

Dems. Rush Is On To Save Incumbents

WASHINGTON (AP) — Desperate Democrats are rushing to save suddenly vulnerable House incumbents, even in states where President Barack Obama cruised to double-digit victories, amid fresh signs of Republican momentum less than a week before the midterm elections.

The once friendly terrain of New York, California, Obama's native state of Hawaii and adopted state of Illinois all now pose stiff challenges to Democrats who are determined to limit their losses next Tuesday. Both parties agree the GOP will hold its House majority; the question is whether Republicans can gain enough seats to rival their post-World War II high water mark of 246.

The current breakdown is 233-199 in favor of the Republicans with three vacancies.

"We're in trench warfare. I'm not going to sugarcoat it," Rep. Steve Israel, D-N.Y., chairman of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, said in an interview.

In one sign of Democratic concern, Vice President Joe Biden was heading to Massachusetts on Wednesday for a rally with Seth Moulton, who is trying to hold onto a Democratic seat against Republican Richard Tisei. Then Biden was traveling to California on Saturday to campaign in an open-seat contest east of Los Angeles that surprisingly looks closer than a sure-fire Democratic gain.

Al-Qaida/ISIS Feud Tapering Off

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. intelligence analysts are closely watching al-Qaida's overtures to the renegade Islamic State to reunite and fight the West, and while a full reconciliation is not on the horizon, there is evidence the two groups have curtailed their feud and are cooperating on the Syrian battlefield.

The al-Qaida global terror network recently has extended olive branches to the rival Islamic State through messages released by its affiliates around the world. The most recent was on Oct. 17 from al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula, the Yemen-based offshoot that denounced the airstrikes and called on rival militant groups to stop their infighting and together train their sights on Western targets. Al-Qaida also has sent emissaries to Syria on unsuccessful missions to get the rival groups working together.

Al-Qaida is saying, "Let's just have a truce in Syria," said Tom Joscelyn, who tracks terror groups for the *Long War Journal*. "That is what's underway now. ... What we have seen is that local commanders are entering into local truces. There are definitely areas where the two groups are not fighting."

The Islamic State group has seized about a third of Iraq and Syrian territory and is terrorizing civilians to impose a strict interpretation of Islamic law. Their advances led to airstrikes by the United States and a coalition of Western and Persian Gulf nations in both Iraq and Syria.

Reconciling with al-Qaida senior leadership would let IS benefit from al-Qaida's broad, international network but would also leave it restrained in carrying out its own attacks. For its side, al-Qaida would get a boost from the Islamic State group's newfound popularity, which has provided an influx of new recruits and money. The Treasury Department said last week that IS has earned about \$1 million a day from selling oil on the black market.

Rocket Explosion Is A Major Setback

CHINCOTEAGUE, Va. (AP) — Crews searched for scorched wreckage along the Virginia coast Wednesday in hopes of figuring out why an unmanned commercial rocket exploded in a blow to NASA's strategy of using private companies to fly supplies and, eventually, astronauts to the International Space Station.

The 140-foot Antares rocket, operated by Orbital Sciences Corp., blew up 15 seconds after lifting off for the space station Tuesday, lighting up the night sky and raining flaming debris on the launch site. No one was injured, but the \$200 million-plus mission was a total loss.

The blast not only incinerated the cargo — 2 1/2 tons of space station food, clothes, equipment and science experiments dreamed up by schoolchildren — but dealt a setback to the commercial spaceflight effort championed by NASA and the White House even before the shuttle was retired.

It was the first failure after an unbroken string of successful commercial cargo flights to the space station since 2012 — three by Orbital and five by SpaceX, the other U.S. company hired by NASA to deliver supplies.

Although the cause of the blast is still unknown, several outside experts cast suspicion on the 1960s-era Russian-built engines used in the rocket's first stage. Orbital Sciences chairman David Thompson himself said the Russian engines had presented "some serious technical and supply challenges in the past."

Houston Drops Subpoenas For Pastors

HOUSTON (AP) — Houston city attorneys have withdrawn subpoenas that sought speeches and other information from five pastors who publicly opposed an ordinance banning discrimination of gay and transgender residents, the mayor said Wednesday.

Mayor Annise Parker said the subpoenas, which the city pursued after opponents filed a lawsuit seeking a vote on repealing the ordinance, inadvertently created a national debate about freedom of religion. The pastors, who aren't plaintiffs but support repeal efforts, argued that their sermons, presentations and other material were protected under the First Amendment.

"I always supported the right of clergy to say what they want even if I disagree with them," Parker said. "It was never our intention to interfere with any members of the clergy and their congregants in terms of sermons, in terms of preaching what they believe is the word of the God that they serve. ... My whole purpose is to defend a strong and wonderful and appropriate city ordinance against local attack."

