

## United States Pulls Ambassador Out Of Syria

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Obama administration has pulled its ambassador home from Syria, arguing that his support for anti-Assad activists put him in grave danger — the most dramatic action so far by the United States as it struggles to counter a Mideast autocrat who is withstanding pressure that has toppled neighboring dictators.

Syria responded quickly Monday, ordering home its envoy from Washington.

American Ambassador Robert Ford was temporarily recalled on Saturday after the U.S. received "credible threats against his personal safety in Syria," the State Department said, pointing directly at President Bashar Assad's government. Ford, who already had been the subject of several incidents of intimidation, has enraged Syrian authorities with his forceful defense of anti-Assad demonstrations and his harsh critique of a government crackdown that has now claimed more than 3,000 lives.

Calling Ford back to the U.S. is short of a complete diplomatic break but represents the collapse of the administration's hopes that it could draw Assad toward government changes and a productive role fostering Mideast peace. Washington held off on a full condemnation of Assad as his crackdown worsened this spring, and waited months to demand that he step aside.

Ford's presence in Damascus had been an important symbolic part of President Barack Obama's effort to engage Syria, which was without a U.S. ambassador for years after the Bush administration broke ties over Syria's alleged role in the 2005 assassination of a political candidate in neighboring Lebanon.

## Bachmann's Ex-Staff Complain Of Rudeness

CONCORD, N.H. (AP) — Republican presidential hopeful Michele Bachmann's former New Hampshire staffers say they were deceived and treated as second-class citizens before they quit in frustration last week.

In a news release, the five former staffers said they hold no ill will toward the Minnesota congresswoman, but they could not continue working for her because her national campaign team had been "rude, unprofessional, dishonest, and at times cruel" to them and "abrasive, discourteous, and dismissive" of the state's voters.

"These are our neighbors and our friends, and some within the national team treated them more as a nuisance than as potential supporters," the group wrote.

Bachmann's spokeswoman did not return a call seeking comment Monday.

Bachmann has visited New Hampshire just twice since announcing her campaign in late June. During her latest trip earlier this month, she blamed her absence on the August debate in Congress over raising the nation's debt limit.

## Stores Start Pricing Wars To Lure Shoppers

NEW YORK (AP) — Forget style, quality and customer service. This holiday season, all that matters is price.

A week before Halloween and two full months before Christmas, stores are desperately trying to outdo each other in hopes of drawing in customers worn down by the economy.

Wal-Mart, the biggest store in the nation, joined the price wars Monday by announcing that it would give gift cards to shoppers if they buy something there and find it somewhere else cheaper.

Staples and Bed Bath & Beyond have already said they will match the lowest prices of Amazon.com and other big Internet retailers. Sears is going a step further, offering to beat a competitor's best price by 10 percent.

"The days of marketing the stuff in your store because it was a hot brand are over," says Dave Ratner, owner of Dave's Soda & Pet City, a Massachusetts pet food and supplies chain.

## Lawyers For Jackson's Dr. Call First Witnesses

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Defense attorneys for the doctor accused of killing Michael Jackson began their case Monday after prosecutors presented a portrait of the physician as the inept, distracted engineer of the King of Pop's death.

Among the first defense witnesses were Dan Myers and Orlando Martinez — two Los Angeles police detectives who worked on the Jackson case.

Defense attorney Nareg Gourjian asked both about statements given by Jackson's bodyguard Alberto Alvarez, who previously testified that defendant Dr. Conrad Murray told him to place some medical equipment and vials in a bag before calling 911.

The defense has contended that Alvarez may have changed his story to fit details released by coroner's officials.

The lawyers also noted previously that the bodyguard did not mention that Murray told him to place the items in a bag until more than two months after Jackson's death.

## Mich.: 87-Year-Old Man Stopped With Cocaine

DETROIT (AP) — An 87-year-old Indiana man arrested in Michigan with 104 bricks of cocaine in his pickup truck has told a judge he was forced at "gunpoint" to carry the load.

