

McCarthy Bows Out Of Speaker Race

BY ERICA WERNER
AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON — Confronting insurmountable obstacles, Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy suddenly withdrew from the contest for speaker of the U.S. House on Thursday, shocking colleagues just before they were to vote and producing ever-deeper chaos for a divided Congress.

"We need a new face," McCarthy declared after a closed-door meeting where House Republicans were prepared to nominate him as speaker but instead listened in disbelief as he took himself out of the running. "If we are going to be strong, we've got to be 100 percent united."

Allies said that even though he would certainly have emerged the winner from Thursday's secret-ballot election of Republicans, McCarthy had concluded he did not have a path to getting the needed 218-vote

majority in the full House later this month. A small but determined bloc of conservatives had announced they were opposing him, and they commanded enough votes to block him on the floor.

These same lawmakers, members of the hardline House Freedom Caucus, pushed outgoing Speaker John Boehner to announce his resignation just two weeks ago by threatening a floor vote on his speakership. Some of them cheered the announcement by Boehner's No. 2.

"The establishment has lost two speakers in two weeks. K Street must be shaking in their boots. Mitch McConnell must be shaking in his boots, too," said Rep. Tim Huelskamp of Kansas, naming the Republican majority leader of the Senate.

One immediate impact, however, might be to prolong Boehner's tenure. The Ohio Republican, who had intended to leave Oct. 30, said he would stay on "until the House



McCarthy

received, I will not be a candidate," said Rep. Paul Ryan of Wisconsin, the former vice presidential nominee who now chairs the Ways and Means Committee. But Ryan was under intense pressure to reconsider, including from Boehner and McCarthy himself.

"I would hope he would" run, McCarthy said of Ryan.

Establishment-minded Republicans expressed bitter frustration at the sway of the Freedom Caucus at a time when Republicans command their largest House majority in 80

years. And stark uncertainty lies ahead as lawmakers question how any candidate backed by mainstream Republicans will be able to prevail in the House.

It all comes with Congress in desperate need of steady leadership as major fiscal and budgetary deadlines loom, starting with the need to raise the government's debt limit to avoid a market-shattering default in a month's time.

"This is unprecedented to have a small group, a tiny minority, hijack the party and blackmail the House," said Rep. Peter King of New York. McCarthy might have been able to eke out a win, but he said that's not how he wanted to become speaker. It's now unknown when the House GOP election will occur, and in doubt as to whether a scheduled Oct. 29 floor vote by both Democrats and Republicans will go forward.

McCarthy's two announced GOP rivals for speaker — Reps. Jason

Chaffetz of Utah and Daniel Webster of Florida — lack widespread support in the House GOP, although Webster has the backing of the Freedom Caucus, whose members dismissed McCarthy as a clone of Boehner.

Numerous other names began to surface of possible candidates, and lawmakers were openly discussing the possibility of elevating a "caretaker" speaker to serve for a short time.

"You understand it could be a quick end to your political career," remarked Rep. Lynn Westmoreland, R-Ga., one of those discussed. He held up his cellphone to show calls coming in from McCarthy.

The Republicans' noontime meeting was adjourned moments after it began with McCarthy making his jaw-dropping announcement as his wife and kids looked on.

EU Agrees On Measures To Deport

LUXEMBOURG (AP) — The European Union on Thursday took measures to buttress its porous external borders and toughen up its migrant return program in an attempt to build a credible refugee policy that would continue to embrace those fleeing for their lives yet punish those seeking economic gain.

Facing their toughest refugee emergency since World War II, the 28 EU nations committed to speed up and intensify the deportation of people who do not qualify for asylum, including more special flights out and detention for those who might slip into illegal residence.

It all was to underscore one key message: Europe feels overwhelmed and needs to be far more rigorous in sending economic migrants back if it wants to find enough goodwill among its population to continue harboring true refugees.

"Increased return rates should act as a deterrent to irregular migration," the conclusions of the meeting said.

More than 500,000 people have arrived this year seeking sanctuary or jobs. But of the people who fail to obtain asylum or residency in the 28-nation EU, less than 40 percent actually go back, and all agree that should change quickly.

