed successor claims, this is the defense. On alert and, in many cases on edge, are hundreds of well-armed toughs who belong to such shadowy "collectives" as La Piedrita, which have been blamed for strong-armed intimidation of political opponents and worse.

Committee OKs Bill On Illegal Gun Purchases

WASHINGTON (AP) — In Congress' first gun votes since the Newtown, Conn., nightmare, the Senate Judiciary Committee voted Thursday to toughen federal penalties against illegal firearms purchases, even as senators signaled that a deep partisan divide remained over gun curbs.

The Democratic-led panel voted 11-7 to impose penalties of up to 25 years for people who legally buy firearms but give them to someone else for use in a crime or to people legally barred from acquiring weapons. The panel's top Republican, Sen. Charles Grassley of Iowa, cast the only GOP vote for the measure.

The parties' differences were underscored when senators debated a proposal by Sen. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., to ban assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines. Democrats have noted that such firearms have been used in many recent mass shootings.

"The time has come, America, to step up and ban these weapons," said Feinstein, a lead sponsor of a 1994 assault weapons ban that expired a decade later. She added, "How could I stand by and see this carnage go on?"

The response from Republicans was that banning such weapons was unconstitutional, would take firearms from law-abiding citizens, and would have little impact because only a small percentage of crimes involve assault weapons or magazines carrying many rounds of ammunition.

Final Cardinal Arrives In Rome

VATICAN CITY (AP) — The last cardinal who will participate in the conclave to elect the next pope arrived in Rome on Thursday, meaning a date can now be set for the election. One U.S. cardinal said a decision on the start date is expected soon.

Some American and other cardinals had said they wanted to continue the pre-conclave meetings that have been going on all week for as long as it takes so they can discern who among them has the stuff to be pope and discuss the problems of the church.

Some Vatican-based cardinals, defensive about criticisms of the Vatican's internal governance that have been aired recently, seemed to want to get on with the vote arguing there's no reason to delay. "Hopefully it will be a short conclave and start very soon," Vatican-based German Cardinal Paul Josef Cordes was quoted Wednesday as telling the German daily Bild. "I would compare it with a visit to the dentist — you want to get everything over with quickly."

Thursday afternoon, U.S. Cardinal Roger Mahony tweeted that the discussions were "reaching a conclusion."

Groups Team Up To Draft Fracking Regulations

CHICAGO (AP) — After years of clashing over the drilling method known as hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," the oil industry and environmentalists have achieved something extraordinary in Illinois: They sat down together to draft regulations both sides could live with.

If approved by lawmakers, participants say, the rules would be the nation's strictest. The Illinois model might also offer a template to other states seeking to carve out a middle ground between energy companies that would like free rein and environmental groups that want to ban the practice entirely.

"The fact that Illinois got there," was significant, said Brian Petty, executive vice president of governmental and regulatory affairs at the International Association of Drilling Contractors. "Anytime you can bring the lion and lamb to the table, it's a good thing. But it's so highly politicized in lot of places" that compromise could be difficult.

Fracking uses a high-pressure mixture of water, sand and chemicals to crack and hold open thick rock formations, releasing trapped oil and gas. Combined with horizontal drilling, it allows access to formerly out-of-reach deposits and has allowed drillers to move closer to populated areas.

The industry insists the method is safe and would create thousands of jobs — possibly 40,000 in the poorest area of Illinois, according to one study. Opponents say it causes water and air pollution and permanently depletes freshwater resources.

USDA, Cal-OSHA Investigate Lion Attack

DUNLAP, Calif. (AP) — The US Department of Agriculture and Cal-OSHA on Thursday joined other state and federal agencies investigating the fatal mauling of a volunteer intern at an exotic animal park in California.

State investigators who protect workplace safety said they are trying to determine whether Cat Haven near Fresno has the required written procedures that employees follow to stay safe.

The USDA enforces the federal Animal Welfare Act and hopes to learn whether the 4-year-old lion that killed 24-year-old Dianna Hanson showed any behavior prior to the attack that might have indicated potential danger.

Fresno County sheriff's investigators and the state Department of Fish and Wildlife want to know why Hanson was in the enclosure with the animal.

The Seattle-area intern had loved lions and tigers since childhood, "was absolutely fearless" around them and hoped to work at a zoo after her six-month internship, her father said.

Facebook Overhauls News Feed

MENLO PARK, Calif. (AP) — Facebook has redesigned its social network to address complaints that the News Feed on its website has turned into a jumble of monotonous musings and random photos.

In an attempt to breathe new life into Facebook's News Feed, the company will introduce controls that allow people to sort streams of photos and other material into organized sections.

With the makeover unveiled Thursday, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg hopes to turn the News Feed into something more like a newspaper tailored to the particular interests of each of the social network's more than 1 billion worldwide users.