During a boisterous appearance in court Monday, Leo Sharp had trouble keeping quiet. The Michigan City, Ind., man was released on bond, three days after he was stopped for improper lane use while driving alone on Interstate 94 near Chelsea, 60 miles west of Detroit.

According to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration state troopers with the help of a drug-sniffing dog discovered 104 brick-sized objects of cocaine Friday.

A criminal complaint signed by a DEA agent is thin on details, and there was no mention in court about Sharp's destination.

Outside court, Sharp told The Associated Press that he's innocent.

# Obama Proposes Mortgage Help

BY JIM KUHNHEIN AND JULIE PACE  
 Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Seeking to circumvent congressional opposition, President Barack Obama will promote a series of executive branch steps aimed at jumpstarting the economy this week, beginning with new rules to make it easier for homeowners to refinance their mortgages.

The White House said changes to the two-year-old Home Affordable Refinance Program will help homeowners with little or no equity in their houses refinance by cutting the cost of doing so and removing caps to give deeply underwater borrowers access to the program. The new rules apply to homeowners with federally guaranteed mortgages who are current on their payments.

Obama will discuss the initiative during a meeting with homeowners Monday in Las Vegas, a city hard hit by foreclosures and sagging home prices. One in every 118 homes in the state of Nevada received a foreclosure filing in September, according to the foreclosure listing firm RealtyTrac.

With the president's jobs bill struggling in Congress, the White House is refocusing its efforts on steps Obama can take to address the



Obama

nation's economic woes without getting lawmakers' approval. In addition to the refinancing program, the White House said Obama will also announce executive action later this week to help students better manage their student loan payments.

The new push comes with a fresh catchphrase as the White House tries to push Republicans into action: "We can't wait." It's Obama's latest in a string of slogans aimed at blaming GOP lawmakers for lack of action on the economy.

White House communications director Dan Pfeiffer said that while executive actions are no substitute for Congress passing elements of the jobs bill, the economy requires action now.

"When Congress won't act, this president will," he said.

GOP leaders counter that the sluggish economy and stubbornly high unemployment rate are the result of Obama administration policies that have failed, including the 2009 stimulus package and financial regulation bill.

"They got everything they wanted from Con-

gress the first two years. Their policies are in place. And they are demonstrably not working," Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said Sunday.

Last month, Obama announced a \$447 billion jobs plan, filled with tax increases on the wealthy and new spending on education, infrastructure and aid to state and local governments. Efforts to pass the full measure were blocked by Senate Republicans, who see the president's proposal as a second stimulus.

That's left Obama and his Democratic allies pushing lawmakers to pass the bill in individual pieces, though the fate of most of the measures remains unclear.

White House economic adviser Gene Sperling said the president considered including an expansion of mortgage refinancing in his jobs bill, but felt the changes could be implemented more quickly through executive action.

The changes to the so-called HARP program will be implemented by the independent Federal Housing Finance Agency. At its core, the initiative will relax eligibility standards, allowing those who are 25 percent of more underwater on their mortgages to take advantage of loans with lower interest rates.

## New Libyan Leader Seeks To Calm West On Sharia Fears

BY HAMZA HENDAWI  
 AND KIM GAMEL  
 Associated Press

TRIPOLI, Libya — After giving a speech that emphasized the Islamization of Libya, the head of the transitional government on Monday tried to reassure the Western powers who helped topple Moammar Gadhafi that the country's new leaders are moderate Muslims.

Just as in neighboring Tunisia and Egypt, Islamists have emerged from yet another Arab Spring uprising as the most powerful group in the country. How far they will go will be decided at the ballot box — in Tunisia this week, in Egypt in November and in Libya within eight months.

National Transitional Council leader Mustafa Abdul-Jalil said Sunday that Islamic Sharia law would be the main source of legislation, that laws contradicting its tenets would be nullified, and that polygamy would be legalized.

