

S. Court Leans To Lifting Giving Limits

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court appeared ready Tuesday to free big individual donors to give more money to political candidates in the court's first major campaign finance case since the justices took the lid off of independent spending in 2010.

The court's conservative justices, who formed the majority in 2010's Citizens United case, voiced varying degrees of skepticism about the limits on what individuals may give candidates, political parties and political action committees in a two-year federal election cycle.

The argument in a packed courtroom that included members of Congress gave supporters of stringent campaign finance regulations little reason for optimism that the court would sustain limits that were enacted 40 years ago in response to Watergate-era abuses. The caps were intended to reduce the potential for political corruption.

Chief Justice John Roberts, possibly the pivotal vote in the case, said that telling an individual he can give the legal maximum of \$2,600 per election to only a handful of candidates for Congress "seems to me a very direct restriction" on First Amendment rights.

Roberts seemed less critical of the overall limits as they applied to the political parties, and he said nothing to suggest he would support an outcome that would call into question all contribution limits, including on what one contributor may give one candidate.

Cairo Scarred By 2 1/2 Years Of Turmoil

CAIRO (AP) — Egypt's capital has long been proud of its nickname, "Mother of the World" — a metropolis of 18 million throbbing with the vitality and fun of other great cities, even if at times it seemed unmanageable and chaotic.

But Cairo's spirit has been deeply scarred by 32 months of turmoil and bloodshed from two "revolutions," constant protests and crackdowns, and a military coup.

Residents talk of an unfamiliar edginess. People are more suspicious of each other, whether because of increased crime or constant media warnings of conspiracies and terrorism.

Families are split by bitter ideological differences. Fights are sparked by a word or a gesture seen as supporting either the military or the Islamists who were ousted from power by the armed forces.

The mood goes beyond ideology. With police battered by the upheaval and rarely enforcing regulations, many people flout laws with no thought of the consequences — whether it's the cafes that take over sidewalks or thugs who seize plots of land.

NYPD Identifies Mother Of 'Baby Hope'

NEW YORK (AP) — In a dramatic break in a cold case more than two decades old, investigators used DNA to identify the mother of a dead child known only as Baby Hope, police said Tuesday.

The New York Police Department received a tip from someone after a publicity push over the summer, police officials said. The tip led to the woman, whose name was being withheld amid a homicide investigation.

"A DNA match was made with the mother, and the mother is cooperating," Police Commissioner Raymond Kelly told reporters on Tuesday.

Kelly declined to discuss the case further as investigators try to determine the circumstances of the 3- to 5-year-old girl's death.

"Obviously, homicide is a distinct possibility here, so we're going to go forward in that direction," Kelly said.

Bangladesh Factory Fire Kills 10 People

DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP) — A fire at a garment factory outside Bangladesh's capital killed 10 people and others were injured trying to escape, officials said Wednesday.

Harsh and often unsafe working conditions exist in Bangladesh's garment industry, and authorities and global clothing companies have pledged to improve safety standards there after numerous fatal accidents.

Those killed in the fire at the Aswad garment factory in Gazipur included the general manager, Rashiduzzaman Mandal, said fire official Zafar Ahmed. He said the fire was doused early Wednesday after firefighters labored 10 hours to bring it under control.

Factory director Emdad Hossain said 170 workers were inside the factory when the fire started and most were able to escape. Hossain said he suffered slight injuries himself.

Farhaduzzaman, another fire official, said the fire spread to two buildings that housed garment factories belonging to the Palmal Group of Industries.

The cause of the fire was not immediately known, but the government was investigating.

Among previous garment industry disasters, the collapse of an eight-story factory building in April killed more than 1,100 people, and a fire last November killed 112 workers.

Obama, Boehner Hint At Compromise

BY DAVID ESPO

AP Special Correspondent

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama and House Speaker John Boehner offered hints of possible compromise but also traded heated rhetoric Tuesday, a frustratingly inconclusive combination that left the eight-day partial government shutdown firmly in place and the threat of an unprecedented national default drawing closer.

"There's a crack there," Boehner said of the impasse near the end of a day of maneuvering at the White House and the Capitol. Yet the Ohio Republican added that it was not enough to warrant optimism.

Stocks fell significantly — the Dow Jones average by 159 points — as political gridlock endured. And, in the latest in a string of dire warnings, the International Monetary Fund said failure to raise America's debt limit could lead to default and disrupt worldwide financial markets, raise interest rates and push the U.S. economy back into recession.

Republicans "don't get to demand ransom in exchange for doing their jobs," Obama said at the White House. "They don't also get to say, you know, unless you give me what the voters rejected in the last election, I'm going to cause a recession."

Even the deaths of U.S. servicemen over the weekend in Afghanistan were grist for the politicians. The Pentagon said that because of the partial shutdown it was unable to pay the customary death benefits to the survivors.

Boehner said Congress had passed and Obama signed legislation last week permitting the payments, adding it was "disgraceful" for the administration to interpret the measure otherwise. He said the House would clarify the issue with a new bill on Wednesday.

