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YOUR NEWS! The Press & Dakotan

GOP Benghazi Team Brings A Long List Of Accusations

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans hoping to ride their Benghazi investigation to a November election sweep have entrusted a seven-member team with "getting to the truth" — as House Speaker John Boehner calls it.

They insist the question is whether the Obama administration misled Americans about the deadly attack. They say the probe isn't political.

But several GOP members of the new committee already have made claims of administration wrongdoing.

Some have participated in previous investigations into how the U.S. ambassador to Libya, Chris Stevens, and three other Americans were killed on Sept. 11, 2012, and how the administration responded.

Democrats have yet to say if they'll take part in this latest investigation, the eighth since the attack.



MARK BOSTER/LOS ANGELES TIMES/MCT
David Roberts surveys the damage after his home was destroyed by fire a day earlier on a hilltop in Escondido, California, Friday. The Roberts' home was built with concrete and steel, and it still could not withstand the heat and fire.

Climate Change

Studies Say Wildfires Worse Due To Warming

BY SETH BORENSTEIN
 AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON — The devastating wildfires scorching Southern California offer a glimpse of a warmer and more fiery future, according to scientists and federal and international reports.

In the past three months, at least three different studies and reports have warned that wildfires are getting bigger, that man-made climate change is to blame, and it's only going to get worse with more fires starting earlier in the year. While scientists are reluctant to blame global warming for any specific fire, they have been warning for years about how it will lead to more fires and earlier fire seasons.

"The fires in California and here in Arizona are a clear example of what happens as the Earth warms, particularly as the West warms, and the warming caused by humans is making fire season longer and longer with each decade," said University of Arizona geoscientist Jonathan Overpeck. "It's certainly an example of what we'll see more of in the future."

Since 1984, the area burned by the West's largest wildfires — those of more than 1,000 acres — have increased by about 87,700 acres a year, according to an April study in the journal Geophysical Research Letters. And the areas where fire has been increasing the most are areas where drought has been worsening and "that certainly points to climate being a major contributor," study main author Philip Dennison of the University of Utah said Friday.

The top five years with the most acres burned have all happened in the last decade, according to federal records. From 2010-2013, about 6.4 million acres a year burned on average; in the 1980s it was 2.9 million acres a year.

"We are going to see increased fire activity all across the West as the climate warms," Dennison said.

That was one of a dozen "key messages" in the 841-page National Climate Assessment released by the federal government earlier this month. It mentioned wildfires 200 times.

"Increased warming, drought and insect outbreaks, all caused by or linked to climate change have increased wildfires and impacts to people and ecosystems in the Southwest," the federal report said. "Fire models project more wildfire and increased risks to communities across extensive areas."

Likewise, the Nobel prize winning Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change noted in March that wildfires are on the rise in the western U.S., have killed 103 Americans in 30 years, and will likely get worse.

The immediate cause of the fires can be anything from lightning to arson; the first of the San Diego area fires, which destroyed at least eight houses, an 18-unit condominium complex and two businesses, seemed to start from sparks from faulty construction equipment working on a graded field, said California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection spokeswoman Lynne Tolmachoff.

But the California fires are fueled by three major ingredients: drought, heat and winds. California and Arizona have had their hottest first four months of the year on record, according to National Weather Service records. Parts of Southern California broke records Thursday, racing past 100 degrees. For the past two weeks the entire state of California has been in a severe or worse drought, up from 46 percent a year ago, according to the U.S. drought monitor.

"With the drought this year, we're certainly going to see increased frequency of this type of event," Dennison said. "Because of the drought the fuels (dry plants and trees) are very susceptible to burning."

Another study last month in Geophysical Research Letters linked the ongoing drought to man-made climate change. Other scientists say that is not yet proven.

Scientists will have to do a lot of time-consuming computer simulations before they can officially link the drought to climate change. But Overpeck said what is clear is that it's not just a drought, but "a hot drought," which is more connected to man-made warming.

The other factor is the unusual early season Santa Ana winds, whose strength is a key factor in whipping the flames. So far, scientists haven't connected early Santa Ana to climate change, Dennison said.

Kerry To Yale Grads: You Are Sterling's 'Worst Nightmare'

NEW HAVEN, Conn. (AP) — Secretary of State John Kerry took a poke at the NBA's controversy surrounding Los Angeles Clippers owner Donald Sterling during a speech at Yale University's Class Day.

Joking about college and pop culture at the start of his speech Sunday, Kerry told the Ivy League graduates: "You are ... the most diverse class in Yale history. Or, as it's called in the NBA, Donald Sterling's worst nightmare." The comment drew laughs from the audience.

The NBA commissioner has banned Sterling for life and fined him \$2.5 million following the release last month of a recording in which the Clippers' owner makes racist remarks. The commissioner also called on owners to oust Sterling from the league.

According to a speaker at Class Day, students from 61 countries are graduating from Yale this weekend.

