

## Supreme Court

## Prayer At Board Meeting OK

BY MARK SHERMAN

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — A narrowly divided Supreme Court upheld decidedly Christian prayers at the start of local council meetings on Monday, declaring them in line with long national traditions though the country has grown more religiously diverse.

The content of the prayers is not significant as long as they do not denigrate non-Christians or try to win converts, the court said in a 5-4 decision backed by its conservative majority.

Though the decision split the court along ideological lines, the Obama administration backed the winning side, the town of Greece, N.Y., outside of Rochester.

The outcome relied heavily on a 1983 decision in which the court upheld an opening prayer in the Nebraska Legislature and said prayer is part of the nation's fabric, not a violation of the First Amendment's guarantee of freedom of religion.

Writing for the court on Monday, Justice Anthony Kennedy said that forcing clergy to scrub the prayers of references to Jesus Christ and other sectarian reli-

gious figures would turn officials into censors. Instead, Kennedy said, the prayers should be seen as ceremonial and in keeping with the nation's traditions.

"The inclusion of a brief, ceremonial prayer as part of a larger exercise in civic recognition suggests that its purpose and effect are to acknowledge religious leaders and the institutions they represent, rather than to exclude or coerce nonbelievers," Kennedy said.

Justice Elena Kagan, writing for the court's four liberal justices, said, "I respectfully dissent from the court's opinion because I think the Town of Greece's prayer practices violate that norm of religious equality — the breathtakingly generous constitutional idea that our public institutions belong no less to the Buddhist or Hindu than to the Methodist or Episcopalian."

Kagan said the case differs significantly from the 1983 decision because "Greece's town meetings involve participation by ordinary citizens, and the invocations given — directly to those citizens — were predominantly sectarian in content."

Kennedy himself was the author an opinion in 1992 that held that a Christian

prayer delivered at a high school graduation did violate the Constitution. The justice said Monday there are differences between the two situations, including the age of the audience and the fact that attendees at the council meeting may step out of the room if they do not like the prayer.

In her dissent, Kagan said the council meeting prayers are unlike those said to open sessions of Congress and state legislatures, where the elected officials are the intended audience. In Greece, "the prayers there are directed squarely at the citizens," she said.

Kagan also noted what she described as the meetings' intimate setting, with 10 or so people sitting in front of the town's elected and top appointed officials. Children and teenagers are likely to be present, she said.

Kennedy and his four colleagues in the majority all are Catholic. They are: Chief Justice John Roberts and Justices Samuel Alito, Antonin Scalia and Clarence Thomas.

Kagan was joined by Justices Stephen Breyer, Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Sonia Sotomayor. Of the four, three are Jewish and Sotomayor is Catholic.

## Fed Climate Report To Present A Dire Picture

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration is more certain than ever that global warming is changing Americans' daily lives and will worsen — conclusions that scientists will detail in a massive federal report to be released Tuesday.

Once people thought global warming was more in the future and more of an issue in other parts of the world, but the National Climate Assessment will emphasize how the United States is already paying the multibillion-dollar price for man-made climate change, said study co-author Donald Wuebbles, a climate scientist at the University of Illinois.

"We're already seeing extreme weather and it's happening now," Wuebbles said Monday. "We're seeing more heat waves, particularly in the West and in the South."

This final report is a rewritten and shortened version of a draft that was released in January 2013, with more scientific references, reviews by experts and the public and a thorough review by the National Academy of Sciences, said Wuebbles and report lead author Gary Yohe of Wesleyan University in Connecticut. There is even stronger evidence than in 2013, Yohe said.

The draft came out just as meteorologists calculated that 2012 was the hottest year on record for the United States, but last year was slightly cooler than the 20th century average. And in the time since the draft report was released, the United States has seen lots of extremes.

Nineteen different state records were set for individual months, such as the hottest January in California this year. Six were for heat: Arizona, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and California. Nine states set monthly records for being too wet: Iowa (twice, setting records for April and May last year), Georgia, Michigan, New Jersey, Florida, Colorado, Oregon and Washington. Two states set records for lack of rain: New Mexico and Utah. Two set records for coldest individual months: Maine and North Dakota.

And since the draft was released, there's been a dramatic new extreme that a good part of the country is worrying about: The drought in California, where a few rural places are in danger of running out of water.

In January 2013, none of California was in either extreme or exceptional drought; now nearly 77 percent of the state is. It is too early to point directly at the near-record California drought as another sign of global warming, but it fits the pattern, Yohe and Wuebbles said.

