

# Obama Rebuffs Pardon For Boxing Great Johnson

BY ANITA KUMAR

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WASHINGTON — For nine years, a pair of Capitol Hill lawmakers have asked the president of the United States to pardon posthumously American boxing legend Jack Johnson.

President George W. Bush did not act, but in 2009 the congressmen thought they might be able to persuade the nation's first African-American president to do so on behalf of the world's first African-American heavyweight boxing champion. But President Barack Obama hasn't issued a pardon either, and his administration says it's unlikely he will.

That isn't stopping the lifelong boxing fans from trying again.

Republicans Sen. John McCain of Arizona and Rep. Peter King of New York, now joined by two Democrats, again introduced a congressional resolution last week calling on Obama to pardon Johnson a century after his racially motivated conviction of taking a woman across state lines for immoral purposes.

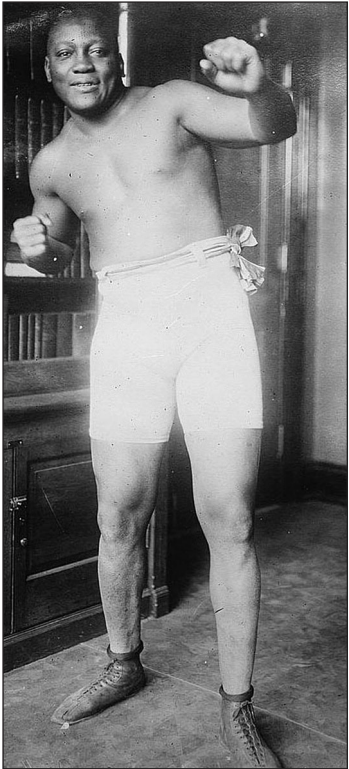
"As we look back on our nation's history, the Jack Johnson case is a shameful stain, apparent to all," McCain said recently. "Rectifying this injustice is long overdue."

The Justice Department, however, generally doesn't consider pardons for people after they die, according to department guidelines. Those investigations are lengthy and complex, and the department would rather spend its resources on the pardon and commutation requests of living people, the guidelines say.

"It is the department's position that the limited resources which are available to process requests for president clemency — now being submitted in record numbers — are best dedicated to requests submitted by persons who can truly benefit from a grant of the request," pardon attorney Ronald Rodgers wrote to King in December 2009. The pardon attorney, at Justice, assists the president in the exercise of executive clemency.

Posthumous pardons are extremely rare but they have been granted.

In 1999, President Bill Clinton pardoned Lt. Henry O. Flipper, the Army's first African-American



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**For nine years, two lawmakers have asked the president to pardon posthumously boxing legend Jack Johnson, seen here circa 1910-1915. Republicans Sen. John McCain of Arizona and Rep. Peter King of New York, now joined by two Democrats, again introduced a resolution calling on Obama to pardon Johnson decades after his racially motivated conviction.**

to graduate from West Point, who'd been forced out of the military in 1882 after white officers accused him of embezzling commissary funds. In 2008, Bush pardoned Charles Winters, who'd been convicted of violating the Neutrality Act in 1948 by helping to transfer two B-17 aircraft to Israel.

The White House referred questions about Johnson to the Department of Justice. A Justice spokesman didn't comment except to say the department doesn't have a pending application for Johnson.

Johnson, born to former slaves in Texas, was initially denied the right to fight professionally because of his race. When he was finally granted the opportunity, he defeated the title holder to become the first African-American heavyweight champion. He reigned over the boxing world from 1908 to 1915 before losing his heavyweight title to a white

fighter — Jess Willard — in Havana, Cuba, in 1915. But he kept his influence over the boxing world, including future fighter Muhammad Ali.

Johnson's success in the ring — and indulgent lifestyle — prompted resentment as well as a search for a white boxer who could defeat him, dubbed the "great white hope." After Johnson defeated a white champion who'd returned from retirement to fight him, race riots broke out in several cities.

Soon after, an all-white jury convicted Johnson of transporting a white girlfriend across state lines, under the Mann Act, a law designed to prevent trafficking of women for prostitution. He eventually served 366 days in prison.

"Jack Johnson was a legendary competitor who defined an era of American boxing and raised the bar for all American athletics," said Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., a former boxer who added his name to this year's resolution. "Johnson's memory was unjustly tarnished by a racially motivated criminal conviction, and it is now time to recast his legacy."

A similar resolution failed in Congress in 2004. In 2008, the House of Representatives approved a resolution but the Senate did not. In 2009, the Senate and House passed the resolution, the first time since 1974 that both chambers had passed a concurrent resolution recommending a posthumous pardon for Johnson. They did so again in 2011.

Johnson died in a car crash in North Carolina in 1946 at age 68, after being refused service at a diner near Raleigh. His story has been chronicled in numerous stage and film productions of "The Great White Hope," including a 1970 film starring James Earl Jones, and more recently in "Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson," a PBS documentary by Ken Burns.

