

After Outburst, Loughner Found Incompetent

TUCSON, Ariz. (AP) — The man accused of wounding Rep. Gabrielle Giffords and killing six in a shooting rampage in Arizona is mentally incompetent to stand trial, a judge ruled Wednesday after two deputy U.S. marshals dragged the man out of the courtroom because of an angry outburst.

As survivors of the deadly January attack looked on, Jared Lee Loughner lowered his head, raised it and said what sounded like "Thank you for the freak show. She died in front of me." His words were loud but indistinct, and it wasn't clear who he was talking about. He wore a khaki prison suit and sported bushy, reddish sideburns.

U.S. District Judge Larry Burns' decision means the 22-year-old will be sent to back to a federal facility in Missouri for up to four months, where doctors will try to medicate him to see if they can restore his competency to a point where he understands the case against him.

The ruling came after Burns said two mental health professionals had concluded Loughner suffers from schizophrenia and is mentally unfit for trial.

Loughner spent five weeks in March and April at a federal facility in Springfield, Mo., where he was examined by psychologist Christina Pietz and psychiatrist Matthew Carroll. The two were asked to determine if Loughner understands the consequences of the case against him.

Dempsey Named As Chairman Of Joint Chiefs

WASHINGTON (AP) — A general installed just last month as the Army's top officer is President Barack Obama's surprise choice to become the next chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, two people familiar with the selection process said Wednesday.

Gen. Martin Dempsey, an accomplished veteran of the Iraq war, would succeed Navy Adm. Mike Mullen as the president's top military adviser when Mullen's term as chairman ends Sept. 30. Dempsey would have to be confirmed by the Senate.

Two people familiar with the choice, who spoke on condition of anonymity because it has not been announced by the White House, said it is scheduled to be made public on Tuesday.

Dempsey is a surprise choice because he just began a four-year term as Army chief of staff on April 11.

Marine Gen. James Cartwright had long been rumored to be Obama's favorite as the next Joint Chiefs chairman. But Obama informed Cartwright over the weekend that he was no longer a candidate, a defense official said on Wednesday. The official spoke on condition of anonymity in order to discuss internal deliberations.

Obama: US, European Influence Still Strong

LONDON (AP) — Offering reassurance and resolve, President Barack Obama stood in the historic grandeur of Westminster Hall and served notice to England and the world that the growing influence of countries like China, India and Brazil in no way dictates a diminished global role for America and its European allies.

"The time for our leadership is now," Obama declared to members of Parliament, who for the first time gave an American president the honor of addressing them from the 900-year-old hall where great and gruesome moments in British history have played out.

"If we fail to meet that responsibility, who would take our place, and what kind of world would we pass on?" the president asked.

Tracing an arc from the allied soldiers who fought on the beaches of Normandy to the NATO-backed rebels now fighting in Benghazi, Libya, Obama argued that only the Western allies have the might and fortitude to promote and defend democracy around the globe.

Obama's message that U.S. and Europe remain vital on the world stage is one he is sure to carry with him as he heads next to Deauville, France, for a two-day summit of the world's top industrial nations. In addition to pressing economic matters, leaders will focus there, too, on how to support democracy in the Middle East and North Africa in a time of upheaval and economic strains.

Edwards Could Be Indicted Within Days

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — The Justice Department plans to bring criminal charges against John Edwards after a two-year investigation into whether the former presidential candidate illegally used money from some of his political backers to cover up his extramarital affair, a person familiar with the case said Wednesday.

An indictment could come within days unless the 2004 Democratic vice-presidential nominee reaches an agreement with prosecutors to plead guilty to a negotiated charge, said the person, who spoke on condition of anonymity because of the case's sensitivity.

It was not immediately clear what charges prosecutors planned to bring.

Federal authorities have been investigating the former North Carolina senator's campaign finances, focusing heavily on money from wealthy supporters that allegedly went to keep mistress Rielle Hunter and her out-of-wedlock baby in hiding in 2007 and 2008 to protect Edwards' White House campaign from a career-ending scandal.

