

## NATION/WORLD DIGEST

## More Dems Balk On Tax Plan

WASHINGTON (AP) — More Democrats joined Republicans on Wednesday in calling for the preservation of tax breaks for Americans of every income level, bolting this election season from President Barack Obama's plan to preserve cuts for those who earn less than \$200,000 and let taxes for the wealthy rise.

"We should not be raising taxes in the middle of a recession," Rep. Jim Marshall, D-Ga., who's facing tough odds in his bid for a fourth term, wrote in a terse letter to House Speaker Nancy Pelosi.

"It is essential that we keep things as they are in the short term," said Rep. Travis W. Childers, D-Miss., another conservative incumbent in a tight race, whose district, like Marshall's, voted for Republican John McCain in the 2008 presidential race.

For this pair, one press release announcing their opposition to Obama's plan was not enough. They and other jittery moderate Democrats have signed a letter being circulated by Utah Rep. Jim Matheson urging Pelosi, D-Calif., and other House leaders to abandon the Obama plan and extend to everyone the Bush-era tax cuts due to expire at the end of the year.

House and Senate leaders aren't saying which plan they'll propose, or whether they'll even bother with the debate in the charged political atmosphere leading up to the Nov. 2 midterm elections. All 435 House seats, 37 in the Senate and the Democratic majorities in both houses are on the line.

## Investigators Probe Shut-Down Delay

SAN BRUNO, Calif. (AP) — Federal investigators are examining whether Pacific Gas & Electric workers followed proper emergency procedures after a gas transmission line exploded into an inferno that killed at least four people and destroyed nearly 40 homes in a San Francisco suburb.

National Transportation Safety Board vice chairman Christopher Hart said that constructing a timeline of how PG&E crews reacted would be important to determining why it took the utility nearly two hours to turn off the gas that fueled last week's devastating blaze.

"We will be looking at how quickly and effectively they responded, and that's one of the reasons the timeline is so important to us," Hart said.

The utility has said the pipeline, built in 1956, had to be shut down manually because it was not equipped with automatic shut-off valves that newer lines have. At a Monday night town hall meeting, PG&E vice president Geisha Williams told residents there was a delay in stopping the flow of gas to the San Bruno neighborhood because it wasn't safe for workers to get near the explosion site.

Hart said Tuesday that the two shut-off valves for the ruptured section of pipe were located one and 1/2 miles away from the blast.

## Peace Talks Round Ends With No Deal

JERUSALEM (AP) — A mortar attack by Palestinian militants and airstrikes by Israel formed the grim backdrop as Mideast leaders ended their latest round of peace talks Wednesday, still divided on major issues. There was no word on when they would meet again.

The inconclusive U.S.-brokered talks between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas left in doubt the prospects for their new effort to end generations of hostilities in the region and create a sovereign Palestine alongside a secure Israel.

George Mitchell, the U.S. envoy for Mideast peace efforts, emerged from an evening session to say the talks had been encouraging but had fallen short of agreement.

"A serious and substantive discussion is well under way," Mitchell told a news conference.

Abbas and Netanyahu met with U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton for about two hours at the Israeli leader's official residence here and agreed to continue the search for a peace deal, he said.

## Brain Syndrome Causes Accent

LONDON (AP) — A woman from a village in southwestern England says that a severe migraine attack left her speaking with what sounds like a French accent — a striking example of a rare syndrome that neuroscientists say can leave lifelong locals sounding like they come from thousands of miles away.

Kay Russell appeared on the BBC earlier this week, speaking in a hesitant, husky voice, drawing out her vowels with an accent which sounded roughly French, or occasionally Eastern European. The broadcaster also showed a video of Russell before the change, in which she speaks to the camera in chirpy southern English accent.

Russell shook her head and smiled sadly as the video played.

"When I see that, I see the person I used to be," the 49-year-old said. "It's not my voice I miss. I would love to have my own voice back, but it goes way, way, way beyond my voice."

It wasn't exactly clear what happened to Russell in January when the migraine attack struck — a number for her could not be located and there was no immediate response to an attempt to reach her through her previous employer. The BBC identified her condition as Foreign Accent Syndrome, known only in a few dozen cases across the world.

## 1,500-Lb. Camel Dug Out Of Sinkhole

OREGON CITY, Ore. (AP) — It was an unusual call for Oregon firefighters: A 1,500-pound camel, named Moses, needed to be rescued. The call came in Tuesday night in Clackamas County after the Oregon City owners of the camel called firefighters to say that Moses had fallen into a sinkhole 6 to 8 feet deep and was possibly injured. The owners — who have several camels and run a children's ministry — had tried to get the camel out themselves but failed.

