

## Republicans Seek Candidate For 2016

WASHINGTON (AP) — Let's say, for a moment, that America has given you the job of picking the perfect candidate for president. Good luck, Mr. or Ms. Voter, deciding what they've got to have — and what they can do without.

There are all sorts of things to start the list: leadership, vision, charisma, communication skills and foreign policy cred. And more: fundraising prowess, authenticity, empathy, a keen understanding of the presidency and maybe a little familiarity with running for the office.

And even more: good looks are always a plus, even if people don't want to admit it. For many, being an "outsider" is a must at a time when "Washington" is on the outs with a lot of people.

Where do you even start? For Republicans, you can't do much better than this week's Conservative Political Action Conference. There are as many as two dozen GOP hopefuls eyeing the party's nomination in 2016, and many of them will be offering themselves at CPAC as the perfect prom date for conservatives in search of a winning candidate.

Can anyone claim the total package? Matt Schlapp, chairman of the American Conservative Union, which runs CPAC, sees a strong lineup of potential candidates and says that now, "they're going to preen and strut and we're going to see a president emerge."

## IS Seize Christians, Smash Artifacts

BEIRUT (AP) — Islamic State militants seized more Christians from their homes in northeastern Syria in the past three days, bringing the total number abducted by the extremist group to over 220, activists said Thursday.

At the same time, the extremists also released a video showing the continued destruction of the heritage of the lands under their control. It depicted men using sledgehammers to smash ancient Mesopotamian statues and other artifacts in Iraq's northern city of Mosul.

The video, coinciding with mounting fears over the fate of the captive Christian Assyrians in Syria, sent a fresh wave of dread across the region, particularly among minorities who feel targeted by the group.

"Daesh is wiping Assyrian heritage in Mosul, and at the same time wiping them geographically from the face of the Earth," said Osama Edward, director of the Assyrian Network for Human Rights in Syria. He referred to the Islamic State by its Arabic acronym.

About 200 Assyrians and other Christians gathered in a church east of Beirut in solidarity with the victims in Syria and Iraq. Some cried openly.

## Vandalism Shows Internet's Vulnerability

FLAGSTAFF, Ariz. (AP) — Computers, cellphones and landlines in Arizona were knocked out of service for hours, ATMs stopped working, 911 systems were disrupted and businesses were unable to process credit card transactions — all because vandals sliced through a fiber-optic Internet cable buried in the rocky desert.

The Internet outage did more than underscore just how dependent modern society has become on high technology. It raised questions about the vulnerability of the nation's Internet infrastructure.

Alex Juarez, a spokesman for Internet service provider CenturyLink, said the problem was first reported around noon Wednesday, with customer complaints pouring in from an area extending from the northern edges of Phoenix to cities like Flagstaff, Prescott, Page and Sedona. Service began coming back within a few hours and was reported fully restored by about 3 a.m. Thursday.

CenturyLink blamed vandalism, and police are investigating.

The severed CenturyLink-owned cable — actually, a set of cables bundled together in a black conduit a few inches in diameter — was buried several feet under the rocky soil in a dry wash, about a quarter-mile from the nearest houses.

## Report Shows Racial Bias In Ferguson

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Justice Department investigation found sweeping patterns of racial bias within the Ferguson, Missouri, police department — with officers routinely discriminating against blacks by using excessive force, issuing petty citations and making baseless traffic stops, according to law enforcement officials familiar with the report.

The report, which could be released as soon as Wednesday, marks the culmination of a months-long investigation into a police department that federal officials have described as troubled and that commanded national attention after one of its officers shot and killed an unarmed black man, 18-year-old Michael Brown, last summer.

It chronicles discriminatory practices across the city's criminal justice system, detailing problems from initial encounters with patrol officers to treatment in the municipal court and jail.

The full report could serve as a roadmap for significant changes by the department, if city officials accept its findings.

## Arline Battery Shipments Regected

WASHINGTON (AP) — Two major U.S. airlines say they will no longer accept rechargeable battery shipments as new government tests confirm that explosions and violent fires are likely to occur when large numbers of batteries enclosed in cargo containers overheat.