New Tally In Saudi Hajj Disaster

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — The crush and stampede last month outside of Saudi Arabia's holy city of Mecca killed at least 1,399 people during the hajj pilgrimage, a new tally Thursday showed, 630 more than the kingdom's official toll.

The Associated Press count of the dead from the worst tragedy to strike the hajj in a quarter-century comes as Saudi Arabia faces threats ranging from an Islamic State insurgency, a war in Yemen against Shiite rebels and weakening global oil prices gnawing away at its reserves.

Any disaster at the hajj, a pillar of Islamic faith, could be seen as a blow to the kingdom's cherished stewardship of Islam's holiest sites. This season saw two, including the Sept. 11 collapse of a crane at Mecca's Grand Mosque that killed 111 people.

Saudi Arabia has been hesitant to release updated casualty figures from the Sept. 24 stampede in Mina, even as hundreds remain missing.

"Discrediting the Saudi handling of the hajj undermines the kingdom's prestige and legitimacy across the Islamic world," Bruce Riedel, a former CIA officer who now runs the Washington-based Brookings Institution's intelligence project, wrote on one of the think tank's blogs this week.

Crimes In Study Programs Gain Attention

MONTPELIER, Vt. (AP) — As colleges wrestle with how to address sexual assault, a legal challenge involving a small Vermont institution brings an obscure part of the equation to the fore: how to report, investigate and punish sexual assaults that happen in overseas-study programs.

Statistics on such assaults are scant, although no one disputes they occur. The federal requirements for schools to report and investigate sexual assaults overseas can be murky. And since perpetrators and victims can be from different schools or studying through programs run by other institutions, colleges' options on punishing students internally can be tricky.

Responding to critics' arguments that campus sexual assaults are underreported, state governments and even Congress are beginning to take steps to better monitor those crimes, and are specifically including overseas study programs.

"These are real things that colleges and universities are thinking about," said Joseph Storch, associate counsel for the State University of New York system, who regularly travels the country to discuss the legal questions around study-abroad programs. "There are no simple answers."

Middlebury College, a private, 2,500-student liberal arts college at the foothills of the Green Mountains, found out the hard way that punishing a student accused of sexual assault is easier said than done.

Obama To Visit Site Of Campus Shooting

ROSEBURG, Ore. (AP) — When President Barack Obama arrives here Friday, he will find a timber town still in mourning over the shooting that killed eight community college students and a teacher. But he will also find another deeply held emotion — seething anger over his calls for new gun restrictions.

Only a week after a gunman strode into a writing class and opened fire on classmates, many people in the region known as Oregon's Bible Belt are quick to reaffirm their opposition to stricter gun laws. At least one parent of a shooting survivor says his family will not meet with the president, although his daughter said she hopes to do so. And gun-rights supporters plan to protest during Obama's visit.

"He's not wanted here. He's coming here purely to push his garbage, and we don't want it," said Michelle Finn, who is helping to organize the protests planned for intersections near the small airport where Obama's helicopter is expected to touch down.

Staunchly conservative Douglas County is bristling with gun owners who use their weapons for hunting, target shooting and protecting themselves. A commonly held opinion in this area is that the solution to mass killings is more people carrying guns, not fewer.

A single unarmed security guard was on patrol the day of the shooting. For months prior to the attack, faculty and staff had debated whether to arm campus security officers, but they could not overcome their divisions on the issue.

A Rush To Preserve Drinking Water In SC

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — South Carolina's capital city had too much water. Now, officials are racing to make sure it has enough.

A canal that serves as the main source of drinking water for about half of the Columbia water system's 375,000 customers collapsed in two places following historic rainfall and flooding over the weekend, sending contractors scrambling to build a rock dam to plug the holes while National Guard helicopters dropped giant sandbags in the rushing water.

Water from the canal normally flows directly into the reservoir at the city's water treatment plant. But with the water level falling because of the levee breach, workers were forced to place orange pumps on the banks of the canal to pump water directly into the reservoir. And if that wasn't enough, the city had plans to pump water directly from the nearby Broad River.