In Congress, a plan by Senate Democrats to raise the debt limit by \$1 trillion to



OLIVIER DOULIERY/ABACA PRESS/MCT
President Barack Obama speaks at a news conference following a talk with House Speaker John Boehner in the briefing room of the White House Washington, D.C., Tuesday.

stave off a possible default drew little evidence of support from Republicans.

And a proposal by Republicans to create a working group of 20 lawmakers to tackle deficit issues, approved 224-197 by the House, drew a veto threat from the White House, the latest in a string of them as the administration insists the GOP reopen the government and avert default before any negotiations on deficit reduction or the three-year-old health care law can take place.

On a day in which both Obama and Boehner appeared on live television, both men appeared to be giving ground yet yielding little if anything of substance.

At midmorning, Boehner and other Republicans seemed to soften their demands.

"I suspect we can work out a mechanism to raise the debt ceiling while a negotiation is underway," said Rep. Tom Cole, an Oklahoma Republican who is close to Boehner.

The speaker, who had previously insisted on specific changes in the health care law as the price for preventing the shutdown, told reporters, "I want to have a conversation (with Obama and Democrats.) I'm not drawing any lines in the sand. It's time for us to just sit down and resolve our differences."

Asked if he was willing to raise the debt ceiling and fund the government for a short period, the Ohio Republican sidestepped. "I'm not going to get into a whole lot of speculation," he said.

A few hours later, Obama told a news conference he was willing to negotiate with Republicans on budget and other issues if Congress passed even short-term legislation to end the crisis.

"I'll even spring for dinner again," he said, referring to his courtship of Republican senators last winter, and attempting to inject humor into a political impasse where invective has been the norm.

Ninety minutes later, Boehner was unsmiling. "What the president said today was if there's unconditional surrender by Republicans, he'll sit down and talk," he said. Renewing his call for "a conversation" about key issues facing the country, the Ohio Republican said, "Not next week. Not next month. The conversation ought to start today."

Boehner added, "The long and short of it is, there is going to be a negotiation here. We can't raise the debt ceiling without doing something about what's driving us to borrow more money and to live beyond our means."

Privately, officials said deeply suspicious Republicans

were attempting to gauge Obama's comments to see whether they might represent a concession.

Treasury Secretary Jacob Lew has said the deadline for Congress to act is Oct., 17, setting that as the day the government will exhaust its ability to borrow funds and will have to rely day-to-day on tax and other receipts to pay its bills.

Some Republicans have downplayed the significance of the Oct. 17 deadline, saying that even then, the United States would be able to pay China and other holders of U.S. debt and avoid widespread economic dislocation.

But Obama said they were badly misguided, warning that default would harm the economy, cause retirement accounts to shrivel and houses to lose value. Still other Republicans have made it clear in recent days they agree with the threat posed by default and are determined to prevent it.

Inside a closed-door meeting of the Republican rank and file, Boehner had told his fellow Republicans they were in the midst of a tough battle and that Obama and Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid were trying to "annihilate us," according to one official in attendance.

Boehner's tone was different when he spoke to reporters.

"There's no boundaries here. There's nothing on the table. There's nothing off the table. I'm trying to do everything I can to bring people together and to have a conversation," he said.

In the back-and-forth, the threat of a default overshadowed the continuing partial government shutdown. An estimated 450,000 federal workers are idled at agencies responsible for items as diverse as food inspection and national parks, although all employees are eventually expected to receive full back pay.

Most Heating Bills To Rise This Winter

BY JONATHAN FAHEY

AP Energy Writer

The government forecast Tuesday that most households will pay more for heat this winter. Heating oil users will catch a slight break, but still pay near-record prices to keep warm.

Prices for natural gas, electricity and propane should be higher, the primary reason that more than 90 percent of U.S. homes will incur higher heating expenses.

Natural gas users will see the biggest percentage increase after two years of historically low prices. Their heating bills should rise to an average of \$679, the Energy Department said in its outlook for heating costs for the season running from October through March. That is about 13 percent higher than a year ago but still 4 percent below the average for the previous five winters.

Homes relying on electricity for heat, about 38 percent of the U.S., will likely pay about 2 percent more compared with last year.

For heating oil customers, there is good news and bad. Their average bill should drop 2 percent. But they'll still pay an average of \$2,046 for the season, the second highest on record behind last year's \$2,092.

Just over half of U.S. households use natural gas for heating. Many of the 38 percent of U.S. households that use electric heat live in warm regions where heating demand is not high. Only 6 percent use heating oil, but those homes tend to be in New England and New York, where winter heating needs are high.

Some analysts are concerned about a spike in heating oil prices. That's because the fuels that refiners make alongside heating oil, including diesel and jet fuel,

are in high demand around the world and inventories are low.

Natural gas should average \$11 per thousand cubic feet, the government said. That's \$1.33 more than last year, but still below the nearly \$13 per thousand cubic feet that homeowners paid in the winter of 2008-2009.

Dave Streit, a meteorologist at the Commodity Weather Group, which forecasts weather patterns to predict energy demand, expects slightly cooler than normal temperatures.

Mark Wolfe, Executive Director of the National Energy Assistance Directors Association, which advocates for heating assistance for low income families, worries that high heating oil prices, colder weather, and cuts in federal heating assistance will leave more families vulnerable.

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