

Romney Says Obama Sending 'Mixed Signals'

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (AP) — Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney accused President Barack Obama's administration of standing in apology for American values when it should have been voicing outrage, as he looked for political advantage in the deadly protests that caused a breach of the U.S. Embassy in Egypt and left four Americans dead in Libya.

The GOP nominee offered no regret for criticizing the president in the midst of an unfolding international crisis.

"It's never too early to condemn attacks on Americans and to defend our values," Romney said in a hastily called news conference at a campaign office in a Jacksonville strip mall.

Romney condemned the violent protests and expressed condolences to the families of those slain in Libya, including the U.S. ambassador there. He said that instead of speaking out forcefully against the initial Egyptian breach, the U.S. Embassy in Cairo had seemed to sympathize with the attacks by issuing a statement that he called "akin to an apology."

In fact, the embassy statement Romney referenced had been issued before protesters reached the embassy, as tensions were rising over an amateur film made in the United States that ridiculed Islam's Prophet Mohammed. When it became clear that there would be a demonstration outside the embassy, officials there issued a statement condemning "continuing efforts by misguided individuals to hurt the religious feelings of Muslims."

U.S. Accuses China Of Bullying Its Neighbors

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. lawmakers Wednesday accused China of bullying its neighbors to press territorial claims in the South China Sea but also raised questions about America's capacity to police the region.

Three congressional panels this week are scrutinizing what they consider to be the security threat posed by China and its human rights record.

With the presidential election two months away, Republican nominee Mitt Romney has accused President Barack Obama of being soft on China, particularly on trade issues, as he has tried to cultivate ties with the emerging superpower. But criticism dished out by members of the House Foreign Relations Committee on Wednesday was directed squarely at Beijing.

The committee's Republican chairwoman, Florida Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, said China was a "schoolyard bully towards its maritime neighbors" that aspired to be the dominant power in Asia, controlling vital sea lanes that could be used to choke off commerce and oil shipments. She said the U.S. would stand by its allies, the Philippines and Japan.

"Other global crises must not distract from our vital national interests in the South China Sea and the western Pacific," she told a hearing addressing the issue.

Chicago Teachers' Strike Grinds Into Third Day

CHICAGO (AP) — The public exchanges between striking Chicago teachers and the school district grew more personal Wednesday as negotiators returned to the bargaining table on the walkout's third day.

A top district negotiator, Barbara Byrd-Bennett, criticized teachers union President Karen Lewis for using the word "silly" when describing the negotiations to a crowd of adoring teachers a day earlier.

"It is not silly that we spent over 10 hours yesterday attempting to bridge the gap," Byrd-Bennett said just before the talks resumed. "We take these negotiations incredibly seriously."

The strike has canceled classes for more than 350,000 students.

Feds Expected Third Bond-Buying Program

WASHINGTON (AP) — If the world's investors are right, the Federal Reserve is about to take a bold new step to try to invigorate the U.S. economy.

And many expect the Fed to unleash its most potent weapon: a third round of bond purchases meant to ease long-term interest rates and spur borrowing and spending. It's called "quantitative easing," or QE.

Others foresee a more measured response when the Fed ends a two-day policy meeting Thursday. They think it will extend its timetable for any rise in record-low short-term rates beyond the current target of late 2014 at the earliest.

Fed officials began their discussions Wednesday and will end with an announcement of any decision around 12:30 p.m. Eastern time. Later, Chairman Ben Bernanke will hold his quarterly news conference.

U.S. Investigates: Were Attacks On Consulate Coordinated To Mark 9/11?

BY MATTHEW LEE
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Obama administration, roiled by the first killing of a U.S. ambassador in more than 30 years, is investigating whether the assault on the U.S. Consulate in Libya was a planned terrorist strike to mark the anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks and not a spontaneous mob enraged over an anti-Islam YouTube video.

President Barack Obama declared in a White House appearance that the U.S. would "work with the Libyan government to bring to justice" those who killed Ambassador Chris Stevens and three other Americans. The attack on the Benghazi consulate was "a planned, coordinated, well-executed military style event," House Intelligence Committee Chairman Mike Rogers said.

In a show of force, the Pentagon moved two warships to the Libyan coast. Officials said one destroyer, the USS Laboon, moved to a position off the coast Wednesday, and the destroyer USS McFaul was en route and should be stationed off the coast within days, increasing the number of Navy destroyers in the Mediterranean from four to five.

The officials said the ships, which carry Tomahawk cruise missiles, do not have a specific mission. But they give commanders flexibility to respond to any mission ordered by the president.

At the same time, some 50 U.S. Marines headed to Libya to reinforce security at U.S. diplomatic facilities, initially at the American embassy in Tripoli, not Benghazi.

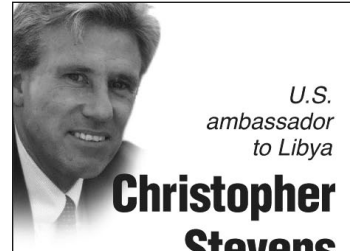
The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly discuss troop movements.