TASS/ZUMA PRESS/TNS

Pictured in this video screen grab are Russian Navy Caspian Flotilla ships that took part in air strikes against remote Islamic State targets in Syria, a thousand kilometres away, on Oct. 7. The targets included ammunition factories, ammunition and fuel depots, command centres and training camps.

Clashes Intensify In Syria From Russian-Backed Offensive

BY ALBERT AJI
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Associated Press

DAMASCUS, Syria — Clashes intensified Thursday between Syrian troops and insurgents in central and northwestern Syria, part of what a top general called a "wide-ranging" offensive aided by Russian airstrikes and apparently aimed at clearing positions near government strongholds on the coast.

U.S. defense officials said as many as four of the 26 long-range cruise missiles that Russia said Wednesday it fired at Syria landed instead in Iran, but it was unclear if they caused any significant damage. Russia said all of its missiles fired from warships hit their targets.

Russia's involvement in Syria, which began with airstrikes Sept. 30 and escalated Wednesday with cruise missiles, "raises serious concerns," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said after a meeting of the alliance's defense ministers in Brussels.

Russia says its air campaign in Syria is aimed against militants of the Islamic State and al-Qaida-linked groups, but the West accuses it of intervening to support President Bashar against even moderate

rebels in the civil war.

The Syrian government's multipronged offensive began Wednesday, and state-run media said it seized several villages in central Syria, with fighting continuing Thursday. The government media and activists reported heavy fighting in Sahl al-Ghab, a vital plain bordering Assad's stronghold of Latakia on the Mediterranean.

The plain also lies between Hama and Idlib, the northwestern provinces seized from government troops in September. Insurgents have been advancing there since summer, threatening the coastal region where Assad's family and the Alawite minority, an offshoot of Shiite Islam, are concentrated.

The Islamic State — also known as ISIS, ISIL or Daesh — has strongholds in Raqqa and Aleppo provinces, while Syria's al-Qaida affiliate, the Nusra Front, has a strong presence in Idlib.

Gen. Ali Ayoub, the Syrian army's chief of staff, said Russia's airstrikes had weakened the Islamic State fighters and other insurgents so that his troops could keep up the initiative.

"Today, the Syrian Arab armed forces began a wide-ranging attack with the aim of eliminating the terrorist groups and liberating the

areas and towns that suffered from their scourge and crimes," Ayoub said in rare televised remarks. The government uses the term "terrorists" to refer to all armed opposition groups in Syria.

Russia said its warplanes flew 22 sorties and carried out 11 airstrikes on IS training facilities in Hama and Raqqa provinces.

The Russian Defense Ministry also said its aircraft destroyed firing positions in rural Hama, where fighting has raged, and struck militants' underground facilities in rural Latakia with concrete-piercing bombs.

Syrian TV showed government troops loading and firing artillery as helicopters flew over rural Hama and Idlib. It also showed tanks and airstrikes. The state-run SANA news agency said joint Syrian-Russian airstrikes hit 27 targets belonging to Nusra Front.

Heavy fighting was concentrated in the rural parts of Idlib, Hama and Latakia provinces — areas of operation for an array of insurgent groups that includes the Nusra Front. The Western-backed Free Syrian Army also has a presence in the area, while the Islamic State has a limited presence in western Hama, where activists reported no fighting or airstrikes.

YSD

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High School Principal Dr. Jennifer Johnke and Beadle Elementary Principal Carey Mitzel presented YSD's successes with this particular goal in the past year. These included incorporating new classes mechanical drafting, cabinetry, mechanics, digital media and other technology based skills.

"Those offerings are helping our students start those careers in various areas of CTE," Johnke said.

The second short-term goal is to expand integration of technology as a teaching and learning tool in grades K-12.

Middle School principal Todd Dvoracek and Stewart Elementary principal Jerome Klimisch shared several improvements and added resources the district has incorporated. Some highlights include using iPads to promote healthy speech therapy. Students are able to read a line of text while the iPad records their speech and indicates how effective the pronunciation is.

And students aren't the only ones benefiting from the new technology.