"Jack Johnson was one of the great African-American athletes," said Sen. William "Mo" Cowan, D-Mass. "His skill and perseverance to get back up every time he was knocked down made him a champion in the eyes of the sports world and for those who, like him, pursued their dreams despite racial intolerance."

## City

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bottom to the number of restrictions in place by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the National Park Service, according to Quail.

After hearing the extensive HDR report, the commission agreed to submit an application for approximately \$28.7 million in Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Loan Program funds at a rate of 3 percent for 20 years.

The application does not com-

mit the city to taking those funds if it turns out that amount is not needed, but it sets in motion the process of making the money available.

In other business Monday, the commission opted to have Parks and Recreation Director Todd Larson do more research on some issues before approving a proposed Meridian Bridge rental policy. The proposal would allow one level of the bridge to be rented out at a time for a minimum two-hour rental of \$300. Each additional hour would be \$100.

The commission also approved a bid of \$527,242 from Masonry Components for the reconstruction of Bill Baggs Road from High-

way 50 to Alumax Road. Yankton County will pay for a portion of the project because the roadway is outside city limits.

Additionally, a decision was made to put off approving a \$6,070 contract with HDR to provide more detail on the costs to Yankton should the Joint Vermillion/Yankton Solid Waste System adopt one of four options to deal with recyclable materials. Commissioners thought it would be better to wait until the Joint Powers has more information on how it will proceed.

You can follow Nathan Johnson on Twitter at [Twitter.com/AnInlandVoyage](https://twitter.com/AnInlandVoyage)

# Senate Democrats Unveil Government Funding Bill

WASHINGTON (AP) — Top Senate Democrats and Republicans Monday night released a catchall government funding bill that denies President Barack Obama new money for implementing signature first-term accomplishments like new regulations on Wall Street and his expansion of government health care subsidies but provides modest additional funding for domestic priorities like health research and highway projects.

Monday's measure is the product of bipartisan negotiations and is the legislative vehicle to fund the day-to-day operations of government through Sept. 30 — and prevent a government shutdown when current funding runs out March 27.

It sets a path for government in the wake of across-the-board spending cuts that took effect March 1. In most cases the minor changes in agency budgets amount to housekeeping within a trillion-dollar cap for the day-to-day operations of agencies in the current budget year.

Passage in the Senate this week seems routine and could presage an end to a mostly overlooked battle between House Republicans and Obama and his Senate Democratic allies over the annual spending bills required to fund federal agency operations.

The measure expands upon House GOP legislation that passed last week, adding sometimes symbolic funding and flexibility for scores of programs and challenges House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, who warned Democrats last week not to load the measure up too much.

But each of the additional items was drawn from earlier informal House-Senate agreements, and top Senate Appropriations Committee Republican Richard Shelby of Alabama has signed on.

The bipartisan measure comes as Washington girds for weeks of warfare over the budget for next year and beyond as both House and Senate Budget Committees this week take up blueprints for the upcoming 2014 budget year.

The first salvo in that battle is coming from House Republicans poised to release on Tuesday a now-familiar budget featuring gestures to block "Obamacare," turn Medicare into a voucher-like program for future retirees and sharply curb Medicaid and domestic agency budgets. Such ideas are dead on arrival with Obama and Democrats controlling the Senate, but will — in concert with new taxes on the wealthy enacted in January — allow Republicans

to propose a budget that would come to balance within 10 years.

"We think we owe the American people a balanced budget," House Budget Committee Chairman Paul Ryan said on "Fox News Sunday."

Senate Democrats are countering on Wednesday with a budget plan mixing tax increases, cuts to the Pentagon and relatively modest cuts to domestic programs. The measure would not reach balance, but it would undo automatic budget cuts that started taking effect this month and largely leaves alone rapidly growing benefit programs like Medicare.

"We need to make sure that everybody participates in getting us to a budget that deals with our debt and our deficit responsibly," Budget Committee Chairwoman Patty Murray, D-Wash., said Monday evening.

The upcoming debate over the long-term budgetary future promises to be stoutly partisan, even as Obama is undertaking outreach to rank-and-file Republicans in hopes of sowing the seeds for a bipartisan "grand bargain" on the budget this year after two failed attempts to strike agreement with House Speaker John Boehner. Obama's budget is already weeks overdue and Press Secretary Jay Carney deflected questions about it Monday, other than to promise that it would "for a period of time" bring deficits below 3 percent of gross domestic product, a measure that many analysts say is sustainable without damaging the economy.

The wrap-up spending bill for the half-completed fiscal year released Monday, however, is another matter entirely. It's a lowest common denominator approach that gives the Pentagon much-sought relief for readiness accounts but adds money sought by Democrats like Appropriations Committee Chairwoman Barbara Mikulski, D-Md., for domestic programs such as Head Start, health research, transportation and housing.

The Senate measure would award seven Cabinet departments — including Defense, Commerce, justice, Agriculture and Veterans Affairs — with their line-by-line detailed budgets, but would leave the rest of the government running on autopilot at current levels. All domestic agencies except for Veterans Affairs would then be subject to a 5 percent across-the-board cut while the Pentagon would bear an 8 percent cut.

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