

### Congress Panels Adopt Budget Plans

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans in Congress advanced balanced-budget plans bristling with cuts in Medicaid and other benefit programs Thursday, determined to make a down payment on last fall's campaign promise to erase deficits by the end of the decade.  
Last-minute maneuvering to match Pentagon spending levels requested by President Barack Obama consumed GOP lawmakers in both the House Budget Committee and the counterpart Senate panel.  
Yet the GOP's focus also extended to deficit reduction, repeal of the health care law, an overhaul of the tax code and other budget priorities long advocated by conservatives in control of both houses of Congress for the first time in nearly a decade.  
The House's version of the budget moved through its Budget Committee on a 22-13 party-line vote.  
The Senate budget panel, followed suit on a 12-10 vote that also fell along party lines.

### Netanyahu Backtracks On Palestine

JERUSALEM (AP) — Days after winning re-election, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday backtracked from hard-line statements against the establishment of a Palestinian state in the face of a diplomatic backlash.  
In the closing days of his campaign, Netanyahu said there could be no Palestinian state while regional violence and chaos persist — conditions that could rule out progress on the issue for many years. The comments, aimed at appealing to his nationalist voter base, angered the Obama administration, which views a two-state solution as a top foreign policy priority.  
Netanyahu said in a TV interview Thursday that he remains committed to Palestinian statehood — if conditions in the region improve — and to the two-state vision first spelled out in a landmark 2009 speech at Israel's Bar Ilan University.  
The Western-backed Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has recognized Israel as a state but refuses to recognize its Jewish character, and last year formed a unity government backed by the Hamas militant group, which is sworn to Israel's destruction.

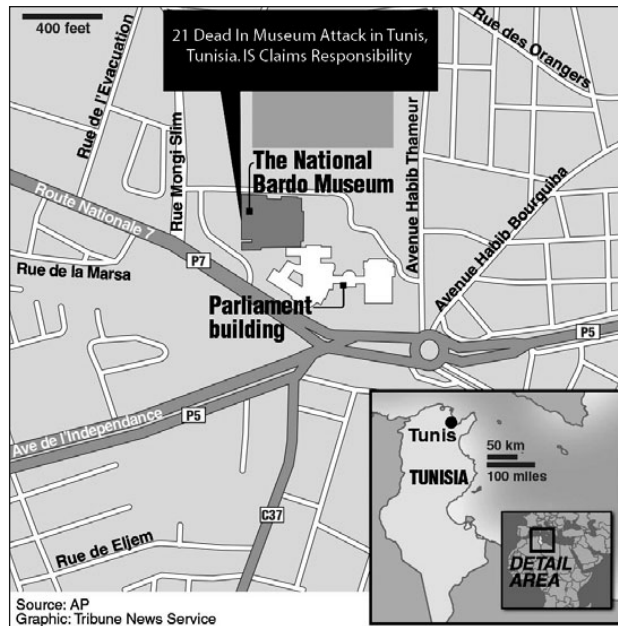
### Toddler Survives After 1.5 Hours Of CPR

PENNSYLVANIA — In a survival story his doctors call extraordinary, a 22-month-old Pennsylvania boy whose lifeless body was pulled from an icy creek was revived after an hour and 41 minutes of CPR and has suffered virtually no lingering effects.  
Gardell Martin came home from the hospital on Sunday, and his doctors said Thursday he has made a full recovery.  
"It's not only extraordinarily rare that we got the kid back, but what's even more extraordinary is the rate at which he recovered and the completeness of his recovery," said Dr. Frank Maffei, director of the pediatric intensive care unit at Geisinger's Janet Weis Children's Hospital in Danville. "The stars and moon aligned, and he had an angel on his shoulder."  
Gardell and two of his brothers had gone outside to play on March 11 when he fell into the stream that runs through their 5-acre property near Millflinburg and was swept away by the fast-moving current.  
His 7-year-old brother, Greg, ran into the house and screamed that he couldn't find Gardell.

