

Departing Boehner's Gift To Successor Ryan

WASHINGTON (AP) — Striving to end a cycle of crisis, congressional leaders and the White House united Tuesday behind an ambitious budget and debt deal aimed at restoring a semblance of order to Capitol Hill and ending the threat of government shutdowns and defaults until well after a new president takes office.

The outgoing House speaker, Republican John Boehner of Ohio, prepared to push the deal through his unruly chamber on Wednesday as his last act before departing Congress at the end of the week.

All but forced to resign under conservative pressure, Boehner was nonetheless going out on his own terms. The budget deal stands as an in-your-face rebuttal to his headline antagonists, on Capitol Hill and off, who angrily oppose spending increases and compromises with Democratic President Barack Obama.

They seethed but acknowledged they were powerless to stop an agreement all but certain to pass with votes from Democrats and a sizable number of Republicans. Boehner brushed off their complaints, declaring that he intended to make good on his promise to leave a "clean barn" for his successor, Paul Ryan of Wisconsin, who is set to get the GOP nomination for speaker on Wednesday and win election on the House floor the day after that.

"I didn't want him to walk into a dirty barn full of you-know-what. So I've done my best to try to clean it up," a good-humored Boehner told reporters after a closed-door gathering of House Republicans, his last such weekly meeting after nearly five years as speaker and a quarter-century on Capitol Hill.

Iran Invited To Participate In Syria Talks

WASHINGTON (AP) — Iran has been invited to participate for the first time in international talks over Syria's future, U.S. officials said Tuesday, a shift in strategy for the United States and its allies as they seek to halt the four-year civil war and eventually ease President Bashar Assad out of power.

Iran has yet to reply, the officials said. The next diplomatic round is expected to start Thursday and continue Friday in Vienna, with Secretary of State John Kerry, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and several top European and Arab diplomats attending.

Washington had held out the possibility of Iran joining the discussions in future, but is only now offering Tehran a seat after days of behind-the-scenes negotiation, particularly with its regional rival Saudi Arabia. Russia extended the invitation.

The United States is taking a gamble. Iran has backed Assad's government throughout the conflict, fighting alongside the Syrian military, and is seen by Western-backed rebels and U.S. partners in the region as a major source of the bloodshed. The Syrian opposition may balk at Iran's inclusion in any discussions on what a post-Assad Syria should look like.

Russia Pounds Syrian Rebel Bases

BEIRUT (AP) — When Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said his country was ready to aid Syrian rebels fighting the Islamic State group, rebel commanders scoffed, pointing out that Russian aircraft were pounding their bases in central and northern Syria on a daily basis.

Moreover, Lavrov not long ago had ridiculed the main Western-backed rebels known as the Free Syrian Army, calling the group a "phantom structure."

But some in the Syrian opposition are wondering whether the Russian offer, for all its ambiguity, might be worth seizing in order to test Moscow's commitment to finding a negotiated solution to the four-year civil war. The seeming change of tune is in sharp contrast to the stance of Syrian President Bashar Assad, who considers all rebels on the ground to be terrorists.

"Maybe there is a disconnect between the regime's discourse and that of the Russians," said Munzer Abkik, of the Syrian National Coalition, an opposition group in exile that coordinates with the Free Syrian Army.

"We are watching cautiously in the coming days to see if they are serious about finding a political solution through a real transition of power, or if they are simply maneuvering to gain time," he said. "The rebel commanders are considering this possibility ... If they sit with (Russian officials), they say they can find out if they are bluffing."

Carson Won't Back Off Nazi, Slavery Talk

COCONUT CREEK, Fla. (AP) — On the eve of his party's third debate, Republican presidential candidate Ben Carson promised not to curb his penchant for using extreme examples to prove his points, such as equating abortion with slavery and comparing Islamic State fighters to patriots of the American Revolution.

"I don't buy the PC stuff. I just don't buy it," Carson said in a Tuesday interview with The Associated Press. He said the country can discuss complicated issues as adults, and he suggested people could learn from his example.