Tests conducted last month by the Federal Aviation Administration show that rechargeable batteries, also called lithium-ion batteries, consistently emit explosive gases when they overheat or short-circuit. The Associated Press has learned. In the recent tests, as well as other FAA tests last year, the buildup of gases — primarily hydrogen — led to fierce explosions.

An FAA video of one of the tests obtained by the AP shows an explosion knocking a cargo container door off its hinges and tossing boxes of batteries into the air. The container was engulfed in fire minutes later.

In the test, a cartridge heater was used to simulate a single battery overheating. The heater caused nearby batteries to overheat and the short-circuiting spread to many of the nearly 5,000 batteries in the container. It's common for tens of thousands of batteries to be placed in a single container.

## Alabama Halts Gay-Marriage Licenses

The Alabama Supreme Court on Tuesday ordered the state's probate judges to stop issuing marriage licenses to gay couples, saying a previous federal ruling that gay-marriage bans violate the U.S. Constitution does not preclude them from following state law, which defines marriage as between a man and a woman.

The all-Republican court sided with the argument offered by a pair of conservative organizations when they appealed a decision last month by U.S. District Judge Callie Granade of Mobile, who ruled that both Alabama's constitutional and statutory bans on same-sex marriage were unconstitutional.

Six justices concurred in the 134-page opinion, which wasn't signed, but the court's most outspoken opponent of gay marriage, Chief Justice Roy Moore, recused himself.

Immediately after Granade's ruling, Moore told probate judges across the state they were not obliged to issue same-sex marriage licenses. His stance created widespread confusion, prompting some judges to refuse to issue the licenses and others to shut down their operations for all couples, gay and straight, until they could get a clear answer.

Justice Jim Main agreed with the result but said he has concerns about procedural aspects "of this highly unusual case."

**BY ARON HELLER AND DEB RIECHMANN**

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a speech that stirred political controversy in two countries, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told Congress on Tuesday that negotiations underway between Iran and the United States would "all but guarantee" that Tehran gets nuclear weapons to the detriment of the entire world.

"And lots of them," he added in an appearance before a packed House chamber that drew loud applause from Republicans and a more restrained reaction from Democrats.

"Iran has proven time and again that it cannot be trusted," no matter what it says about permitting verification of the terms of any accord designed to prevent it from getting such weapons, he said. "The greatest danger facing our world is the marriage of militant Islam with nuclear weapons."

Netanyahu spoke in English shortly after Secretary of State John Kerry met for more than two hours in Switzerland with Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in hopes of completing an international framework agreement later this month to curb Tehran's nuclear ambitions.

The Israeli leader's appeal also came two weeks before tight elections in which he is seeking a new term — and after the invitation to address Congress extended by House Speaker John Boehner, a Republican, triggered a political furor in the United States. More than four dozen House and Senate Democrats said in advance they would not attend the event, a highly unusual move given historically close ties between the two allies.

Many of Netanyahu's comments were greeted by loud applause from U.S. lawmakers, but not everyone was persuaded by his rhetoric.

House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi of California conspicuously refrained from applauding on several occasions, and when the Is-



OLIVIER DOULIERY/ABACA PRESS/TNS  
**Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addresses a joint session of the U.S. Congress at the Capitol on Tuesday in Washington, D.C.**

raeli leader called for holding out for a better deal with Iran, she held her hands wide and shook her head in disagreement. Later, she issued a statement saying that she was "near tears throughout the prime minister's speech - saddened by the insult to the intelligence of the United States" as part of the international coalition in talks with Tehran.

The White House expressed its displeasure with Netanyahu's appearance by word and deed, dispatching Vice President Joe Biden on an overseas trip that meant he did not fill his customary seat behind the House rostrum during the speech. Nor did the Israeli leader meet at the White House with Obama on his trip to the United States.

The prime minister was greeted with a roaring welcome as he walked down the same center aisle of the House chamber that presidents tread before their annual State of the Union speeches.

He also sought to smooth over any political unpleasantness, thanking Obama lavishly for the help he has given Israel since he became president. In a grace note, he took a moment to mention Senate Democratic Leader Harry Reid, who is back at work after suffering an eye

injury in an accident at home.