Previous tweaks to the News Feed have triggered howls of protest among Facebook's users. Hoping to minimize the grousing this time around, Facebook intends to roll out the changes in phases. It will probably be six months to a year before everyone who accesses Facebook on a personal computer sees the revamped News Feed, the company said. The facelift is likely to be more jarring for those who only visit Facebook on a PC because it incorporates some features already deployed in the social network's mobile applications for smartphones and tablet computers.

Sending A Powerful Message

U.N. Sanctions North Korea After Latest Nuclear Test

BY EDITH M. LEDERER AND HYUNG-JIN KIM
Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS — The U.N. Security Council responded swiftly to North Korea's latest nuclear test by punishing the reclusive regime Thursday with tough, new sanctions targeting its economy and leadership, despite Pyongyang's threat of a pre-emptive nuclear strike on the United States.

The penalties came in a unanimous resolution drafted by the U.S. along with China, which is North Korea's main benefactor. Beijing said the focus now should be to "defuse the tensions" by restarting negotiations.

The resolution sent a powerful message to North Korea's new young leader, Kim Jong Un, that the international community condemns his defiance of Security Council bans on nuclear and ballistic tests and is prepared to take even tougher action if he continues flouting international obligations.

"Taken together, these sanctions will bite, and bite hard," U.S. Ambassador Susan Rice said. "They increase North Korea's isolation and raise the cost to North Korea's leaders of defying the international community."

The new sanctions came in response to North Korea's underground nuclear test on Feb. 12 and were the fourth set imposed by the U.N. since the country's first test in 2006. They are aimed at reining in Pyongyang's nuclear and missile development by requiring all countries to freeze financial transactions or services that could contribute to the programs.

The resolution also targets North Korea's ruling elite by banning all nations from exporting expensive jewelry, yachts, luxury automobiles and race cars to the North. It also imposes new travel sanctions that would require countries to expel agents working for sanctioned North Korean companies.

The success of the sanctions could depend on how well they are enforced by China, where most of the companies and banks that North Korea is believed to work with are based.

Tensions with North Korea have escalated since Pyongyang launched a rocket in December and conducted last month's nuclear test — the first since Kim took charge. Many countries, especially in the region, had hoped he would steer the country toward engagement and resolution of the dispute over its nuclear

and missile programs. Instead, the North has escalated its threats.

Immediately before the Security Council vote, a spokesman for Pyongyang's Foreign Ministry said the North will exercise its right for "a pre-emptive nuclear attack to destroy the strongholds of the aggressors" because Washington is "set to light a fuse for a nuclear war."

The statement was carried by the North's official Korean Central News Agency, which issued no comment after the vote.

In the capital of Pyongyang, Army Gen. Kang Pyo Yong told a crowd of tens of thousands that North Korea is ready to fire long-range nuclear-armed missiles at Washington, which "will be engulfed in a sea of fire."

White House spokesman Jay Carney said the U.S. is "fully capable" of defending itself against a North Korea ballistic missile attack.

Experts doubt that the North has mastered how to mount a nuclear warhead on a ballistic missile capable of reaching the mainland United States.

The North Korean statement appeared to be the most specific open threat of a nuclear strike by any country against another. Sen. Robert Menendez, D-N.J., chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, called the threat "absurd" and suicidal.



President Barack Obama signs the Violence against Women Act, Thursday, March 7, 2013. Looking on from left to right: Susan Collins (R-ME), Tysheena (Tye) Rhames, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, Senator Mike Crapo (R-ID) Senator Patrick Leahy, Representative Steny Hoyer (D-MD) and Representative Gwen Moore (D-WI).

Obama Signs Expanded Violence Against Women Act

BY JOSH LEDERMAN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama signed expanded protections for domestic violence victims into law Thursday, renewing a measure credited with curbing attacks against women a year and a half after it lapsed amid partisan bickering.

The revitalized Violence Against Women Act also marked an important win for gay rights advocates and Native Americans, who will see new protections under the law, and for Obama, whose attempts to push for a renewal failed last year after they became entangled in gender politics and the presidential election.

"This is your day. This is the day of the advocates, the day of the survivors. This is your victory," Obama said. "This victory shows that when the American people make their voices heard, Washington listens."

As Obama prepared to put his pen to the new law, new government data underscored both the progress that has been made and the enduring need to do more.

The rate of sexual violence against women and girls age 12 or older fell 64 percent in a decade and has remained stable for five years, the Justice Department said in a survey released Thursday. In 2010, women and girls nationwide experienced

about 270,000 rapes or sexual assaults, compared with 556,000 in 1995.

The survey also showed that rapes and sexual assault rates involving women have plateaued while violent crime rates overall have declined. Women's advocacy groups called the report proof that the Violence Against Women Act and heightened awareness of the problem by police has had a positive effect.