Prosecutors, in an investigation overseen by top Justice Department officials in Washington, have been looking at whether those funds should have been reported as campaign contributions since they arguably aided his presidential bid.

Navy, Columbia To Ink Pact For ROTC's Return

NEW YORK (AP) — Columbia University says it will sign an agreement with the Navy allowing the ROTC back onto campus for the first time since the military training program was banned amid protests over the Vietnam War.

Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus and university President Lee C. Bollinger will sign the agreement aboard the USS Iwo Jima as part of New York's annual Fleet Week on Thursday.

Student and faculty leaders voted in April to allow the Reserve Officers' Training Corps back after the U.S. military dropped its ban on openly gay soldiers.

Under the agreement, the Navy will have an office at the university's campus on Manhattan's Upper West Side. Recruits will train at the State University of New York's Maritime College in the Bronx.

Forecasts And Luck Eased Tornado Risk

BY KRISTI EATON
AND CHUCK BARTELS
Associated Press

PIEDMONT, Okla. — When three tornadoes marched toward Oklahoma City and its suburbs, thousands of people in the path benefited from good forecasts, luck and live television to avoid the kind of catastrophe that befell Tuscaloosa, Ala., and Joplin, Mo.

Although at least 15 people died in the latest round of violent weather that started Tuesday, schools and offices closed early, giving many families plenty of time to take shelter. And even stragglers were able to get to safety at the last minute because TV forecasters narrated the twisters' every turn.

"We live in Oklahoma and we don't mess around," Lori Jenkins of Guthrie said after emerging from a neighbor's storm shelter to find her carport crumpled and her home damaged.

The people of Oklahoma City, which has been struck by more tornadoes than any other U.S. city, knew the storms were coming. Anxiety was perhaps running higher than usual Tuesday after last month's twister outbreak in the South that killed more than 300 people and a Sunday storm that killed at least 122 in Joplin, Mo.

The Oklahoma twisters proved to be weaker than the other tornadoes. But the minute-by-minute accounts of the developing weather helped thousands of people stay abreast of the danger.

Television helicopters broadcast live footage while the system approached the metropolitan area of 1.2 million people — calling out to specific communities like Piedmont to "Take cover now!"

In Guthrie, about 30 miles north of the capital city, Ron Brooks was watching when he learned that a tornado was barreling toward him. He heeded the weatherman's warning, scooped up his two children and took cover with his wife in their laundry room.

"When they told us to get into the shelter or interior room, we did that," Brooks said. "The first year I moved to Oklahoma, in 1997, I saw a funnel drop out of a wall cloud. Since seeing one, I've always taken it pretty seriously." He emerged 20 minutes later, relieved to learn that the tornado passed



MAX FAULKNER/FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM/MCT
Tim Beck shows a photo Wednesday, in Denton, Texas, that he shot with his BlackBerry phone of the tornado that hit Argyle and Denton on Tuesday night.

just north of his home.

Another line of severe storms swept through the nation's midsection Wednesday, mainly east of Oklahoma. A tornado warning was briefly issued for downtown Kansas City, Mo., and at least two weak tornadoes touched down in or near the suburbs.

A few others were reported in Illinois. The storms moved later into Indiana, Kentucky and Tennessee.

In Joplin, the city manager said Wednesday that 125 people had died in the storm, raising by three the toll of the nation's deadliest single tornado since 1950. He said more than 900 people had been injured.

Rescue and recovery work continued, with crews repeating grid searches for any survivors who might still be buried in rubble. Structural engineers were sent inside the ruins of St. John's Medical Center, which was crippled by the twister, to see if the hospital could be saved.

Back in the Oklahoma City area, at least nine people were killed, despite broadcasters offering live coverage of the storms for two hours before the bad weather actually hit around the evening rush hour.

Across the border in Arkansas, people in the tiny hamlet of Denning didn't have the luxury of an early warning. A tornado killed at least one person there. Storms left

Wednesday, he was prancing around in the sun as the Ellisons moved belongings out of their home.

"He must have known to stay low to the ground," Ellison said.