White House press secretary Jay Carney said it was too early to judge whether the Benghazi attack was planned.

"I know that this is being investigated, and we're working with the Libyan government to investigate the incident. I would not want to speculate on that at this time," he said. Several Libyan security guards also were killed.

Rogers, R-Mich., said U.S. intelligence had not yet determined who was responsible, but added, "Our list is narrowing."

"When you see (such an attack), it wasn't some folks who had some guns in their garage and said let's shoot up the consulate," Rogers said in an interview.



U.S. ambassador to Libya

Christopher Stevens

Early life

1960 Born in Northern Calif.

1982 University of California at Berkeley

1983-85 Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco

1989 University of California's Hastings College of Law

2010 M.S. from the National War College

Overseas and Libya

1991 Joined foreign service; assignments in Jerusalem, Cairo, Damascus and Riyadh

2007-09 Deputy chief of the U.S. mission in Libya

March-Nov. 2011 Special representative to the Libyan Transitional National Council during Arab Spring

May 2012 Arrived in Tripoli as U.S. ambassador to Libya

Sept. 11, 2012 Killed with three other Americans in attack at consulate in Benghazi, Libya

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Source: BBC, U.S. State Department, MCT Photo Service

The FBI was sending evidence teams to Libya, said a law enforcement official.

Analysts are working on several different scenarios based on intelligence that could lead to a motive for the attack. Some concern the possibility of targeting high-ranking officials, according to a law enforcement official briefed on the investigation.

But none of the intelligence has suggested terrorists would specifically target Stevens, said the official who also spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly about the investigation.

The attack in Libya, which came hours after a mob stormed the U.S. Embassy in Cairo and tore down the U.S. flag, was presumed to have been triggered by a movie, whose trailer has gone viral on YouTube, depicting the Islamic prophet Muhammad in disrespectful ways. In an extraordinary move, Gen. Martin Dempsey, the chair-

man of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, called anti-Islamic preacher Terry Jones and asked him to stop promoting the film. A spokeswoman said the church would not show the film Wednesday evening.

"Make no mistake. Justice will be done," a somber Obama pledged at the White House, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton at his side.

He ordered increased security at U.S. diplomatic missions overseas, particularly in Libya, and said he condemned "in the strongest possible terms the outrageous and shocking" attack. Clinton said she was particularly appalled that the attack took place in Benghazi, which the U.S. had helped liberate from dictator Moammar Gadhafi during the Arab Spring revolution in Libya last year.

Three Americans were wounded, U.S. officials said.

The aftermath of the two attacks also stirred the U.S. presidential campaign, where until Wednesday, foreign policy had taken a back seat to the struggling economy.

The Republican nominee, Mitt Romney, criticized the administration for statements issued before and after the Cairo attacks that expressed sympathy for those insulted by the video. But he in turn was criticized for turning a tragedy too quickly into political fodder, and getting key details wrong. And his account didn't mesh completely with events in Cairo.

The embassy statement that he referred to as akin to an apology was issued at midday on Tuesday in Cairo at a time the embassy staff was aware of still-peaceful demonstrations in the area nearby. It was four or five hours later when the mob breached the compound's walls and tried to burn a U.S. flag.

Obama told CBS' "60 Minutes" that Romney "seems to have a tendency to shoot first and aim later."

Obama and Clinton made a rare joint visit to the State Department, where grieving colleagues of Stevens and the other three Americans killed in Benghazi gathered in a courtyard. The president also ordered U.S. flags to be flown at half-staff at government and military buildings and vessels around the world until sunset on Sept. 16. Flags had already been lowered in many places to commemorate the victims of the 9/11 attacks.

Clinton denounced those who might kill over an insulting movie.

"There is no justification for this," Clinton said. "None. Violence like this is no way to

honor religion or faith and as long as there are those who would take innocent life in the name of God, the world will never know a true and lasting peace."

Undercoring the administration's frustration, Clinton wondered aloud about the attack in Benghazi, which Gadhafi had once threatened to destroy.

"This is not easy," she said.

"Today, many Americans are asking, indeed I asked myself, how could this happen? How could this happen in a country we helped liberate, in a city we helped save from destruction? This question reflects just how complicated and, at times, just how confounding, the world can be."

"But we must be clear-eyed in our grief," she said, saying the attack was carried out by a "small and savage group" not representative of the Libyan people. She noted that Libyan security guards had tried to fight off the attackers, had carried Stevens' body to the hospital and led other consulate employees to safety.

Stevens, a 52-year-old career diplomat, was killed after he became separated from other American officials during the consulate attack. It's unclear when he died: He was taken by Libyans to a hospital, and his remains were delivered hours later to U.S. officials at the Benghazi airport.

Stevens is the first U.S. ambassador to be killed in an attack since 1979, when Ambassador Adolph Dubois was killed in Afghanistan.

Three other Americans were also killed and the State Department identified one of them as Sean Smith, an Air Force veteran who had worked as an information management officer for 10 years in posts such as Brussels, Baghdad and Pretoria. Smith was also well-known in the video game community.

