

Cypriot Austerity Plan Shocks Europeans

NICOSIA, Cyprus (AP) — A plan to seize up to 10 percent of people's savings in the small Mediterranean island nation of Cyprus sent shockwaves across Europe on Monday as households realized the money they have in the bank may not be safe.

A weekend agreement between Cyprus and its European partners called for the government to raid bank accounts as part of a (euro) 15.8 billion (\$20.4 billion) financial bailout, the first time in the euro-zone's crisis that the prospect of seizing individuals' savings has been raised.

Facing outrage, Cypriot authorities delayed a parliamentary vote on the seizure and ordered banks to remain shut until Thursday while it tries to modify the deal to reduce the hit on people with small deposits.

Several hundred protesters gathered outside the parliament building, with some chanting "thieves, thieves" and "people wake up, they're drinking your blood." One demonstrator dumped sheep wool and animal feces in front of a line of police officers guarding the entrance. Protesters later marched onto the presidential palace.

"It's a precedent for all European countries. Their money in every bank is not safe," said lawyer Simos Angelides.

Items Suggest Campus Attack Was Planned

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — A University of Central Florida student planned an attack on campus but committed suicide in a dorm before carrying it out, authorities said Monday.

Materials found in his dorm room made it appear that 30-year-old James Oliver Seevakumaran planned a wider attack, authorities said a news conference.

Seevakumaran pulled a gun on another student, who then called police, said University of Central Florida Police Chief Richard Beary. He then killed himself with a shot to the head moments later as police officers were responding to the call.

"His timeline got off," Beary said. "We think the rapid response of law enforcement may have changed his ability to think quickly on his feet."

UCF spokesman Grant Heston said the university was in the process of removing Seevakumaran from the dorm before Monday. Four makeshift explosive devices were found in a back pack, and Beary said he believes that Seevakumaran pulled a fire alarm in the dorm to get other students out in the open for an attack.

Justices Split On Ariz. Immigration Proposals

WASHINGTON (AP) — Supreme Court justices disagreed Monday over whether states can require would-be voters to prove they are U.S. citizens before using a federal registration system designed to make signing up easier.

Arizona and other states told the justices the precaution is needed to keep illegal immigrants and other noncitizens from voting. But some justices asked whether states have the right to force people to document their citizenship when Congress ordered the states to accept and use federal "motor voter" registration cards that only ask registrants to swear on paper that they are U.S. citizens.

"I have a real big disconnect with how you can be saying you're accepting and using, when you're not registering people when they use it the way the federal law permits them to," Justice Sonia Sotomayor said to Arizona Attorney General Thomas C. Horne.

Said Horne: "It is the burden of the states to determine the eligibility of the voters."

This is the second voting eligibility issue the high court is tackling this session. Last month, several justices voiced deep skepticism about whether a section of the Voting Rights Act of 1965, a law that has helped millions of minorities exercise their right to vote, especially in areas of the Deep South, was still needed.

Pope's Diplomacy Put To Test In Falklands

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis' diplomatic skills were put to the test Monday during his inaugural audience with a visiting head of state as he met with his political nemesis, Argentine President Cristina Fernandez, and was asked to intervene in the dispute with Britain over the Falkland Islands.

It was a baptism by fire, given that the former Archbishop of Buenos Aires has been on record as saying Britain "usurped" the remote islands from Argentina and last year paid homage to the Argentines who were killed trying "to reclaim what is theirs for the fatherland."

Argentina and Britain fought a 1982 war over the islands, which Argentina calls Malvinas. Earlier this month, the islanders voted overwhelmingly to remain a British Overseas Territory.

There was no indication that Francis, now pope, would take up the request from Fernandez, with whom he has clashed for years over her populist policies on gay marriage and other hot-button issues like birth control that will soon confront Francis on a global scale as leader of the world's 1.2-billion Catholics.

Francis may well map out some of his own priorities in his installation Mass on Tuesday, which some 130 government delegations and scores of Jewish, Orthodox and other Christian representatives will attend. Italian news reports say civil protection officials are gearing up for as many as 1 million people to flock to the event.

Hillary Clinton Says She Backs Gay Marriage

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton announced her support for gay marriage Monday, putting her in line with other potential Democratic presidential candidates on a social issue that is rapidly gaining public approval.

Clinton made the announcement in an online video released Monday morning by the gay rights advocacy group Human Rights Campaign. She says in the six-minute video that gays and lesbians are "full and equal citizens and deserve the rights of citizenship."

"That includes marriage," she says, adding that she backs gay marriage both "personally and as a matter of policy and law."

Clinton's announcement is certain to further fuel the already rampant speculation that she is considering another run for president in 2016. Other possible Democratic contenders — including Vice President Joe Biden, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo and Maryland Gov. Martin O'Malley — all back the right of same-sex couples to marry.

Polls show that public opinion on gay marriage has shifted perhaps more rapidly than on any other major issue in recent times. In Gallup polling last November, 53 percent of adult Americans said same-sex marriages should be granted the same status as traditional marriages, while 46 percent felt they should not be valid.

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Budget

Spending Bill Advances In Senate

BY ANDREW TAYLOR
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A bipartisan full-year funding bill took a big step forward in the Senate on Monday, despite opposition from Republicans who were denied chances to offer money aimed at addressing home state problems like looming closures of air traffic control towers.