Oklahoma City has been hit by tornadoes 146 times, according to the federal government's Storm Prediction Center. That history brings respect for severe storms and a simple rule for people who find themselves in a twister's path: Get out of the way or get underground.

"I think Oklahomans, simply because we're around it so much, take very seriously the threat of severe weather. It's something we live with year-round," said Michelann Ooten, a spokeswoman for the state Department of Emergency Management. "We have a genuine respect for the severe weather here."

Part of that comes from learning to deal with bad weather at a young age, Ooten said.

The long track of the storm in Piedmont gave Lynn Hartman's family time to take shelter and then run away. As warning sirens sounded, Hartman said, she huddled in the pantry of her Piedmont home with her two children and the family dog until her husband arrived home from work.

"We're there just crying and praying," Hartman said, and her daughter, Sierra, 10, was saying repeatedly, "I just don't want to die."

The family then decided to flee as the storm drew closer. They crossed the Oklahoma City area to Shawnee. Once there, sirens sounded again for a storm approaching from the south. The four drove around for three hours before returning to find their roof gone. The pantry was standing, but Hartman was not convinced the family would have survived.

Ooten said trying to outrun a tornado is dangerous.

"Find the sturdiest building you can gain access to," she said. "Unless you're an expert, I wouldn't try to outrun a tornado. You're not in charge. Mother Nature is the one in charge."

three others dead elsewhere in Arkansas and killed two in Kansas.

The storms arrived in Denning in the darkness, with a warning posted only about 10 minutes before a tornado nearly obliterated the town of 270 shortly after midnight.

Troy Ellison didn't even have that much time.

He was watching a movie in his mobile home when he switched on the TV news. The tornado was four minutes away.

"We were going to take the work truck and get out," Ellison said. "I looked out the back door with my son and it was coming."

He dove under the kitchen table with his wife and two sons just before the tornado hit. "It got that growling sound and the windows popped," he said.

The tornado ripped the roof off his home and collapsed his workshop next door. Somehow, the family escaped unharmed.

Then Ellison went outside and saw the family dog, Jager, his paws splayed out on the ground. The animal "looked like someone stepped on him," Ellison assumed he was dead.

But the dog, a pit bull-boxer mix, turned out to be fine. By

Former Preacher Gets Life In Smart Case

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Nearly nine years after she was abducted at knifepoint from her bed, Elizabeth Smart watched Wednesday without showing any emotion as a federal judge ordered a street preacher to spend the rest of his life in prison for kidnapping and raping her while holding her captive for months.

The sentencing of Brian David Mitchell closed a major legal chapter in the heartbreaking ordeal that stalled for years after Mitchell was declared mentally ill and unfit to stand trial in state court.

"I know that you know what you did is wrong," Smart told Mitchell, who sang quietly in the courtroom. "You took away nine months of my life that can never be returned."

Dressed in a gray striped skirt and yellow blouse, Smart took the witness stand for only about 30 seconds and confronted her abductor in court for the first time since the abduction ended.

Mitchell did not respond when U.S. District Judge Dale Kimball handed down two life sentences at the hearing in Salt Lake City.

Afterward, Smart smiled and hugged family members and her lawyers.

A jury unanimously convicted the 57-year-old Mitchell in December of kidnapping and unlawful transportation of a minor across state lines for sex.

With long hair and beard, Mitchell looked frail and thin in court. He sang throughout the proceedings, even when the judge asked if he wanted to speak.

The prosecution had sought the life sentences. The defense waived its closing remarks.

Smart was 14 when she was snatched from the bedroom of her family home in Salt Lake City. Wednesday was the first time she faced her kidnapper in court; he was removed from the trial for singing hymns when she testified.

Now 23, she testified in excruciating detail about waking up in the early hours of June 5, 2002, to the feel of a cold, jagged knife at her throat and being whisked away by Mitchell to his camp in the foothills near the family home.

The disappearance and a massive search to find the blond-haired, blue-eyed girl riveted the nation, as did her improbable recovery while walking with her captor on a suburban Salt Lake City-area street on March 12, 2003.

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