# IS Claims Responsibility For Tunisia Attack

BY JAMEY KEATEN AND PAUL SCHEMM  
Associated Press

TUNIS, Tunisia — The Islamic State group claimed responsibility Thursday for the attack that killed 21 people at a museum. But Tunisian authorities said the two slain gunmen had no clear links to extremists, and analysts said existing militant cells are merely being inspired by the group, rather than establishing its presence across North Africa.  
Police announced the arrest of five people described as directly tied to the two gunmen who opened fire Wednesday at the National Bardo Museum. Four others said to be supporters of the cell also were arrested in central Tunisia, not far from where a group claiming allegiance to al-Qaida's North African branch has been active.



Tunisian stepped around trails of blood and broken glass outside the museum to rally in solidarity with the 21 victims — most of them foreign tourists from cruise ships — and with the country's fledgling democracy. Marchers carried signs saying, "No to terrorism," and "Tunisia is bloodied but still standing."  
In claiming responsibility for the attack, the Islamic State group issued a statement and audio on jihadi websites applauding the dead gunmen as "knights" for their "blessed invasion of one of the dens of infidels and vice in Muslim Tunisia."

Several well-armed groups in neighboring and chaotic Libya have already pledged their allegiance to Islamic State based in Iraq and Syria, but the attack of such magnitude in Tunisia — the only country to emerge from the Arab Spring uprisings with a functioning democracy — raised concern about the spread of extremism to the rest of North Africa.

Analysts cautioned against seeing every such attack as evidence of a well-organized, centrally controlled entity spanning the Middle East, saying instead that small groups could merely be taking inspiration from the high-profile militant group.  
"I think (the Islamic State) is probably taking credit for something it may not have played a role in," said Geoff Porter, a security analyst for North Africa.  
Even as it is under pressure from rival militias in Libya and U.S.-backed forces in Iraq, the extremist group appears to be trying to raise its profile by associating itself with attacks around the region.  
Confronted with a poor economy, young Tunisians have disproportionately gone abroad to fight with extremist groups in Libya, Syria and Iraq, including some affiliated with the Islamic State. Upon their return home, some may have decided to carry out attacks on their own.  
Tunisian authorities have estimated that of the 3,000 young people who left the country to fight with radical groups, about 500 have returned.  
"It could have been people who fought with the Islamic State or were inspired by it,"

said Raffaello Pantucci, director of International Security Studies at the Royal United Services Institute, a British think tank. "Some guys may have come back, not liked what the government is doing, and attacked the tourist industry to hurt the economy — a classic move."  
Until now, Tunisia's most deadly group was the Oqba Ibn Nafaa brigade, which is allied to al-Qaida and based in the mountains near the Algerian border. Previously, it has confined its attacks to political figures and security services.  
"While Tunisia's ultra-radical Islamist fringe was most associated with al-Qaida, there is no reason why the jihadi underground shouldn't have changed its tutelage," said Jon Marks, associate fellow at Chatham House, a London think tank. "However, whether this 'rebranding' goes as far as direct command and compliance structures is far from clear."  
While militant attacks may not necessarily have been centrally planned, they have succeeded in spreading fear and damaging the economy — and giving the impression of an all-powerful radical Islamic