At the same time, Netanyahu was unrelenting in his condemnation of the negotiations the administration is conducting with Tehran.

He said that with the concessions the United States was prepared to make Iran would not only gain nuclear weapons, but also eventually would become free of international economic sanctions. As a result, he said, it would be emboldened to finance even more terrorism around the Middle East and the world.

The result for Iran, he said, would be "aggression abroad and prosperity at home."

Instead, he said that if Iran wants to be "treated like a normal country, it ought to behave like a normal country."

"We've been told that no deal is better than a bad deal. Well this is a bad deal, a very bad deal," he said.

He said that the world needs to insist that no restrictions are lifted on Iran's nuclear program until the country stops aggressive actions against its neighbors in the Mideast, stops supporting terrorism around the world and stops threatening to annihilate Israel.

Netanyahu singled out Holocaust Survivor Elie

Wiesel, a world-renowned author.

"I wish I could promise you, Elie, that the lessons of history have been learned," he said in a reference to the Nazis, who killed 6 million Jews.

A few moments later, he added, applause swelling, "The days when the Jewish people remained passive in the face of genocidal enemies are over."

The Obama administration has complained that congressional Republicans injected destructive partisanship into the U.S.-Israel alliance by inviting Netanyahu to speak.

Senior adviser Valerie Jarrett called it "a bit of a distraction" but told MSNBC the dispute wouldn't undermine Obama's commitment to Israel.

"We share a common goal of ensuring that Iran does not develop nuclear weapons," Jarrett said, and disagree with Netanyahu only over "the tactics of how to get there."

The U.S. and Iranian sides met for two hours on Tuesday morning in the Swiss resort of Montreux, according to U.S. officials.

"We're working away, productively," Kerry told reporters.

In Israel, Isaac Herzog, who is running against Netanyahu in the March 17 election, said he supported the prime minister's message on Iran but played down any positive impact from the speech.

# GOP: House To Vote On Homeland Bill

**BY ERICA WERNER AND DAVID ESPO**

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a major victory for President Barack Obama, the Republican-led House relented on Tuesday and will back legislation to fund the Homeland Security Department through the end of the budget year, without restrictions on immigration.

House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, outlined the dwindling options for his deeply divided GOP caucus on Tuesday morning after the Senate left the House with little choice. Boehner pointed out that the issue is now in the hands of the courts.

"I am as outraged and frustrated as you at the lawless and unconstitutional actions of this president," Boehner told his caucus, according to aides. "I believe this decision — considering where we are — is the right one for this team, and the right one for this country."

A vote was expected later Tuesday to send the bill to Obama for his signature. Short-term funding for the department expires on Friday at midnight.

Conservatives had demanded that the funding bill roll back Obama's immigration directives from last fall that spared millions of immigrants from deportation. Democrats had insisted on legislation to fund the department, which shares responsibility for anti-terrorism operations, without any conditions.

The GOP leadership's decision to bow to Democratic demands angered several conservatives.

"This is the signal of capitulation," said Rep. Steve King, R-Iowa. "The mood of this thing is such that to bring it back from the abyss is very difficult."

But more pragmatic Republicans welcomed

Boehner's move.

"Sanity is prevailing. I do give John Boehner credit," said Rep. Peter King, R-N.Y.

A federal court ruling has temporarily blocked the administration from implementing the new immigration rules. The administration has appealed the decision and the ultimate result of the legal challenge is unknown.

Passage of the stand-alone spending bill would seal the failure of a Republican strategy designed to make Homeland Security funding contingent on con-

cessions from Obama. Controversy over the legislation has produced partisan gridlock in the first several weeks of the new Congress, though Republicans gained control of the Senate last fall and won more seats in the House than at any time in 70 years.

Even so, Democratic unity blocked passage in the Senate of House-passed legislation with the immigration provisions. By late last week, a split in House GOP ranks brought the department to the brink of a partial shutdown. That was averted

when Congress approved a one-week funding bill that Obama signed into law only moments before a midnight Friday deadline.

House Republicans said that after months spent railing against Obama's executive actions, which most Republicans view as an unconstitutional overreach, they had no more moves to make.

House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy told reporters that with Senate Democrats united to block the House GOP approach, "What direction do we have?"

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