

Nearly 6M May Face Penalty For No Coverage

WASHINGTON (AP) — Nearly 6 million Americans — most of them in the middle class — will face a tax penalty for not carrying medical coverage once President Barack Obama's health care overhaul law is fully in place, congressional budget analysts said Wednesday.

The new estimate amounts to an inconvenient fact for the administration, a reminder of what critics see as broken promises.

The numbers from the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office are significantly higher than a previous projection by the same office in 2010, shortly after the law passed.

The earlier estimate found 4 million people would be affected. The difference — 2 million people— represents a 50 percent increase.

That's still only a sliver of the population, given that more than 150 million people currently are covered by employer plans. Nonetheless, in his first campaign for the White House, Obama pledged not to raise taxes on individuals making less than \$200,000 a year and couples making less than \$250,000.

France Bolsters Embassy Security In Mideast

PARIS (AP) — France stepped up security Wednesday at its embassies across the Muslim world after a French satirical weekly revived a formula that it has already used to capture attention: Publishing crude, lewd caricatures of Islam's Prophet Muhammad.

Wednesday's issue of the provocative satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo*, whose offices were firebombed last year, raised concerns that France could face violent protests like the ones targeting the United States over an amateur video produced in California that have left at least 30 people dead.

The drawings, some of which depicted Muhammad naked and in demeaning or pornographic poses, were met with a swift rebuke by the French government, which warned the magazine could be inflaming tensions, even as it reiterated France's free speech protections.

The principle of freedom of expression "must not be infringed," Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius said, speaking on France Inter radio.

But he added: "Is it pertinent, intelligent, in this context to pour oil on the fire? The answer is no."

Child Death Threat Heightens Digital Fears

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Rants, racist remarks and menacing words permeate the Internet these days, so why did police decide to arrest a Yale dropout for investigation of making online death threats against children and hold him on a bail amount usually reserved for suspected killers?

Authorities said they considered several factors in the case against 21-year-old Eric Yee, who was arrested this week after commenting about a story on ESPN's website about the cost of new Nike sneakers named after LeBron James.

Authorities claimed Yee said he wouldn't mind killing children, and there were unregistered weapons in the Santa Clarita, Calif., house overlooking two schools where he lived with his parents.

ESPN is based in Connecticut, where a worker told police about the posting. Authorities said it also referred to a shooting that would be like the one in Aurora, Colo., where 12 people were killed and 58 others injured during a screening of the latest Batman movie.

Arresting Yee and imposing the steep bail was a sign of how seriously investigators in the digital age are taking threats that could escalate, Los Angeles County sheriff's Lt. Steve Low said.

Could Marijuana Legalization Be Tax Windfall?

DENVER (AP) — A catchy pro-marijuana jingle for Colorado voters considering legalizing the drug goes like this: "Jobs for our people. Money for schools. Who could ask for more?"

It's a bit more complicated than that in the three states — Colorado, Oregon and Washington — that could become the first to legalize marijuana this fall.

The debate over how much tax money recreational marijuana laws could produce is playing an outside role in the campaigns for and against legalization — and both sides concede they're not really sure what would happen.

At one extreme, pro-pot campaigners say it could prove a windfall for cash-strapped states with new taxes on pot and reduced criminal justice costs.

At the other, state government skeptics warn legalization would lead to costly legal battles and expensive new bureaucracies to regulate marijuana.

Decision 2012

Polls, Housing Boost Obama

BY DAVID ESPO
AP Special Correspondent

WASHINGTON — Fresh signs of a national housing rebound and growing support in public opinion polls boosted President Barack Obama's bid for a new term in the White House on Wednesday as Republican rival Mitt Romney struggled to quell his video controversy.

The challenger's attempts to get his campaign back on track ran into fresh difficulty in the form of criticism from fellow Republicans concerned with their own election prospects in the fall.

"I have a very different view of the world," said appointed Sen. Dean Heller of Nevada, taking issue with Romney's dismissive comments about the 47 percent of all Americans who pay no income taxes. "I don't write anybody off," Heller said.

After days of virtually non-stop political damage control on issues foreign and domestic, Romney told an audience at an Atlanta fundraiser: "The question of this campaign is not who cares about the poor and the middle class. I do. He (Obama) does. The question is who can help the poor and the middle class. I can. He can't."

The former Massachusetts governor spoke about 48 hours after a video emerged that showed him telling donors last May that as a candidate for the White House, "my job is not to worry about" the millions of



TRAVIS LONG/RALEIGH NEWS & OBSERVER/MCT
First lady Michelle Obama speaks during a campaign stop at North Carolina Central University on Wednesday in Durham, N.C.