"One of my goals is to get us to mature as a society," he said. "We should be mature enough to be able to talk about things without going into a tizzy."

To date, Carson's style has not affected his climb through the GOP's ranks to challenge Donald Trump as a front-runner for the Republican nomination. Indeed, many conservatives embrace the unvarnished approach of the retired neurosurgeon who has never before run for office.

Yet Carson's own advisers worry the rhetorical grenades may complicate his ability to go far in the competitive and still unsettled Republican field.

US Retooling Fight Against IS

WASHINGTON (AP) — Signaling a possible escalation of U.S. military action in the Middle East, Defense Secretary Ash Carter said Tuesday that the United States is retooling its strategy in Iraq and Syria and would conduct unilateral ground raids if needed to target Islamic State militants.

The U.S. has done special operations raids in Syria and participated in a ground operation to rescue hostages last week in northern Iraq that resulted in the first U.S. combat death in Iraq since 2011. Carter did not say under what circumstances the U.S. might conduct more ground action, but said, "Once we locate them, no target is beyond our reach."

"We won't hold back from supporting capable partners in opportunistic attacks against ISIL, or conducting such missions directly, whether by strikes from the air or direct action on the ground," Carter said, using an acronym for the militant group.

Carter and Marine Gen. Joseph Dunford, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee. Republicans harshly criticized the Obama administration's strategy in Syria and Iraq, where IS militants have captured large swaths of territory and have largely fought the U.S.-led coalition to a stalemate.

With little recent progress in defeating the militant group, the defense secretary's testimony outlined a changing U.S. approach to the fight against IS. The changes point toward the prospect of deeper U.S. military involvement, although President Barack Obama has said he would not authorize a major commitment of ground combat forces.

China Warns Navy After Ship Sails By Island

BEIJING (AP) — A U.S. Navy warship sailed past one of China's artificial islands in the South China Sea on Tuesday, in a challenge to Chinese sovereignty claims that drew an angry protest from Beijing, which said the move damaged U.S.-China relations and regional peace.

China's Foreign Ministry said authorities monitored and warned the USS Lassen as it entered what China claims as a 12-mile (21-kilometer) territorial limit around Subi Reef in the Spratly Islands archipelago, a group of reefs, islets and atolls where the Philippines has competing claims.

"The actions of the U.S. warship have threatened China's sovereignty and security interests, jeopardized the safety of personnel and facilities on the reefs, and damaged regional peace and stability," the ministry said on its website.

"The Chinese side expresses its strong dissatisfaction and resolute opposition," the statement said.

Obama To Police Chiefs: US Safer Because Of Your Efforts

BY DARLENE SUPERVILLE
Associated Press

CHICAGO — Defending police officers who have come under scrutiny like never before, President Barack Obama on Tuesday said the men and women who risk their lives to provide security are wrongly "scapegoated" for failing to deal with broader problems that lead people to commit crimes.

Unemployment, poor education, inadequate drug treatment and lax gun laws are not the responsibility of police officers, Obama said in remarks to the International Association of Chief of Police, which held its annual meeting in the president's Chicago hometown.

He blamed the news media's tendency "to focus on the sensational" for helping to drive a wedge between police officers and a public they take an oath to protect and serve. He called for rebuilding the trust that once existed between them.

Obama delivered his speech amid a roiling national debate about officers' treatment of potential criminal suspects following the deaths of unarmed black men in New York, Missouri and elsewhere by police.

"Too often, law enforcement gets scapegoated for the broader failures of our society and criminal justice system," the president said. "I know that you do your jobs with distinction no matter the challenges you face. That's part of wearing a badge."

"But we can't expect you to contain and control problems that the rest of us aren't willing to face or do anything about," he said.

Obama also sought to avoid making the debate about police against communities.