The Houston City Council passed an ordinance in May that consolidates city bans on discrimination based on sex, race, age, religion and other categories. It also increases protections for gay and transgender residents. Opponents are pushing to repeal the ordinance, saying the issue should be decided by voters.

Girls' ISIS Journey Nightmare For Parents

AURORA, Colo. (AP) — The strange journey of three suburban Denver girls who authorities say tried to join Islamic State militants in Syria has many in their close-knit east African community worried about whether their own children will be the next to be lured to terror.

The girls' voyage has mystified many in the U.S., and has been even more troubling among Aurora's Somali and Sudanese immigrants, thousands of whom fled civil war and forged new lives in the Denver suburbs, where refugees easily find jobs driving cabs or working in the meat industry.

But while the girls' parents were working to give them a better life, being a Muslim teenager isn't easy in an American high school, said Ahmed Odowaay, a community advocate who works with youth. It's easy to feel like an outsider, even as a U.S. citizen.

Even his 10-year-old daughter gets taunts of "terrorist" when she wears her hijab in school, he said.

"This community is outcast. They feel like they don't belong here. They're frustrated," Odowaay said from his seat at Barwaqo, a restaurant hidden in one of Aurora's low-slung strip malls, where other men dined on goat and spaghetti, a favorite east African dish. "I'm worried their frustrations will lead them in the wrong direction."

Ebola Quarantine For Troops Approved

BY ROBERT BURNS
AP National Security Writer

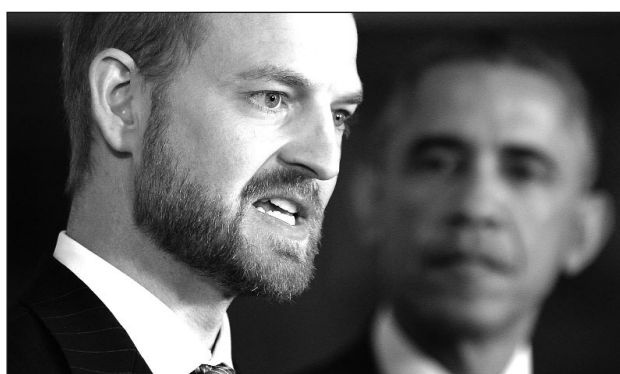
WASHINGTON — All American troops returning from Ebola response missions in West Africa will be placed in supervised isolation for 21 days, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel said Wednesday. He called it a "safety valve" sought by military members' families.

The U.S. military has nearly 1,000 troops in Liberia and just over 100 in Senegal supporting efforts to combat the virus. The total could grow to 3,900 under current plans. None are intended to be in contact with Ebola patients.

In explaining his decision, Hagel noted that the military has more people in Africa helping with the Ebola effort than any other segment of the U.S. government.

"This is also a policy that was discussed in great detail by the communities, by the families of our military men and women, and they very much wanted a safety valve on this," he said at a public forum in Washington.

The move goes beyond precautions recommended by the Obama administration for civilians, although President Barack Obama has made clear he feels the military's situation is different from that of civilians, in part



OLIVIER DOULIERY/ABACA PRESS/MCT
Ebola survivor Dr. Kent Brantly speaks about the heroic work of health care workers caring for Ebola patients as President Barack Obama looks on during an event in the East Room of the White House on Wednesday, in Washington, D.C.

because troops are not in West Africa by choice.

Hagel acted in response to a recommendation sent to him Tuesday by Army Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, on behalf of the heads of each of the military services. They cited numerous factors, including concerns among military families and the communities from which troops are deploying for the Ebola response mission.

Pentagon officials said it was too early to know exactly how the quarantine-like program will work. Hagel said he directed the Joint Chiefs to provide him within 15 days a detailed implementation plan. A Pentagon spokesman, Col. Steve

Warren, said it is yet to be determined whether the new policy applies to Defense Department civilians returning from Liberia and to military air crews who fly in and out of the area without staying overnight.

As originally envisioned, Pentagon policy called for troops returning to their home bases from Ebola response missions to undergo temperature checks twice a day for 21 days to ensure they are free of Ebola symptoms and to be prohibited from travelling widely during that period. But they were not to be quarantined and kept from contact with others.

The Army, however, acting on its own this week, put a small number of returning soldiers, including a two-star

general, in 21-day quarantine in Italy. That group was the first to return from West Africa after Ebola duty. Warren said that group of soldiers has grown from 12 to 42; all are in supervised isolation at a military base in Vicenza, their home base.