"I would like to assure the international community that we as Libyans are moderate Muslims," said Abdul-Jalil, who added that he was dismayed by the focus abroad on his comments Sunday on polygamy. A State Department spokeswoman said the U.S. was encouraged that he had clarified his earlier statement.

The stir created by Abdul-Jalil's address in Benghazi, the eastern Libyan city where the anti-Gadhafi uprising was born in mid-February, came as international pressure mounted on him to investigate the circumstances of Gadhafi's death.

Abdul-Jalil ordered an inquiry to establish whether the deposed Libyan leader was killed in an execution-style slaying after being captured alive Thursday by fighters in his hometown of Sirte or whether he died in the crossfire as government officials have suggested.

State Department spokeswoman Victoria Nuland reiterated U.S. support for a full investigation but said "it's now time for Libya to move on." She endorsed the NTC's proposed timeline for next steps in the demo-



ERHAN SEVENLER/AA/ABACA PRESS/MCT

The corpses of former Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi together with his son Mutassim and his army chief Abu Bakr Yunis are displayed inside a marketplace cold storage unit in Misrata, Libya, Saturday.

cratic transition, and said Libyans "with no blood on their hands" must be ensured "a place in the new Libya, and that they are safe and they are included."

She also called a Human Rights Watch report that dozens of Gadhafi supporters were found dead with bullet wounds in the back of the head and their hands tied, "extremely disturbing." She said U.S. Ambassador to Libya Gene Cretz raised Washington's concerns with the council and asked them to conduct another investigation.

Gadhafi's body went on public display since Friday in a commercial refrigerator in the port city of Misrata, where residents lined up to see it.

Late Monday, an APTN crew saw vehicles driving away from the refrigerator, and Associated Press reporters saw that it was empty. A military commander said the bodies were handed over to authorities for burial.

Ibrahim Beit al-Mal, a spokesman for the fighters, said he expected that the bodies of Gadhafi, his slain son Mutassim and former Defense Minister Abu Bakr Yunis would be buried Tuesday in an unmarked grave in a secret location.

Abdul-Jalil said earlier that the transitional government has established a committee to determine what to do with Gadhafi's body, adding that the decision will be governed by a religious edict by the head of the Islamic Fatwa society.

Several videos have emerged showing Gadhafi was alive when he was captured and taunted and beaten by revolutionary fighters in Sirte. The Boston-based international news site GlobalPost posted a video showing Gadhafi's captors ramming a stick into his buttocks through his pants.

Guma al-Gamaty, a London-based spokesman for the National Transitional Council, said Abdul-Jalil had an obligation at the dawn of a new era to assure Libyans that Islam will be respected.

## Bodies And Survivors Found After Earthquake

ERCIS, Turkey (AP) — Distraught Turkish families mourned outside a mosque or sought to identify loved ones among rows of bodies Monday as rescue workers scoured debris for survivors after a 7.2-magnitude quake that killed at least 279 people.

Rescue teams with generator-powered floodlights worked into the night in the worst-hit city of Ercis, where running water and electricity were cut by the quake that rocked eastern Turkey on Sunday. Unnerved by over 200 aftershocks, many residents slept outside their homes, making campfires to ward off the cold, as aid organizations rushed to erect tents for the homeless.

Victims were trapped in mounds of concrete, twisted steel and construction debris after over a hundred buildings in two cities and mud-brick homes in nearby villages pancaked or partially collapsed in Sunday's earthquake. About 80 multistory buildings collapsed in Ercis, a city of 75,000 close to the Iranian border that lies in one of Turkey's most earthquake-prone zones.

Cranes and other heavy equipment lifted slabs of concrete, allowing residents to dig for the missing with shovels.

Deputy Prime Minister Bulent Arinc said the quake killed 279 people and injured 1,300, though search-and-rescue efforts could end as early as Tuesday. Authorities said 10 of the dead were students learning about the Quran at a religious school that collapsed.

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