"I reject any narrative that seeks to divide police and the communities that they serve — I reject the story line



ANTONIO PEREZ/CHICAGO TRIBUNE/TNS
President Barack Obama speaks to the International Association of Chiefs of Police at the 122nd Annual IACP Conference and Exposition in Chicago on Tuesday. The event is the largest gathering of law enforcement leaders in the world, with more than 14,000 public safety professionals and 700 exhibiting companies.

that says, when it comes to public safety, there's an 'us' and 'them,'" Obama said. He said it's a "narrative that too often gets served up to us by news stations seeking ratings, or tweets seeking retweets, or political candidates seeking some attention."

Obama opened his remarks with a tribute to slain New York City police officer Randolph Holder as hundreds of officers streamed into his wake. Holder, 33, died last week after being shot in the head by a man he and his partner were chasing. The officers had responded to a call of shots fired and a bicycle stolen at gunpoint. A suspect is in custody on charges of murder and robbery in Holder's killing.

Obama praised the Guyana native as emblematic of many U.S. police officers who put their lives on the line every day.

Before the speech, Obama met with the families of law

enforcement officers who were killed on the job, according to the White House. He also met with relatives of victims of Chicago gun violence. Chicago, like some other major U.S. cities, is grappling with an alarming spike in violent crime.

Obama argued for fairer sentencing laws as part of his push for a more effective criminal justice system. He said that while he has no sympathy for violent offenders, America every year wastes billions of dollars that could be better spent to keep non-violent offenders behind bars.

Following this month's deadly shooting at an Oregon community college, Obama also used to appearance to push for new steps to reduce gun violence, such as requiring national background checks for every firearms purchase. The police chiefs' association supports such checks.

"Fewer gun safety laws

don't mean more freedom, they mean more danger, certainly, more danger to the police, more fallen officers," Obama said. "More grieving families, more Americans terrified that they or their loved ones could be next."

Anthony Campos, the chief of police in Newark, New Jersey, said he found the president's comments "very comforting because at the end of the day he gets it, he understands our job." Obama plans to visit Newark on Monday to highlight programs for formerly incarcerated people.

Campos added that the president's comments about building trust between police and communities validated what has been done in New Jersey's largest city.

"We have been spared a lot of what we are seeing in the rest of the nation because of the relationship we have with the community," Campos said of his department.

Arrest Of Girl Who Texted In Class Prompts Civil Rights Case

BY MEG KINNARD
Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. — A girl who refused to surrender her phone after texting in math class was flipped backward and tossed across the classroom floor by a sheriff's deputy, prompting a federal civil rights probe on Tuesday.

The sheriff said the girl "may have had a rug burn" but was not injured, and said the teacher and vice principal felt the officer acted appropriately. Still, videos of the confrontation between a white officer and black girl stirred such outrage that he called the FBI and Justice Department for help.

Richland County Sheriff Leon Lott suspended Senior Deputy Ben Fields without pay, and said what he did at Spring Valley High School in Columbia made him want

to "throw up."

"Literally, it just makes you sick to your stomach when you see that initial video. But again, that's a snapshot," he said.

Videos taken by students and posted online show Fields warning the girl to leave her seat or be forcibly removed on Monday. The officer then wraps a forearm around her neck, flips her and the desk backward onto the floor, tosses her toward the front of the classroom and handcuffs her.

Lott pointed out at a news conference that the girl can also be seen trying to strike the officer as she was being taken down, but said he's focused on the deputy's actions as he decides within 24 hours whether Fields should remain on the force.

"I think sometimes our officers are

put in uncomfortable positions when a teacher can't control a student," the sheriff said, promising to be fair.

Email, phone and text messages for Fields were not returned.

The deputy also arrested a second student who verbally objected to his actions. Both girls were charged with disturbing schools and released to their parents. Their names were not officially released.

The second student, Niya Kenny, told WLTX-TV that she felt she had to say something. Doris Kenny said she's proud her daughter was "brave enough to speak out against what was going on."

Appearing on MSNBC Tuesday night, Niya Kenny said an administrator told her to sit down, be quiet and to put her cellphone away. She refused.

"This is not right. This is not right," Kenny recalled saying in the classroom.

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