Firefighters had to carefully shovel mud for several hours to free the animal. The rescuers were concerned Moses would break his legs if he'd try to free himself while still partially buried.

But Moses was patient, and eventually firefighters got him out. Moses lay on his side for an hour resting after the rescue. A veterinarian said the animal looked unhurt.

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## Poll: Climate For GOP Keeps Improving

BY LIZ SIDOTI

AP National Political Writer

WASHINGTON — Tilted toward the GOP from the start of the year, the political environment has grown even more favorable for Republicans and rockier for President Barack Obama and his Democrats over the long primary season that just ended with a bang.

With November's matchups set and the general election campaign beginning in earnest Wednesday, an Associated Press-GfK poll found that more Americans say the country is headed in the wrong direction than did before the nomination contests got under way in February. Also, more now disapprove of the job Obama is doing. And more now want to see Republicans in control of Congress rather than the Democrats who now run the House and Senate.

The country's pessimism benefits the out-of-power GOP, which clearly has enthusiasm on its side. Far more people voted this year in Republican primaries than in Democratic contests, and the anti-establishment tea party coalition has energized the GOP even as it has sprung a series of primary surprises.

"We're definitely in a stronger position than we've been in really at any point this year," Sen. John Cornyn, who leads the effort to

elect Senate Republicans, said in an interview.

Said Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell: "Turnout and enthusiasm are off the charts."

Indeed, Republicans expected turnout of 30,000 to 40,000 in Delaware on Tuesday. Some 57,582 people showed up to vote as tea party-backed Christine O'Donnell upset moderate Rep. Mike Castle for the Senate GOP nomination. By most accounts, the outcome diminished Republican chances of winning former Vice President Joe Biden's seat. But Republicans got their preferred candidate in New Hampshire as former state Attorney General Kelly Ayotte fended off tea party-supported Ovide Lamontagne by a razor-thin margin.

Fueling voter anger is an unemployment rate that's hovered near 10 percent all year despite efforts by Obama and fellow Democrats to accelerate the economic recovery.

"I'm going to do everything in my power to make sure that they're out of office," said independent voter Robbin Payton of Newport News, Va., reflecting just how toxic the environment is for the party in power.

Overall, it's an extraordinarily dreary backdrop for Obama's beleaguered party. And with just seven weeks until Election Day, Democrats are running out of options to mitigate widespread

expected losses of House, Senate and governor's seats from coast to coast on Nov. 2.

"The reality is if you take the 30,000-foot view, it doesn't probably look that inviting," Sen. Robert Menendez of New Jersey, who leads the committee charged with electing Senate Democrats, said in an interview. "If you take the state-by-state view ... it's far more beneficial to us" because in places like Delaware "Republicans have chosen extremists to be their nominees."

In the House, Speaker Nancy Pelosi predicted that the Democrats would keep control. But, underscoring the woes facing Democrats, she stopped short of the kind of confidence she's shown in past campaigns when her party had a political tail wind.

"I am not yielding one grain of sand. I want to have the same big, strong majority that we have," said Pelosi, D-Calif.

As Illinois kicked off the primary season Feb. 2, there was little talk even among Republicans that power in the House was in reach, much less in the Senate. But the national landscape has only worsened for Democrats.

Back then: — The unemployment rate was 9.7 percent; it's 9.6 now.

— Half of the country said in January that the country was on

the wrong track; 57 percent say that now in the new AP-GfK poll.

— About 42 percent of the country disapproved of Obama's job performance; half does now.

— Democrats had a 49 percent to 37 percent advantage over Republicans on the party that voters want to see control Congress; the GOP now enjoys a 55-39 lead among likely voters.

Republicans have steadily gained ground on economic issues and now have a slight advantage on handling the economy, the federal deficit and taxes. They improved their standing in the past month even as Obama stepped up his efforts to persuade the public to give Democratic solutions more time to work.

At the same time, 40 percent of likely voters call themselves tea party supporters, and most of them lean toward Republicans while nearly two-thirds have a deeply negative impression of Democrats. That means the GOP could be in strong shape on Nov. 2 if tea party backers turn out and vote Republican. That's what they've been doing so far this year: The grass-roots, antiestablishment movement can claim wins in at least seven GOP Senate races, a handful of Republican gubernatorial contests and dozens of House primary campaigns.