Americans who don't earn enough to pay income taxes.

Obama spent the day in the White House, a rarity in a race with less than seven weeks yet to run. He invited democracy advocate Aung San Suu Kyi of Myanmar to the Oval Office, a chat between two Nobel Peace Prize winners.

Romney raised campaign cash in Georgia, then headed for an evening speech in battleground Florida, his first appearance before a public audience since the emergence of the videotape. Under pressure from fellow Republicans to campaign more

extensively, he was considering adding at least one appearance to a light weekend schedule, officials said.

In a campaign dominated all year by the sluggish economy, the government said construction of single-family homes jumped to the highest rate in more than two years. Separately, the National Association of Realtors reported that home sales rose last month to the highest level since May 2010.

Real estate has been among the slowest sectors of the economy to recover from the national downturn

of 2008. The administration has struggled to reverse a decline in home values that left millions who managed to avoid foreclosure owing more on their mortgages than their homes are worth.

A new AP-GfK poll — taken before the Romney video was revealed — put Obama's overall approval rating among voting-age adults at 56 percent. That was above 50 percent for the first time since May, and at its highest level since the death of terrorist leader Osama bin Laden more than a year ago.

Among likely voters, however, the race was a statistical tie, with Obama at 47 percent and Romney at 46 percent.

The two were also tied statistically when it came to handling the economy and the federal deficit, while the president was preferred on issues of protecting the country, handling health care and understanding the problems of "people like you."

On a question of personal credibility, 50 percent of likely voters said Obama more often says what he really believes, while 42 percent said that applied to Romney.

At the same time, 61 percent of likely voters described the economy as poor, and only 22 percent described it as good more than 3 1/2 years after Obama took office, another indication of the challenges he faces as he bids for a new term in a time of long-term unemployment over 8 percent nationally.

DOJ Faulted In Gun-Trafficking Operation

BY PETE YOST
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department's internal watchdog on Wednesday faulted the agency for misguided strategies, errors in judgment and management failures during a bungled gun-trafficking probe in Arizona that disregarded public safety and resulted in hundreds of weapons turning up at crime scenes in the U.S. and Mexico.

A former head of the department's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and a deputy assistant attorney

general in Justice's criminal division in Washington left the department upon the report's release — the first by retirement, the second by resignation.

In the 471-page report, Inspector General Michael Horowitz referred more than a dozen people for possible department disciplinary action for their roles in Operation Fast and Furious and a separate, earlier probe known as Wide Receiver, undertaken during the George W. Bush administration. A former acting deputy attorney general and the head of the criminal division were criticized for actions and omissions related

to operations subsequent to and preceding Fast and Furious.

The report did not criticize Attorney General Eric Holder, but said lower-level officials should have briefed him about the investigation much earlier.

The report found no evidence that Holder was informed about the Fast and Furious operation before Jan. 31, 2011, or that the attorney general was told about the much-disputed gun-walking tactic employed by the ATF.

Gun-walking was an experimental tactic, barred under long-standing department policy. ATF agents in Arizona allowed suspected "straw purchasers," in these cases

believed to be working for Mexican drug gangs, to leave Phoenix-area gun stores with weapons in order to track them and bring charges against gun-smuggling kingpins who long had eluded prosecution, but they lost track of most of the guns.

The experimental operations were a response to widespread criticisms of the agency's anti-smuggling efforts. Because of thin ATF staffing and weak penalties, the traditional strategy of arresting suspected straw buyers as soon as possible had failed to stop the flow of tens of thousands of guns to Mexico — more than 68,000 in the past five years.

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Dr. Irwin treats patients in all aspects of heart care including coronary heart disease, rhythm disturbances such as atrial fibrillation, heart failure, and preventative cardiology. He has particular interest in valvular heart disease and stress testing to aid in the diagnosis and management of coronary artery disease.

Dr. Maska treats arthritis, including rheumatoid, osteoarthritis and complex forms such as gout; certain autoimmune diseases, such as lupus and vasculitis; as well as musculoskeletal pain disorders such as fibromyalgia.

Dr. Garry performs general surgery procedures such as laparoscopic hernia, stomach, colon, adrenal and splenectomy surgery; colonoscopies; esophagogastroduodenoscopy (EGDs); "Painless" hemorrhoid surgery; and minimally invasive parathyroidectomy.

Tim Irwin, M.D. (Top)
Board Certified in Internal Medicine and Board Eligible in Cardiology

Leann Maska, M.D. (Center)
Board Certified in Internal Medicine and Board Eligible in Rheumatology

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