Historic Flooding Rakes Across Bosnia

BRCKO, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AP) — Floodwaters triggered more than 3,000 landslides across the Balkans on Sunday, laying waste to entire towns and villages and disturbing land mines leftover from the region's 1990s war, along with warning signs that marked the unexploded weapons.

The Balkans' worst flooding since record keeping began forced tens of thousands of people from their homes and threatened to inundate Serbia's main power plant, which supplies electricity to a third of the country and most of the capital, Belgrade.

Authorities organized a frenzied helicopter airlift to get terrified families to safety before the water swallowed up their homes. Many were plucked from rooftops.

Floodwaters receded Sunday in some locations, laying bare the full scale of the damage. Elsewhere, emergency management officials warned that the water would keep rising into Sunday night.

"The situation is catastrophic," said Bosnia's refugee minister, Adil Osmanovic.

AT&T To Purchase DirecTV For \$48.5B

DALLAS (AP) — AT&T Inc. on Sunday agreed to buy DirecTV for \$48.5 billion, or \$95 per share, a move that gives telecommunications company a larger base of video subscribers and increases its ability to compete against Comcast and Time Warner Cable, which agreed to a merger in February.

AT&T's proposed combination, which is subject to government review, could improve its Internet service by pushing its existing U-verse TV subscribers into video-over-satellite service, and thereby free up bandwidth on its telecommunications network.

AT&T currently offers a high-speed Internet plan in a bundle with DirecTV television service. The acquisition would help it further reap the benefits of that alliance.

With 5.7 million U-verse TV customers and 20.3 million DirecTV customers in the U.S., the combined entity would serve 26 million. That would make it the second-largest pay TV operator behind a combined Comcast-Time Warner Cable, which would serve 30 million.

The companies expect the deal to close within 12 months. Under the terms agreed to Sunday, DirecTV shareholders will receive \$28.50 per share in cash and \$66.50 per share in AT&T stock. The total transaction value is \$67.1 billion, including DirecTV's net debt.

Libya: Parliament Closed After Attack

TRIPOLI, Libya (AP) — Forces apparently loyal to a renegade Libyan general said they suspended parliament Sunday after earlier leading a military assault against lawmakers, directly challenging the legitimacy of the country's weak central government three years after the overthrow of dictator Moammar Gadhafi.

A commander in the military police in Libya read a statement announcing the suspension on behalf of a group led by Gen. Khalifa Hifter, a one-time rebel commander who said the U.S. backed his efforts topple Gadhafi in the 1990s. Hours earlier, militia members backed by truck-mounted anti-aircraft guns, mortars and rocket fire attacked parliament, sending lawmakers fleeing for their lives as gunmen ransacked the legislature.

Gen. Mokhtar Farnana, speaking on a Libyan television channel on behalf of Hifter's group, said it assigned a 60-member constituent's assembly to take over for parliament. Farnana said Libya's current government would act on an emergency basis, without elaborating.

Farnana, who is in charge of prisons operated by the military police, said forces loyal to Hifter carried out Sunday's attack on parliament. He also said Sunday's attack on Libya's parliament was not a coup, but "fighting by the people's choice."

"We announce to the world that the country can't be a breeding ground or an incubator for terrorism," said Farnana, who wore a military uniform and stood in front of Libya's flag.

Major Pyongyang Building Collapses

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean officials offered a rare public apology for the collapse of an apartment building under construction in Pyongyang, which a South Korean official said was believed to have caused considerable casualties that could mean hundreds might have died.

The word of the collapse in the secretive nation's capital was reported Sunday morning by the North's official Korean Central News Agency, which gave no death toll but said that the accident was "serious" and upset North Korea's leader, Kim Jong Un.

The report said it occurred in the capital's Phyeonghon district on Tuesday "as the construction of an apartment house was not done properly and officials supervised and controlled it in an irresponsible manner."

In Seoul, a South Korean government official speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the information said the 23-story apartment building that collapsed was presumed to have housed 92 families.

That could mean the casualties could be in the hundreds because a typical North Korean family has four members. However, it was not clear whether all the residents were inside at the time of the collapse, or that four people lived in each apartment.

3 Face Charges In Turkey Mine Disaster

ISTANBUL (AP) — In the face of widespread anger over Turkey's worst mining disaster, prosecutors arrested three people, including a company manager, on charges of negligence Sunday.

The three were also accused of causing the death of more than one person, a charge that doesn't imply intent, prosecutor Bekir Sahiner said at a news conference in the western town of Soma, where 301 coal miners were killed in Tuesday's tragedy.

The arrests follow allegations by miners that the company failed to heed safety concerns and that government inspections had been superficial. The disaster has provoked anger at a critical time for Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, as he mulls running in August's presidential election.

A total of 25 people were initially detained for questioning and six were later released, Sahiner said. Prosecutors will now decide whether to charge or release the remaining 16 people in custody.

Sahiner said one of those arrested was the company's operations manager. The manager is Akin Celik, though Sahiner didn't identify him by name.

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