The legislation advanced on a 63-35 procedural vote that sets up a vote on Tuesday to pass the measure and send it back to the House, which is likely to clear it later this week for President Barack Obama's signature. Ten Republicans, mostly members of the appropriations committee, joined with Democrats to send the measure over the 60-vote hurdle set by Republicans.

The sweeping 587-page measure would set a path for government in the wake of across-the-board spending cuts that took effect March 1 and prevent a government shutdown at the end of the month when funding for the day-to-day operations of every Cabinet department expires. It covers the rest of the 2013 budget year, which expires Sept. 30.

The measure gives the Pentagon much-sought money for military readiness but also adds money sought by Democrats and Republicans alike for domestic programs.

While top Senate leaders like No. 1 Democrat



Reid

Harry Reid of Nevada focused on the big picture — preventing a government shutdown — rank-and-file senators were sweating the small stuff, focusing on local concerns like keeping meat inspectors on the job, preventing furloughs at rural airports and trying to ease layoffs at Army depots.

The opposition was led by Republicans such as Kelly Ayotte of New Hampshire — denied a vote on an amendment shifting \$360 million to military readiness — and Jerry Moran of Kansas, who wants money to keep air traffic controllers at six small airports in his state.

There were also amendments proposed to add restrictions on U.S. aid to Egypt and reopen the White House to tours.

There had once been speculation that the measure could be a potential vehicle to turn off painful across-the-board spending cuts of 5 percent to domestic programs and 8 percent to the Pentagon but now much of the focus is on bread-and-butter issues as facilities back home begin to absorb the cuts.

Sen. Pat Toomey, R-Pa., is pressing to shore up accounts funding the salaries for contractors at Army facilities like the Tobyhanna Army Depot, which plans to lay off 418 civilian contract employees in the coming weeks, though

the \$60 million he's proposing to add would barely make a dent in the layoffs.

A particularly popular amendment by Sens. Mark Pryor, D-Ark., and Roy Blunt, R-Mo., would shift \$55 million from lower-priority Agriculture Department accounts to prevent furloughs of thousands of food inspectors. The meatpacking and poultry industries say the move is needed to prevent intermittent closure of 6,300 food inspection plants, threatening more than 500,000 workers with nearly \$400 million in lost wages.

Even that amendment had a two-steps-forward, one-step-back quality to it since the additional money would not fully make up for the money to be struck by the across-the-board cuts. That dynamic plays across the bill, with virtually every add-back failing to make up for the cuts.

"Without this funding, every meat, poultry, and egg processing facility in the country would be forced to shut down for up to two weeks," Blunt said in a statement. "That means high food prices and less work for the hardworking Americans who work in these facilities nationwide."

Democrats and Republicans are trying to reverse cuts that would close air traffic control towers at scores of smaller airports across the country, while supporters of military personnel want to restore funding for a Pentagon program that helps pay tuition so active military can attend college part time.

NYC Plan Would Keep Tobacco Items Out Of Sight

NEW YORK (AP) — Cigarettes would have to be kept out of sight in New York City stores under a first-in-the-nation plan unveiled by Mayor Michael Bloomberg on Monday, igniting complaints from retailers and smokers who said they've had enough with the city's crack-downs.

Shops from corner stores to supermarkets would have to keep tobacco products in cabinets, drawers, under the counter, behind a curtain or in other concealed spots. Officials also want to stop shops from taking cigarette coupons and honoring discounts, and are proposing a minimum price for cigarettes, below what the going rate is in much of the city now, to discourage black market sales.

Anti-smoking advocates and health experts hailed the proposals as a bold effort to take on a habit that remains the leading preventable cause of death in a city that already has helped impose the highest cigarette taxes in the country, barred smoking in restaurants, bars, parks and beaches and launched sometimes graphic advertising campaigns about the effects of smoking.

The ban on displaying cigarettes follows similar laws in Iceland, Canada, England and Ireland, but it would be the first such measure in the U.S. It's aimed at discouraging young people from smoking.

"Such displays suggest that smoking is a normal activity," Bloomberg said. "And they invite young people to experiment with tobacco."

But smokers and cigarette sellers said the measure was over-reaching.

"I don't disagree that smoking itself is risky, but it's a legal product," said Audrey Silk, who's

affiliated with a smokers-rights group that has sued the city over previous regulations. "Tobacco's been normal for centuries. ... It's what he's doing that's not normal."

Slated to be introduced to the City Council on Wednesday, the anti-smoking proposal was also a sign that a mayor who has built a reputation as a public health crusader isn't backing off after a setback last week, when a judge struck down the city's effort to ban supersized, sugary drinks. The city is appealing that decision.

"We're doing these health things to save lives," Bloomberg said Monday.

The billionaire mayor, who also

has given \$600 million of his own money to anti-smoking efforts around the world, began taking on tobacco use shortly after he became mayor in 2002. Adult smoking rates have since fallen by nearly a third — from 21.5 percent in 2002 to 14.8 percent in 2011, Health Commissioner Dr. Thomas Farley said.

But the youth rate has remained

flat, at 8.5 percent, since 2007. Some 28,000 city public high school students tried smoking for the first time in 2011, city officials say.

Keeping cigarettes under wraps could help change that, anti-smoking advocates say. Moreover, it could cut down on impulse buys by smokers who are trying to quit, city officials say.

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