Still, 1 in 5 women will be raped during their lifetime, said Obama, asserting a continued need for action nearly two decades after the bill's original passage in 1994.

"It didn't just change the rules, it changed our culture. It empowered people to start speaking out," Obama said.

The law authorizes some \$659 million a year over five years for programs that strengthen the criminal justice system's response to crimes against women and some men, such as transitional housing, legal assistance, law enforcement training and hotlines. One element of this year's renewal focuses on ways to reduce sexual assault on college campuses. It also reauthorizes the Trafficking Victims Protection Act, adds stalking to the list of crimes that make immigrants eligible for protection and authorizes programs to reduce the backlog in rape investigations.

Officials:

Bin Laden Spokesman Caught In Jordan

BY LARA JAKES
AP National Security Writer

WASHINGTON — Osama bin Laden's spokesman and son-in-law has been captured by the United States, officials said Thursday, in what a senior congressman called a "very significant victory" in the fight against al-Qaida.

Sulaiman Abu Ghaith is expected to be in U.S. federal court in New York on Friday in an initial hearing to face terror charges, according to a law enforcement official who spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to release the information. The case marks a legal victory for the Obama administration, which has long sought to charge senior al-Qaida suspects in American federal courts instead of military tribunals at the detention center at Guantanamo Bay.

Rep. Peter King, the former chairman of the House Homeland Security Committee, credited the CIA and FBI with catching al-Qaida propagandist Abu Ghaith in Jordan within the last week. He said

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PETER KING

the capture was confirmed to him by U.S. law enforcement officials.

A Jordanian security official confirmed that Abu Ghaith was handed over last week to U.S. law enforcement officials under both nations' extradition treaty. He declined to disclose other details and spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter.

"Definitely, one by one, we are getting the top echelons of al-Qaida," said King, R-N.Y. "I give the (Obama) administration credit for this: it's steady and it's unrelenting and it's very successful."

Abu Ghaith became an international name in late 2001 when he appeared on pan-Arab satellite television urging Muslims everywhere to fight the United States and warning of more attacks simi-

lar to those of Sept. 11. In one video, he was sitting with bin Laden in front of a rock face in Afghanistan. A teacher and mosque preacher in Kuwait, he was stripped of his Kuwaiti citizenship after 9/11.

He is identified as a major al-Qaida core official by the New America Foundation think tank in Washington. King said Abu Ghaith was involved in the planning in the 9/11 attacks against the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

Tom Lynch, a research fellow at the National Defense University in Washington, described Abu Ghaith as one of a small handful of senior al-Qaida leaders "capable of getting the old band back together and postured for a round of real serious international terror."

"His capture and extradition not only allows the U.S. to hold — and perhaps try — a reputed al-Qaida core survivor, further tarnishing the AQ core brand, but it also points to the dangers for those few remaining al-Qaida core refugees," Lynch said.

Senate Confirms Brennan For CIA

BY DONNA CASSATA
AND RICHARD LARDNER
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Senate confirmed John Brennan to be CIA director Thursday after the Obama administration bowed to demands from Republicans blocking the nomination and stated explicitly there are limits on the president's power to use drones against U.S. terror suspects on American soil.

The vote was 63-34 and came just hours after Republican Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky, a possible 2016 presidential candidate, held the floor past midnight in an old-style filibuster of the nomination to extract an answer from the administration.

Still, Brennan won some GOP support. Thirteen Republicans voted with 49 Democrats and one independent to give Brennan, who has been President Barack Obama's top counterterrorism adviser, the top job at the nation's spy agency. He will replace Michael Morell, the CIA's deputy director who has been acting director since David Petraeus resigned in November after acknowledging an affair with his biographer.

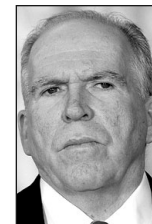
The confirmation vote came moments after Democrats prevailed in a vote ending the filibuster, 81-16. In a series of fast-moving events, by Senate standards, Attorney General Eric Holder sent a one-paragraph letter to Paul, who had commanded the floor for nearly 13 hours on Wednesday and into Thursday. "It has come to my attention that you have now asked an additional question: 'Does the president have the authority to use a weaponized drone to kill an American not engaged in combat on American soil?'" Holder wrote Paul.

"The answer to that question is no."

That cleared the way. "We worked very hard on a constitutional question to get an answer from the president," Paul said after voting against Brennan. "It may have been a little harder than we wish it had been, but in the end I think it was a good healthy debate for the country to finally get an answer that the Fifth Amendment applies to all Americans."

However, Paul's stand on the Brennan nomination and insistence that the Obama administration explain its controversial drone program exposed a deep split among Senate Republicans, pitting leader Mitch McConnell, libertarians and tea partiers against military hawks such as John McCain of Arizona and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina.

The government's drone program and its use in the ongoing fight against terrorists were at the heart of the dispute.



Brennan