Hagel said he believed the 21-day supervised isolation, which he called "controlled monitoring," is a prudent measure. He ordered the service chiefs to conduct within 45 days a review of this new regimen.

"This review will offer a recommendation on whether or not such controlled monitoring should continue based on what we learn and observe from the initial waves of personnel returning from Operation United Assistance," Hagel's spokesman, Rear Adm. John Kirby, said in a written statement, using the official name of the military mission against Ebola in Africa.

"The secretary believes these initial steps are prudent given the large number of military personnel transiting from their home base and West Africa and the unique logistical demands and impact this deployment has on the force," Kirby added. "The secretary's highest priority is the safety and security of our men and women in uniform and their families."

Obama: U.S. Can't Seal Itself Off

BY JIM KUHNHENN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Pushing to confront Ebola at its West African source, President Barack Obama said Wednesday the United States was not immune to the disease but cautioned against discouraging American health care workers with restrictive measures that confine them upon their return from the afflicted region. "We can't hermetically seal ourselves off," he declared.

Obama said doctors and nurses from the United States who have volunteered to fight Ebola in West Africa are American heroes who must be treated with dignity and respect.

His remarks came amid debate between the federal government and several states over how returning health care workers should be monitored. The White House has pushed back against overly restrictive measures, including proposals for travel bans or isolation measures adopted by some states.

"Yes, we are likely to see a possible case elsewhere outside of these countries, and that's true whether or not we adopt a travel ban, whether or not you adopt a quarantine," Obama said from the White House, surrounded by health care workers who have volunteered or will volunteer to serve in Liberia, Sierra Leone or Guinea, where the disease has killed nearly 5,000.

"We have to keep in mind that if we're discouraging our health care workers, who are prepared to make these sacrifices, from traveling to these places in need, then we're not doing our job in terms of looking after our own public health and safety," he added.

Obama did not mention any specific case, but a nurse who treated Ebola patients in West Africa and has shown no signs of the disease was isolated in a hospital tent in New Jersey and now is abiding by a voluntary quarantine in her home state of Maine. The nurse, Kaci Hickox, said Wednesday that she planned to defy those guidelines if the state's policy didn't change by Thursday.

The White House has argued that stricter measures adopted by states such as New Jersey and New York could hurt efforts to recruit

Supreme Court To Consider Health Overhaul Subsidies

BY MARK SHERMAN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Supreme Court justices have their first chance this week to decide whether they have the appetite for another major fight over President Barack Obama's health care law.

Some of the same players who mounted the first failed effort to kill the law altogether now want the justices to rule that subsidies that help millions of low- and middle-income people afford their premiums under the law are illegal.

The challengers are appealing a unanimous ruling of a three-judge panel of the federal appeals court in Richmond, Virginia, that upheld Internal Revenue Service regulations that allow health-insurance tax credits under the Affordable Care Act for consumers in all 50 states. The appeal is on the agenda for the justices' private conference on Friday, and word of their action could come as early as Monday.

The fight over subsidies is part of a long-running political and legal campaign to overturn Obama's signature domestic legislation by Republicans and other opponents of the law. Republican candidates have relentlessly attacked Democrats who voted for it, and the partisanship has continued on the federal bench. Every judge who has voted to strike down the subsidies was appointed by a Republican president.

The appeal has arrived at the Supreme Court at a curious time; there is no conflicting appeals court ruling that the justices often say is a virtual requirement for them to take on an issue. Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg cited that practice, for example, as a reason she and her col-

leagues decided not to take on the same-sex marriage issue. And in the gay marriage cases, both sides were urging the court to step in.

That's not the case with the health care subsidies. The Obama administration argues there is no "reason for this court to depart from its usual course" and hear the dispute over subsidies now.

For a brief period, there was a split between appellate courts. On July 22, just a couple of hours before the Richmond-based court issued its decision, a three-judge panel of the federal appeals court in Washington, D.C., voted 2-1 to strike down the IRS regulations. The DC court held that under the law, financial aid can be provided only in states that have set up their own insurance markets, or exchanges.

The ruling created a big problem for the administration, which noted in its high-court filing that the federal government is running the markets, or exchanges, in 34 states and that nearly 5 million people receive subsidies that allow them to purchase health insurance through those exchanges.

For those federal exchange consumers, the subsidies cover 76 percent of their premiums, on average. Customers now pay an average of \$82 on total monthly premiums averaging \$346. The federal subsidy of \$264 a month makes up the difference.

But last month, the entire Washington appeals court voted to rehear the case and threw out the panel's ruling, eliminating the so-called circuit split. The appeals argument has been scheduled for mid-December, meaning a decision almost certainly would come too late to be considered by the Supreme Court this term.



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