The Obama administration will likely use the 840-page report as scientific justification to reduce emissions of heat-trapping gas from the burning of fossil fuels, such as coal, gas and oil and to encourage local communities to adapt to changes in the climate. White House counselor John Podesta called it "the most authoritative and comprehensive source of scientific information" on how climate change will hit all parts of the nation and the economy.



SEERGEI L. LOIKO/LOS ANGELES TIMES/MCT  
A scene inside the town of Kramatorsk, Ukraine, near Sloviansk after a battle between Ukraine security forces and pro-Russia gunmen.

## Ukraine Sends Elite Force To Odessa Due To Unrest

BY YURAS KARMANAU AND RADUL RADOVANOVIC

Associated Press

ODESSA, Ukraine — Ukraine sent an elite national guard unit to its southern port of Odessa, desperate to halt a spread of the fighting between government troops and a pro-Russia militia in the east that killed combatants on both sides Monday.

The government in Kiev intensified its attempts to bring both regions back under its control, but seemed particularly alarmed by the bloodshed in Odessa. It had been largely peaceful until Friday, when clashes killed 46 people, many of them in a government building that was set on fire.

The tensions in Ukraine also raised concerns in neighboring Moldova, another former Soviet republic, where the government said late Monday it had put its borders on alert. Moldova's breakaway Trans-Dniester region, located just northwest of Odessa and home to 1,500 Russian troops, is supported by Moscow, and many of its residents sympathize with the pro-Russia insurgency.

The loss of Odessa — in addition to a swath of industrial eastern Ukraine — would be catastrophic for the interim government in Kiev, leaving the country cut off from the Black Sea. Ukraine already lost a significant part of its coastline in March, when its Crimean Peninsula was annexed by Russia.

Compared with eastern Ukraine, Odessa is a wealthy city with an educated and ethnically diverse population of more than 1 million. Jews still make up 12 percent of the population of the city, which once had a large Jewish community.

"The people of Odessa are well-educated and understand

## US: Russian Planes Active In Pacific

WASHINGTON (AP) — The commander of U.S. air forces in the Pacific is reporting a significant increase in activities by Russian planes and ships in the region.

Gen. Herbert Carlisle linked that to the situation in the Ukraine. He said Russia was demonstrating its capabilities and gathering intelligence on U.S. military exercises.

Carlisle said there had been long-range Russian air patrols to the coast of California and a circumnavigation of the U.S. Pacific territory of Guam. He said a U.S. F-15 fighter jet intercepted a Russian strategic bomber that had flown to Guam.

He also reported a sharp increase in Russian air patrols around Japanese islands and Korea.

Carlisle said there was a lot more Russian ship activity too.

He was speaking Monday at the Center for Strategic and International Studies think tank.

perfectly well that Russia is sowing the seeds of civil war and destabilization in Ukraine," said Vladimir Kureichik, a 52-year-old literature teacher who left Crimea after it became part of Russia.

The White House said it was "extremely concerned" by the violence in southern Ukraine.

"The events in Odessa dramatically underscore the need for an immediate de-escalation of tensions in Ukraine," said spokesman Jay Carney. He suggested Russia still must follow through with its part of a diplomatic deal aimed at defusing the tensions.

In eastern Ukraine, gunfire and multiple explosions rang out in and around Sloviansk, a city of 125,000 in the Russian-

speaking heartland that has become the focus of the armed insurgency against the government in Kiev.

The Russian Foreign Ministry put the blame squarely on Kiev, which "stubbornly continues to wage war against the people of its own country." The ministry urged what it called the "Kiev organizers of the terror" to pull back the troops and hold peaceful negotiations to resolve the crisis.

Ukrainian Interior Minister Arsen Avakov said in a statement that government troops were battling about 800 pro-Russia forces, which were deploying large-caliber weapons and mortars. His ministry reported four officers killed and 30 wounded in the fighting.

## US To Unleash IRS On Russian Banks

WASHINGTON (AP) — As the United States attempts to punish Russia for its actions in Ukraine, the Treasury Department is deploying an economic weapon that could prove more costly than sanctions: the Internal Revenue Service.

This summer, the U.S. plans to start using a new law that will make it more expensive for Russian banks to do business in America.

"It's a huge deal," says Mark E. Matthews, a former IRS deputy commissioner. "It would throw enormous uncertainty into the Russian banking community."

