

Senate Dems, GOP Agree On Libya Resolution

WASHINGTON (AP) — Top Senate Democrats and Republicans agreed Monday on a resolution backing limited U.S. involvement in the NATO-led military campaign against Libya, days after the expiration of the legal deadline for President Barack Obama to seek full-blown congressional authorization.

Foreign Relations Committee Chairman John Kerry, D-Mass., and Sen. John McCain, the top Republican on the Armed Services Committee, introduced the non-binding resolution along with five other Republicans and Democrats.

The measure supports the limited use of military force and concurs with Obama that the stated goal of U.S. policy "is to achieve the departure from power of Moammar Gadhafi and his family, including through the use of non-military means, so that a peaceful transition can begin to an inclusive government that ensures freedom, opportunity and justice for the people of Libya."

The resolution calls on Obama to submit to Congress a description of U.S. policy objectives in Libya — during and after Gadhafi's tenure — and to consult with Congress regarding U.S. operations in Libya.

Under the War Powers Resolution of 1973 a president can only send troops into combat for 60 days without congressional approval. That deadline passed on Friday, with little pressure from Congress. The frustration and anger among many lawmakers shortly after the U.S. launched air strikes in support of a "no-fly zone" in March have largely dissipated as the American military role has diminished.

On Monday, France and Britain pledged to deploy attack helicopters to help the rebels amid their standoff with Gadhafi's forces.

In a letter to congressional leaders on Friday, Obama said he would welcome a resolution.

"While we are no longer in the lead, U.S. support for the NATO-based coalition remains crucial to assuring the success of international efforts to protect civilians from the actions of the Gadhafi regime," Obama wrote. "Congressional action in support of the mission would underline the U.S. commitment to this remarkable international effort. Such a resolution is also important in the context of our constitutional framework, as it would demonstrate a unity of purpose among the political branches on this important national security matter."



McCain

Ash Cloud From Iceland Volcano Heads East

LONDON (AP) — A dense ash cloud from an Icelandic volcano blew toward Scotland on Monday, causing airlines to cancel flights, forcing President Barack Obama to shorten a visit to Ireland, and raising fears of a repeat of last year's huge travel disruptions in Europe that stranded millions of passengers.

Britain's Civil Aviation Authority said it appears that ash from the Grimsvotn volcano could reach Scottish airspace as early as Tuesday and affect other parts of the U.K. and Ireland later in the week.

British Airways suspended all its flights for Tuesday morning between London and Scotland, while Dutch carrier KLM and Easyjet canceled flights to and from Scotland and northern England at the same time. Two domestic airlines also announced flight disruptions.

Still, authorities say they don't expect the kind of massive grounding of flights that followed last year's eruption of the Eyjafjallajokull volcano in Iceland because systems and procedures have been improved since then and the cloud is currently not expected to move over continental Europe.

Pilots unions, however, expressed concerns that the ash could still be dangerous.

Pakistan Regains Control Of Embattled Base

KARACHI, Pakistan (AP) — Pakistani commandos recaptured a major naval base from Taliban attackers Monday after a bloody and humiliating 18-hour standoff that raised questions about militant infiltration in the security services and the safety of the volatile country's nuclear warheads.

The unusually brazen assault, which the Taliban said was to avenge the killing of Osama bin Laden, was a reminder that the Pakistanis are catching blame from both sides in the aftermath of the May 2 raid by U.S. commandos.

While Americans have accused elements in the Pakistani security services of having sheltered bin Laden in the military town of Abbottabad, the Taliban and al-Qaida fault the army for its level of cooperation with the Americans. It was the third purported revenge strike in Pakistan since bin Laden's death.

After initially estimating that 15 insurgents were involved in the attack that began late Sunday in the country's commercial capital, Karachi, officials said just six heavily armed, black-clad assailants penetrated into the heart of the Naval Station Mehran after cutting through wire in a quiet section of its eastern perimeter.