## Iran Accused Of Intimidating Nuke Inspectors

BY GEORGE JAHN

Associated Press Writer

VIENNA — A U.S. envoy accused Iran on Wednesday of intimidating U.N. nuclear inspectors in an effort to influence their findings — a move he said may lead to "appropriate action," from the International Atomic Energy Agency.

Britain, France and Germany also criticized Iran for its decision to ban several inspectors in a toughly worded statement also critical of Tehran for ignoring U.N. Security Council demands to stop nuclear activities that could be used to make weapons.

"Iran is pursuing ... programs which have no credible peaceful purposes," said the statement to the IAEA's 35-nation board, delivered by French chief delegate Florence Mangin. "The only conclusion we can draw from this is that Iran remains determined to pursue a nuclear program which could provide it with military capabilities."

In warning of "appropriate action," Glyn Davies, the chief U.S. delegate to

the nuclear agency, did not go into details in comments to the board. But he referred to the phrase as part of the authority given the board if the agency's inspectors are hampered in carrying out their duties by the nation under inspection.

If the country is found to have violated commitments on how and what the International Atomic Energy Agency is allowed to inspect, the board could then formally report the breach to the U.N. Security Council in a resolution — a move that would add to international pressure on the Islamic Republic over its nuclear activities.

Iran is under four sets of Security Council sanctions for refusing to stop uranium enrichment and ignoring other demands meant to ease international concern that it seeks to make nuclear weapons.

Enrichment can make both nuclear fuel and the fissile warhead material. Iran, which kept its enrichment activities under wraps until they were revealed eight years ago, says it is enriching only to fuel a

future network of nuclear reactors.

While initially offering partial cooperation with an International Atomic Energy Agency probe three years ago of intelligence reports that it had conducted secret experiments meant to help it develop nuclear arms, Iran subsequently fended off questions and inspections, saying all queries had been laid to rest.

In comments inside the closed meeting made available to reporters, IAEA chief Yukiya Amano fended off Iranian accusations that the intelligence was forged.

"It is broadly consistent and credible in terms of technical and other details," he said. "This is why we are concerned."

The dispute over the inspectors arose from Iran's decision to bar two International Atomic Energy Agency experts several months ago after they reported that the country was experimenting with pyroprocessing, a procedure that can be used to purify uranium metal used in nuclear warheads.

Iran says the inspectors misreported what they saw and notes that every nation has the right to approve inspectors put forward by the agency.

But Davies told the board meeting that barring inspectors because "they report accurately ... is unprecedented."

Iran's ban is a "clear effort to intimidate inspectors and thereby influence the conclusions" they make, he said.

A European Union statement to the board also expressed "serious concern" about the ban, saying it "hampers the safeguards process in Iran."

Diplomats inside the closed meeting said Iranian envoy Ali Asghar Soltanieh Amano for complaining about Tehran's decision to bar the two. But Amano stood firm, declaring: "I request Iran not to designate any more inspectors with experience" inside the country. Amano had warned at the board's opening session Monday that the bans hampered his watchdog agency's attempts to monitor Iran's nuclear program. Amano on Monday also urged Iran to withdraw its 2007 ban on 38 inspectors, announced in apparent retaliation for the imposition of U.N. sanctions because of the Islamic Republic's refusal to freeze enrichment, which can produce both nuclear fuel and the fissile warhead material.

## Trouble At National Cemetery

BY PAULINE JELINEK

Associated Press Writer

WASHINGTON — Three people were buried in the wrong graves at Arlington National Cemetery, the Army said Wednesday as it followed up an investigation into bookkeeping problems and burial mix-ups at one of the nation's most hallowed sites.

After a report issued in June found that the problems could potentially affect thousands of graves, defense officials received about 1,100 calls from worried families.

One of those callers, the widow of an Army staff sergeant, led to the exhumation of three graves late last month. The three remains in those graves, all former members of the armed forces, were found to be in the wrong place, said Gary Tallman, an Army spokesman.

"The families are satisfied that the problem was fixed," Tallman said Wednesday.

A fourth grave was opened Wednesday in a different section of Arlington. At the request of his father, the grave and casket of Marine Pfc. Heath Warner of Canton, Ohio, were opened. The site was found to hold the remains of Warner, who was killed in Iraq in 2006, Tallman said.

"We're gratified that the outcome was positive and they were able to gain some closure," Tallman said of Warner's family members.

Tallman said he was not aware of any other requests for exhumation.

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