Long before the Ukraine crisis, Congress approved the law in 2010 to curb tax evasion that relies on overseas accounts. Now, beginning in July, U.S. banks will be required to start withholding a 30 percent tax on certain payments to financial institutions in other countries — unless those foreign banks have agreements in place to share information about U.S. account holders with the IRS. The withholding applies mainly to investment income.

Russia and dozens of other countries have been negotiating information-sharing agreements with the U.S. in an effort to spare their banks from such harsh penalties.

## Dems Undecided On Benghazi Inquiry

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Obama administration and House Democrats said Monday they were undecided about whether to take part in or boycott an election-year investigation by Republicans into the Benghazi attack that killed four Americans.

House Speaker John Boehner announced last week he would create a select committee to examine the response to the deadly Sept. 11, 2012, assault on the U.S. diplomatic post in Libya that killed Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans. Legislative aides said a vote to authorize the panel is expected sometime this week. On Monday, Boehner said Rep. Trey Gowdy, R-S.C., would head the investigation.

The action puts President Barack Obama's team and House Democrats in a bind. They are concerned about what they believe will be a partisan forum for attacks on the president and his top aides ahead of crucial midterm elections in November, which could swing the Senate to GOP control. But avoiding the committee altogether means sacrificing the ability to counter Republican claims.

White House press secretary Jay Carney stressed Monday that the administration always cooperates with "legitimate" congressional oversight — including sending witnesses to hearings and providing bipartisan committees with documents. He declined to characterize whether the Obama administration would view a House select committee as legitimate or illegitimate. But he said that what Republicans have said about the committee "certainly casts doubt" about its legitimacy.

Carney also suggested the select committee was unnecessary. "One thing this Congress is not short on is investigations into what happened before, during and after the attacks in Benghazi," he told reporters.

Boehner and other Republicans accuse the administration of misleading the American people after the attack to protect Obama in the final weeks of his re-election campaign, and of stonewalling congressional investigators ever since. They pointed to emails released only last week as further evidence of White House wrongdoing.

## Leader Threatens To Sell Kidnapped Girls

LAGOS, Nigeria (AP) — Nigeria's Islamic extremist leader is threatening to sell the nearly 300 teenage schoolgirls abducted from a school in the remote northeast three weeks ago, in a new videotape received Monday.

Abubakar Shekau for the first time also claimed responsibility for the April 15 mass abduction, warning that his group plans to attack more schools and abduct more girls.

"I abducted your girls," said the leader of Boko Haram, which means "Western education is sinful."

He described the girls as "slaves" and said, "By Allah, I will sell them in the marketplace." The hourlong video starts with fighters lifting automatic rifles and shooting in the air as they chant "Allahu akbar" or "God is great."

It was unclear if the video was made before or after reports emerged last week that some of the girls have been forced to marry their abductors — who paid a nominal bride price of \$12 — and that others have been carried into neighboring Cameroon and Chad. Those reports could not be verified.

## Snapped Clip Eyed In Circus Mishap

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) — Investigators suspect that a snapped clip sent eight aerial acrobats plummeting 20 feet or more during a daring performance, an experience one injured performer likened to a "plunge into darkness."

The clip, a common type called a carabiner that's used for everything from rock climbing to holding keyrings, was one of several pieces at the top of a chandelier-like apparatus that suspended the performers, fire officials said. After the accident, the 4- to 5-inch steel clip was found in three pieces on the ground with its spine snapped.

Providence Public Safety Commissioner Steven Pare stopped short of saying the carabiner caused Sunday's accident at the Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey circus, witnessed by about 3,900 people, many of them children. The federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration is trying to make a final determination.

"We don't know if it was metal fatigue, if it wasn't properly positioned or something else," Pare said. "We just don't know."

Two of the acrobats were in critical condition Monday and all eight were still hospitalized with injuries including a pierced liver and neck and back fractures, as well as head injuries. None of the injuries appear to be life-threatening, said Stephen Payne, a spokesman for Feld Entertainment, Ringling's parent company.

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## FREE Skin Cancer Screening

Tuesday, May 6th, 1pm - 4pm

Yankton Medical Clinic®, P.C. Dermatologist, James Young, D.O., will be offering a free skin cancer screening clinic on May 6th. No appointment is necessary. Patients will be seen on a first come, first serve basis. Limit of 50 patients. Upon arrival at the Clinic please check in at Section N receptionist, upstairs in the expansion.

\*For screening purposes. If further tests are needed, standard charges will be applied.



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