The militants destroyed two U.S.-supplied surveillance aircraft and killed at least five navy officers, two paramilitary rangers and three firefighters. Six Americans and 11 Chinese aviation engineers escaped unharmed, authorities said.

Court Upholds Order To Cut Prison Population

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Monday narrowly endorsed reducing California's cramped prison population by more than 30,000 inmates to fix sometimes deadly problems in medical care, ruling that federal judges retain enormous power to oversee troubled state prisons.

The court said in a 5-4 decision that the reduction is "required by the Constitution" to correct longstanding violations of inmates' rights to adequate care for their mental and physical health. In 2009, the state's prisons averaged nearly a death a week that might have been prevented or delayed with better medical care.

The order mandates a prison population of no more than 110,000 inmates, still far above the 80,000 the system was designed to hold.

There were more than 143,000 inmates in California's 33 adult prisons as of May 11, so roughly 33,000 inmates will need to be transferred to other jurisdictions or released.

"The violations have persisted for years. They remain uncorrected," Justice Anthony Kennedy, a California native, wrote for the court. The lawsuit challenging the adequacy of mental health care was filed in 1990.

Earmark Foes Taking Care Of Home Districts

WASHINGTON (AP) — Hard-charging Republicans who rallied voters last year with cries of "Stop the spending, ban the earmarks" are quietly offering a more familiar Washington refrain now that they're in Congress — not in my backyard.

The massive, \$553 billion bill providing a budget for the Pentagon boasts millions of dollars that President Barack Obama didn't request for weapons programs, installations and other projects in districts from Illinois to Mississippi represented by House GOP freshmen. The additions look suspiciously like the pet projects that Republicans prohibited when they took over the House and that the new class of lawmakers, many with tea party backing, swore off in a promise to change Washington's spending habits.

Heated campaign talk of reining in spending and barring earmarks often cools once candidates get to Congress and face the needs and demands of their districts, especially in times of wobbly economic recovery and a widespread shortage of jobs.

The House is scheduled to begin work on the bill Monday and vote on it this week. Republicans on the House Armed Services Committee insist the additions are not earmarks. The committee chairman, Rep. Howard "Buck" McKeon, R-Calif., said firmly in March that he would not permit them, and each addition carries a disclaimer that says a decision to spend these budgetary requests must be based on competition or merit.

AP-GfK Poll: Medicare Doesn't Have To Be Cut

WASHINGTON (AP) — They're not buying it. Most Americans say they don't believe Medicare has to be cut to balance the federal budget, and ditto for Social Security, a new poll shows.

The Associated Press-GfK poll suggests that arguments for overhauling the massive benefit programs to pare government debt have failed to sway the public. The debate is unlikely to be resolved before next year's elections for president and Congress.

Americans worry about the future of the retirement safety net, the poll found, and 3 out of 5 say the two programs are vital to their basic financial security as they age. That helps explain why the Republican Medicare privatization plan flopped, and why President Barack Obama's Medicare cuts to finance his health care law contributed to Democrats losing control of the House in last year's elections.

Medicare seems to be turning into the new third rail of politics. "I'm pretty confident Medicare will be there, because there would be a rebellion among voters," said Nicholas Read, 67, a retired teacher who lives near Buffalo, N.Y. "Republicans only got a hint of that this year. They got burned. They touched the hot stove."

Cuts To Food Aid Proposed

BY MARY CLARE JALONICK
 Associated Press

WASHINGTON — House Republicans are targeting domestic nutrition programs and international food assistance as they try to control spending in next year's budget.

In a bill released Monday, Republicans proposed cutting \$832 million — or 11 percent — from this year's budget for the Women, Infants and Children program, which provides food for low-income mothers and children. The 2012 budget proposal for food and farm programs also includes a decrease of almost \$457 million, or 23 percent, from international food assistance.