The identities of the others were being withheld pending notification of relatives.

"The mission that drew Chris and Sean and their colleagues to Libya is both noble and necessary, and we and the people of Libya honor their memory by carrying it forward," Clinton said.

Stevens spoke Arabic and French and had already served two tours in Libya, including running the office in Benghazi during the revolt against Gadhafi. He was confirmed as ambassador to Libya by the Senate earlier this year.

U.S. Poverty Rate Unchanged; Record Numbers Persist

BY HOPE YEN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The nation's poverty rate remained stuck at a record level last year, while household income dropped and the number of people who don't have health insurance declined.

A Census Bureau report released Wednesday provided a mixed picture of the economic well-being of U.S. households for 2011 as the nation enters the final phase of a presidential election campaign in which the economy is the No. 1 issue.

The overall poverty rate stood at 15 percent, statistically unchanged from the 15.1 percent rate in the previous year. Experts had expected a rise in the poverty rate for the fourth straight year, but unemployment benefits and modest job gains helped stave that off, the bureau reported. For last year, the official poverty line was an annual income of \$23,021 for a family of four.

While unemployment eased slightly from 2010 to 2011, the gap between rich and poor increased. The median, or midpoint, household income was \$50,054, 1.5 percent lower than 2010 and a second straight annual decline.

In a blog post, the White House said the

latest figures show that government policies can help the poor, middle class and uninsured, while more work remains to be done.

"While we have made progress digging our way out of the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression, too many families are still struggling and Congress must act on the policies President Obama has put forward to strengthen the middle class and those trying to get into it," the White House post said.

At a fundraising event in Jacksonville, Fla., Obama's GOP rival for the White House, Mitt Romney, said the president "is the candidate that's pushed the middle class into poverty. We're the party of those who want a brighter, prosperous future for themselves and for their kids. We're not the party of the rich. We're the party of the people who want to get rich."

By total numbers, roughly 46.2 million people remained below the poverty line last year, unchanged from 2010. That figure was the highest in the more than half a century that records have been kept. The 15 percent poverty rate was about the same as it was in 1993 and was the highest since 1983.

Broken down by state, New Mexico had the highest share of poor people, at 22.2

percent, according to rough calculations by the Census Bureau. It was followed by Louisiana, the District of Columbia, South Carolina, Arkansas and Georgia. On the other end of the scale, New Hampshire had the lowest, at 7.6 percent.

Bruce D. Meyer, an economist at the University of Chicago, said it was disappointing that poverty levels did not improve. He described it as a sign of lingering problems in the labor market, even with recent declines in the unemployment rate. "The drop in the unemployment rate has been due in significant part to workers leaving the labor force, because they are discouraged, back in school, taking care of family or other reasons," he said.

Some economists were just relieved that the poverty level wasn't higher in the struggling economy.

"This is good news and a surprise," said Sheldon Danziger, a University of Michigan economist who closely tracks poverty. He pointed to a continuing boost from new unemployment benefits passed in 2009 that gave workers up to 99 weeks of payments after layoffs and didn't run out for many people until late 2011. Also, job gains in the private sector helped offset cuts in state and local government workers.

"It would indicate the stimulus was

even more effective than believed," he said.

The official poverty level is based on a government calculation that includes only income before tax deductions. It excludes capital gains or accumulated wealth, such as home ownership.

As a result, the official poverty rate takes into account the effects of some stimulus programs passed in 2009, such as unemployment benefits, as well as jobs that were created or saved by government spending. It does not factor in noncash government aid such as tax credits and food stamps.

David Johnson, the chief of the Census Bureau's household economics division, attributed the better-than-expected poverty numbers to increases in full-time workers over the last year. He also estimated that expanded unemployment benefits helped keep 2.3 million people out of poverty, while Social Security lifted roughly 14.5 million seniors above the poverty line. Without the Social Security cash payments, the number of people ages 65 and older living in poverty would have increased five-fold.

If non-cash government aid were counted in the official formula, the earned income tax credit would have lifted an-

other 5.7 million people above the poverty threshold, while food stamps would have boosted 3.9 million people.

On the other hand, those at the top saw more growth in their incomes. Johnson said top 1 percent of wage earners had a 6 percent increase in income in the last year, while earners in the bottom 80 percent of the income distribution mostly lost ground. The top 5 percent posted a 5.3 percent increase in income, indicating a widening in the gap between rich and poor.

The share of Americans without health coverage fell from 16.3 percent to 15.7 percent, or 48.6 million people. It was the biggest decline in the number of uninsured since 1999, helped in part by increased coverage for young adults under the new health care law that allows them to be covered under their parents' health insurance until age 26.

The number of people covered by employment-based health plans also edged up from 169.4 million to 170.1 million, the first time in 10 years that the rate of private insurance coverage did not fall. Meanwhile, government health insurance including Medicaid, Medicare and the Children's Health Insurance Program increased for the fifth consecutive year, adding coverage to more than three million people.

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