"Our goal is to get technology in the hands of teachers," Klimisch said. "We want to make sure we have the most powerful computers possible."

The third and final short-term goals are to improve and expand communication and relationship-building efforts between the school district and community members.

Webster Elementary principal Melanie Ryken and Lincoln elementary principal Paul Struck spoke about increasing communication both in and out of the buildings, and inviting community members and school district staff to venture into each other's environments.

The district has a "Connect 5" system that allows e-mail and text messages to be sent to a select contact list to inform recipients on anything from school cancellations to parent meeting reminders.

"It is amazing," Ryken said. "If we have early dismissals, nobody is left at school late anymore. Everybody knows about it."

Kindle wrapped up the evening by addressing the five-year strategic plan's long-term goals that are set to be accomplished within the next 3-5 years. They

include:

- Obtaining adequate funding sources.
- Achieving curriculum balance between academics, fine arts and athletics.
- Examining class size, grade levels, facility capacity and student educational needs to inflict changes when appropriate.

The majority of these goals will be incorporated into the district's comprehensive facilities study.

"We want to have good and safe facilities for our students and staff," Kindle said. "We are really looking forward to looking at what comes out of that study."

YSD's five-year strategic plan, despite being in the early stages, has produced significant growth within the schools, officials said. They see that progress continuing and eventually achieving an overall goal of providing the best possible learning experience for students.

"Enhancing curriculum offerings in ongoing," Kindle said. "It is something that we are going to continue to see grant funding for, analyze our staffing needs and provide a first-class educational opportunity for our students."

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US Airman Who Thwarted French Train Attack Stabbed In Brawl

BY DON THOMPSON
AND JULIE WATSON
Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Airman 1st Class Spencer Stone, celebrated as a hero for helping to stop a terror attack on a French train over the summer, was stabbed and seriously wounded outside a bar in his hometown early Thursday in what police said was an alcohol-related brawl.

Stone, 23, was knifed three times in the upper body but was expected to survive after about two hours of surgery, said Dr. J. Douglas Kirk, chief medical officer at UC Davis Medical Center.

"This incident is not related to terrorism in any way," Deputy Police Chief Ken Bernard said. "We know it's not related to what occurred in France months ago."

A grainy surveillance video from a camera outside a liquor store showed a man who appeared to be Stone fighting with several people at an intersection. The group spilled into the street as people took swings at each other, and one person got knocked down.

Police said two assailants fled in a car. No immediate arrests were made.

Bernard said Stone was out with four friends when they got into a fight with another group of people. The deputy chief would not say what sparked the argument. He said there was no evidence the assailants knew who Stone was.

Bernard said he did not know whether Stone was drinking, but others in his group were.

Kirk said Stone remained heavily sedated in the hospital's intensive care unit. He declined to discuss any details about the surgery or whether any vital organs were damaged in the stabbing, beyond saying Stone had "significant injuries."

The airman arrived at the nearby hospital conscious despite his wounds, the doctor said.

"I suspect given his history of recent events he is quite a fighter," Kirk said. He said Stone's family asked him to convey "their deepest gratitude for all the expressions of concern for his welfare at this very difficult time for them."

In August, Stone and two of his childhood friends from Sacramento, National Guardsman Alek Skarlatos and college student Anthony Sadler, were vacationing in Europe when they sprang into action aboard a Paris-bound passenger train and tackled Ayoub El-Khazzani, a man with ties to radical Islam. He had boarded the train with a Kalashnikov rifle, a pistol and a box cutter.

Stone, who is assigned to Travis Air Force Base in California, suffered a severely cut thumb and a knife wound to his neck during the struggle with the gunman.

President Barack Obama met with the three Americans last month, praising them for their quick thinking and courage and calling them "the very best of America." They were also awarded France's highest honor by President Francois Hollande. The three appeared on late-night talk shows and received a parade in their hometown.

Stone is the second of the three Americans to be shaken by violence at home since their return.

Last week, Skarlatos left rehearsals for TV's "Dancing With the Stars" to rush back to his hometown of Roseburg, Oregon, after a gunman killed nine people at the community college that Skarlatos attends.