network extending its reach.  
Tunisia is particularly vulnerable to such attacks because its economy has struggled since the country became the birthplace of the Arab Spring by overthrowing its dictator in 2011.  
At a news conference Thursday, Prime Minister Habib Essid announced new security measures around the country, including a crack-down on websites seen as promoting terrorism.  
On Thursday, U.S. President Barack Obama spoke with Tunisian President Beji Caid Essebsi by phone to offer his condolences, sympathy and support. The White House says Obama offered to keep providing assistance to Tunisia as the investigation proceeds.  
The deaths of so many foreigners will damage Tunisia's tourism industry, which draws thousands of foreigners to its Mediterranean beaches, desert oases and ancient Roman ruins. The industry had just started to recover after years of decline.  
Two cruise ships that had 17 passengers among the dead quickly left the port of Tunis early Thursday, citing safety concerns, and the vessels' operators suspended visits to the country.  
Culture Minister Latifa Lakhdar gave a defiant news conference at the museum, where blood still stained the floor amid the Roman-era mosaics.  
"They are targeting knowledge. They are targeting science. They are targeting reason. They are targeting history. They are targeting memory, because all these things mean nothing in their eyes," she told reporters.  
Dr. Samar Samoud of the Health Ministry said six of the dead foreigners remained unidentified. She listed the rest of the foreign victims as three from Japan, three from France, two from Spain, and one each from Australia, Colombia, Britain, Poland, Belgium and Italy.

# Draft Agreement Cuts Iran's Nuclear Hardware By 40 Percent

BY BRADLEY KLAPPER AND GEORGE JAHN  
Associated Press

LAUSANNE, Switzerland — The United States and Iran are drafting elements of a nuclear deal that commits Tehran to a 40 percent cut in the number of machines it could use to make an atomic bomb, officials told The Associated Press on Thursday. In return, the Iranians would get quick relief from some crippling economic sanctions and a partial lift of a U.N. embargo on conventional arms.  
Agreement on Iran's uranium enrichment program could signal a breakthrough for a larger deal aimed at containing the Islamic Republic's nuclear activities.  
The sides are racing to meet a March 31 deadline for a framework pact and a full agreement by the end of June — even as the U.S. Congress keeps up pressure on the administration to avoid any agreement leaving Iran with an avenue to become a nuclear power.  
Officials said the tentative deal imposes at least a decade of new limits on the number of centrifuges Iran can operate to enrich uranium, a process that can lead to nuclear weapons-grade material. The sides are zeroing in on a cap of 6,000 centrifuges, officials said, down from the 6,500 they spoke of in recent weeks.  
That's also fewer than the 10,000 such machines Tehran

now runs, yet substantially more than the 500 to 1,500 that Washington originally wanted as a ceiling. Only a year ago, U.S. officials floated 4,000 as a possible compromise.  
But U.S. officials insist the focus on centrifuge numbers alone misses the point. Combined with other restrictions on enrichment levels and the types of centrifuges Iran can use, Washington believes it can extend the time Tehran would need to produce a nuclear weapon to at least a year.  
Right now, Iran would require only two to three months to amass enough material to make a bomb.  
President Barack Obama appealed directly to Iranian citizens in a message commemorating Nowruz, the Persian New Year.  
"Our negotiations have made progress, but gaps remain," Obama said Thursday in a video message posted online.  
"If Iran's leaders can agree to a reasonable deal, it can lead to a better path — the path of greater opportunities for the Iranian people," he said.  
The pressure in Congress on the administration over Iran remained intense, with the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee saying he would move ahead with legislation giving lawmakers a say over any nuclear deal. And 360 House Republicans and Democrats — more than enough to

override any presidential veto — sent a letter to Obama saying if an agreement is reached, Congress will decide on easing sanctions it has imposed.  
"Congress must be convinced that its terms foreclose any pathway to a bomb, and only then will Congress be able to consider permanent sanctions relief," the lawmakers wrote.  
Rep. Eliot Engel of New York, the top Democrat on the House Foreign Affairs Committee, told administration officials at a hearing Thursday that Congress cannot be marginalized and "any attempts to sidestep Congress will be resisted on both sides of the aisle."  
The one-year breakout time has become a point the Obama administration is reluctant to cross in the set of highly technical talks, and that bare minimum would be maintained for 10 years as part of the draft deal. After that, the restrictions would be slowly eased. The total length of the deal would be at least 15 years, possibly 20.  
As part of the agreement, punitive U.S. economic sanctions would be phased out over time. President Barack Obama has the authority to eliminate some measures immediately, and others would be suspended as Iran confirms its compliance over time. Some sanctions would be held to the later years of the deal, while a last set would require a highly skeptical U.S. Congress to change laws.