The legislation would cut \$2 billion from food stamps, or about 1.3 percent of the feeding program's giant \$67 billion budget.

Republicans who wrote the bill said the cuts

in domestic food programs are taken from excess dollars in those accounts, and participants won't see a decrease in services.

Domestic nutrition programs are mined for dollars in tight budget times because they often have extra money sitting in their accounts. Money is allocated for the programs based on projections of need and food costs, and those needs are sometimes overestimated.

Hunger advocates have warned against stripping those programs of those reserves. Two analysts from the liberal research and advocacy group Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, Zok Neuberger and Robert Greenstein, said Monday that the cuts could mean turning away as many as 475,000 people from the Women, Infants and Children program if food prices continue to rise.

Almost 9 million low-income mothers and children participate in the WIC program, which

provides food, health care referrals and nutrition education.

Rep. Rosa DeLauro, D-Conn., said the GOP budget "rolls back years of progress."

"This budget threatens the health and security of American families, while asking the most of low-income seniors and the most vulnerable among us," she said.

The bill would cut about 10 percent of the Food and Drug Administration's \$2.5 billion budget, with fees charging industry for regulation potentially making up some of that difference. The legislation also cuts rural development programs, rural housing programs and agricultural research programs administered by the Agriculture Department.

Georgia Rep. Jack Kingston, the Republican chairman of the House Appropriations agriculture subcommittee, said the cuts would "root out waste and duplication."

Obama To Irish: 'I've Come Home'

Cheering Crowds Greet President As He Starts Four-Nation Europe Trip

BY NANCY BENAC
 Associated Press

DUBLIN — He downed a pint of Guinness with a distant cousin and checked out centuries-old parish records tracing his family to Ireland. From the tiny village of Moneygall to a huge, cheering crowd in Dublin, President Barack Obama opened his four-nation trip through Europe on Monday with an unlikely homecoming far removed from the grinding politics of Washington and the world.

"My name is Barack Obama, of the Moneygall Obamas, and I've come home to find the apostrophe we lost somewhere along the way," a clearly tickled Obama — make that O'Bama — told the overflow throng at Dublin's College Green with his wife, Michelle, right by him. "We feel very much at home."

Obama's feel-good indulgence in Ireland came at the start of a four-country, six-day trip that is bound to get into stickier matters as he goes. The only hitch on day one was the threat of a volcanic ash cloud from Iceland that led the president to leave Ireland without even a night's stay and land in England on Monday night.

His high point in Ireland was a helicopter jaunt to Moneygall, population 350 give or take it, where the president's great-great-grandfather, Falmouth Kearney, was born and where thousands congregated to welcome the United States' first black president home. Obama met there with his nearest Irish relative, 26-year-old accountant Henry Healy, and they stopped in at Ollie's Bar for a Guinness.

It was a moment and a pint to savor. To the approval of the pub crowd and people all across Ireland watching on television, Obama downed the full pint in four slurps and came away with a foam mustache.

"The president actually killed his pint! He gets my vote," said Christy O'Sullivan, an Irish government clerical worker taking a long lunch break to watch live TV footage of Obama's visit. "He's the first president I've actually seen drink the black



LIAM SWEENEY/MCT

President Barack Obama speaks to a crowd in College Green, Dublin, Ireland, Monday where he and first lady Michelle Obama were on an official visit at the start of a tour taking in several European countries.

stuff like he's not ashamed of something."

An Irish link is good news for any American politician trying to connect with voters, and particularly for one who's been dogged by questions about whether he was even born in the United States. By some estimates, 35-40 million Americans trace their ancestry to Ireland. While Ireland, population 4.5 million, is a relatively small player on the world stage, this nation roughly the size of West Virginia has been a popular stopping point for modern American presidents ever since John F. Kennedy came in 1963.