Although time periods, centrifuge caps and sanctions schedules have previously been discussed, most of the specifics divulged by the officials were new. They demanded anonymity because they weren't authorized to speak publicly on the confidential talks.  
Iran insists its program is solely for peaceful energy, medical and research purposes, though many governments believe it has nuclear weapons ambitions.  
It's unclear how complete the draft is. Iran's deeply buried underground enrichment plant remains a problem, officials said, with Washington demanding the facility be repurposed and Tehran insisting it be able to run hundreds of centrifuges there. Iran says it wants to use the machines for scientific research; the Americans fear they could be quickly retooled for enrichment.  
A planned heavy water reactor will be re-engineered to produce much less plutonium than originally envisioned, relieving concerns that it could be an alternative pathway to a bomb.  
Any March framework agreement is unlikely to constrain Iran's missile program, which the United States believes may ultimately be aimed at creating delivery systems for nuclear warheads. Diplomats say that as the talks move to a deadline, the Iranians continue to insist that missile curbs are not up for discussion.

restrictions would stay in place, however, such as on the transfer of missile technology.  
After the deal expires, Iran could theoretically ramp up enrichment to whatever level or volume it wants.  
Iran already can produce the equivalent of one weapon's worth of enriched uranium with the centrifuges it now runs. However, Iran's supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, spoke of eventually operating enough centrifuges to produce what 190,000 of its current models churn out.

## Weather

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have grown over the last few months to about 50-70 percent of average," said Dennis Today, SDSU Extension climate specialist and South Dakota state climatologists.  
The combination of South Dakota's current conditions with a forecast showing drier-than-average weather increases chances of drought conditions expanding, Today said in an interview with the *Press and Dakotan*.  
"Right now, the systems that are coming to the area don't look to be big precipitation producers," Today said. "Although the bigger concern is in the northeast of South Dakota — not by Yankton just yet."  
For the three-month period ahead, the NOAA Climate Prediction Center's

outlook continues to trend drier than average for the eastern edge of South Dakota.  
"This is a change from earlier outlooks that projected equal chances of drier, wetter or near average rainfall for the later spring season," Today said.  
Additionally, the state's northern tier counties are expected to be warmer than average through the late spring.  
The combination of these factors in the northeastern part of the state could contribute to an expansion of drought — and/or an increase in severity — through the early growing season, Today said.  
"We are trying to raise a level of awareness that it is dry," he said. "But I'm not going to raise any red flags. We are not in really big trouble right now. If we continue to stay dry and not get much precipitation in the spring, then we are going to have

problems. Right now, it's just dry and not a major deal just yet."  
But he warned that if the region doesn't get any rain in the next two to three weeks, it could become a real concern.  
"When we are getting into the spring season, people are going to start planting their crops, and their pasture and forage needs water," Edwards said. "So, the impacts start to accumulate a little bit more during this season. Producers and growers should (keep) this in mind and be thinking ahead to plan B's and plan C's and other options."  
However, dry conditions may not be bad news for everyone.  
"For ranchers who are going to be calving, the dryer and warmer weather makes it easier on both the ranchers and the cattle," Ryan said. "Getting equipment into the fields should be a little bit easier without the snow on

the grounds. With the unfrozen soils, any moisture that falls will have the opportunity to soak into the soil and recharge soil moisture, whereas if the soil was still frozen, we would see some of that moisture run off and not recharge."  
Dry conditions also allow for more rapid planting of row crops to occur, Edwards added.  
"However, these same conditions increase the risk of stress as crops need to get some rainfall at the right time for germination and early growth this spring season," she said.  
The current forecast for the next 8-14 days shows dry conditions are likely through the end of March into early April, while temperatures will move from cooler than average to near average.

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