For Obama, it was a day reminiscent of the campaign season when candidate Obama was greeted by adoring crowds and the president milked it for all it was worth. He spoke enthusiastically Monday of "the bonds of affection" between the United States and Ireland. "There's always been a little green behind the red, white and blue," he said to cheers in Dublin.

It wasn't until the 2008 presidential campaign that Obama discovered he had Irish roots, when a priest of the local Anglican church, Canon

Stephen Neill, located the family's baptismal records and established the connection. Falmouth Kearney, who immigrated to the United States in 1850 at the age of 19, is a great-grandfather of Obama on his Kansas-born mother's side. His father was born in Kenya.

In Moneygall, 14-year-old Grainne Ryan scrawled "Obama" and drew a shamrock on her cheeks with eyeliner. Thirty-one-year-old Tara Morris pronounced herself "star-struck," a sentiment that appeared to be shared by many in a country that could use a boost as it weathers a steep economic downturn after its boom years as the Celtic Tiger.

Michelle Obama, for her part, drank her full half-pint and then got behind the bar herself to serve Moneygall's parish priest, the Rev. Joe Kennedy.

The president said the brew somehow tasted better in Ireland than in America. And, by the same token, the crowds here were by far more enthusiastic than those greeting him back home of late.

GAO: Tax Cheats Among Recipients Of Stim Money

BY JIM ABRAMS
 Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Thousands of companies that cashed in on President Barack Obama's economic stimulus package owed the government millions in unpaid taxes, congressional investigators have found.

The Government Accountability Office, in a report being released Tuesday, said at least 3,700 government contractors and nonprofit organizations that received more than \$24 billion from the stimulus effort owed \$757 million in back taxes as of Sept. 30, 2009, the end of the budget year.

The report said the tax delinquents accounted for nearly 6 percent of the 63,000 contractors and grantees examined and cautioned that the real number might be higher because the known tax debt does not measure such factors as income underreporting.

Among the examples was an engineering firm that received a \$100,000 stimulus act contract but owed \$6 million in taxes. The IRS called it "an extreme case of non-compliance." A social services nonprofit that received more than \$1 million in stimulus funds owed taxes of \$2 million.

The GAO referred those two cases and 13 others to the IRS for further investigation.

On Tuesday, a Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs subcommittee will hold a hearing on the report.

Federal law does not prohibit tax delinquents from getting government contracts or grants, though there are provisions that enable the government to withhold payments in some cases. While the federal government requires contractors to present documentation that their taxes are paid, some recipients escaped federal review because the money was disbursed at state or local levels.

Sen. Carl Levin, D-Mich., chairman of the investigations subcommittee holding the hearing, said it's been known for years that a few federal contractors and grantees don't pay their taxes.

He said a program to recover funds from tax delinquents has been

strengthened, and "the executive branch has made it clear" that non-payment of tax can be grounds for denying a specific contract or barring a contractor from bidding on any contract. He added that the executive branch should "get on with it" and bar "the worst of the tax cheats from the contractor workforce."

"It is a matter of basic fairness that those who take government money should be required to pay their taxes like everyone else," said Sen. Tom Coburn of Oklahoma, the panel's top Republican. "That such a huge amount of the stimulus money went to known tax cheats should be a wakeup call for Congress."

The stimulus package, enacted in February 2009, funneled some \$821 billion into the recession-hit economy. Of that, about \$275 billion was designated for contracts and grants, of which nearly \$200 billion had been paid out as of March 25, 2011.

The report noted that about 35 percent of the unpaid taxes were for debts incurred prior to 2003 and that more than half of the apparent violations, \$417 million, were from unpaid corporate taxes. Another quarter, \$207 million, came from unpaid payroll taxes.

The most serious documented case was a security firm that owed \$9 million, mainly in unpaid payroll taxes from the mid-2000s. IRS records indicated that the company paid other creditors while shirking its tax obligations. The company, which received more than \$100,000 in stimulus money, had a history of being uncooperative, missing deadlines and repeatedly filing appeals, according to the records.

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