



President Barack Obama speaks on the economy at the Brookings Institution in Washington, D.C., on Tuesday. Obama hopes the economy can profit from increased federal spending in the future.

Obama urges government to spend, improve economy

By Tom Raum
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

WASHINGTON, D.C. — President Barack Obama called for a major new burst of federal spending Tuesday, perhaps \$150 billion or more, aiming to jolt the wobbly economy into a stronger recovery and reduce painfully persistent double-digit unemployment.

Despite Republican criticism concerning record federal deficits, Obama said the U.S. has had to “spend our way out of this recession” with so many people out of work but insisted he was still mindful of a need to confront soaring deficits.

More than 7 million Americans have lost their jobs since the recession began two years ago, and the jobless rate stands at 10 percent, statistics Obama called “staggering.” Congressional approval would be required for the new spending.

“We avoided the depression many feared,” Obama said in a speech at the Brookings Institution, a Washington think

tank. But, he added, “Our work is far from done.”

It was the third time in a week the president had presided over a high-profile event on jobs, responding to rising pleas in Congress that he spend more time discussing unemployment as mid-term election season draws near.

Obama proposed new spending for highway and bridge construction, for small business tax cuts and for retrofitting millions of homes to make them more energy-efficient.

He said he wanted to extend economic stimulus programs to keep unemployment insurance from expiring for millions of out-of-work Americans and to help laid-off workers keep their health insurance. He proposed an additional \$250 apiece in stimulus spending for seniors and veterans and aid to state and local governments to discourage them from laying off teachers, police officers and firefighters.

He did not give a price tag for the new package but said he would work with Congress

“Our work is far from done.”

Barack Obama
President of the United States

On deciding how to pay for it. On Capitol Hill, estimates of a potential jobs bill range from \$75 to \$150 billion, said Rep. Steny Hoyer of Maryland, the No. 2 Democrat in the House.

“100 billion, 150 billion, 75 billion — those are all figures that are being talked about,” Hoyer told reporters.

Those billions would be on top of money for separate legislation for safety-net initiatives such as extending unemployment benefits for the long-term jobless and providing them with health insurance subsidies.

Some lawmakers put the total cost of the new proposals at \$200 billion or more. White House economic adviser Jared Bernstein said the White House is considering spending \$50 billion on infrastructure projects alone.

FOR GOOD SUSPECT

Ex-FBI director to look into case

By Devlin Barrett
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Ex-FBI director William Webster will conduct an independent review of the bureau’s handling of information gathered about the Fort Hood shooting suspect before the deadly rampage, officials said Tuesday.

FBI Director Robert Mueller has asked Webster to take a look at how the bureau handled information about Maj. Nidal Hasan in the months before the shooting at the Texas military base that killed 13 people.

Mueller had already ordered an internal review of the matter, and that review led to a secret report to the White House in late November. The new assignment for Webster takes the internal review a step further, and likely means a more prolonged, in-depth inquiry. Webster is a former judge who also served as CIA director.

In a statement, Mueller called

Webster “uniquely qualified” for the job because he “has led independent reviews of various FBI systems and broader policies and provided valuable recommendations. In this case, Judge Webster will have complete access and whatever resources necessary to complete the task.”

Webster now works for a private law firm, and his office referred all questions Tuesday to the FBI.

The U.S. military is also reviewing its handling of information about Hasan before the shooting spree, and has also sent a report to the White House on the matter. In the FBI’s case, members of two anti-terrorism task forces saw e-mails between the Army psychiatrist and a radical imam overseas beginning in December 2008.

Those task forces reviewed the communications and decided they were in keeping with Hasan’s research at the time. As a result, no formal investigation of Hasan was opened.

ABORTION AMENDMENT

Senate denies effort for tight restrictions

By Ricardo Alonso-Zaldívar
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

WASHINGTON — The Senate on Tuesday rejected an effort by abortion opponents to tighten restrictions in the health care overhaul bill on taxpayer dollars for the procedure, but it was unlikely to be the last word on the divisive issue.

By a vote of 54-45, the Senate sidetracked an amendment by Democratic Sen. Ben Nelson of Nebraska and Republican Sen. Orrin Hatch of Utah that would ban any insurance plan getting taxpayer dollars from offering abortion coverage.

The restrictions mirrored provisions in the House-passed health care bill.

The Senate bill currently allows insurance plans to cover abor-

tions, but requires that they can only be paid for with private money. The legislation calls for insurance plans that would receive federal subsidies in a new insurance marketplace to strictly separate public funds from private dollars that would be used to pay for abortion.

“As our bill currently reads, no insurance plan in the new marketplace, whether private or public, would be allowed to use public funds for abortion,” said Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev.

The Senate vote — hailed as a victory by abortion rights supporters — could complicate prospects for President Barack Obama’s health overhaul.

It’s unclear whether Reid can pass his bill without the votes of Democratic abortion opponents.

Wave of coordinated attacks, car bombs in Iraq kills 127

By Brian Murphy
ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITER

BAGHDAD — A suicide car bomb flattened a court building and an explosives-rigged ambulance blew down walls like dominoes near the Finance Ministry during a wave of coordinated attacks Tuesday that targeted high-profile symbols of Iraqi authority. At least 127 people were killed.

The blasts — at least five in total — marked the third major strike on government sites since August and brought uncomfortable questions for Iraqi leaders. These include signs al-Qaida in Iraq is regrouping and concerns over the readiness of Iraqi forces to handle

security alone as U.S. forces depart.

The bombings also brought swift accusations about the motives behind the attacks. Officials claimed a Sunni insurgent alliance, including members of Saddam Hussein’s banned Baath Party, seeks to undermine the pro-Western government ahead of elections set for March 7 and the later withdrawal of U.S. combat forces.

Authorities also faced angry questions about how bombers again found holes in Iraqi security.

“If security falls apart, then everything will collapse,” said Abbas al-Bayati, head of parliament’s defense committee and an ally of the Shiite government, as

lawmakers convened an emergency session.

Another lawmaker, Saadi al-Barazani, shouted: “If I were the interior minister, I would resign!”

The attacks began with a suicide strike on a police patrol. An hour later, four more explosions rumbled across Baghdad in the span of a few minutes.

Suicide car bombings hit three sites: the main Appeals Court, an area outside the Finance Ministry and a government compound that includes the Labor Ministry. A roadside bomb also went off near a university.

Iraq’s Health Ministry reported at least 513 people were wounded.

There was no immediate claim of responsibility.



Hadi Mizban/Associated Press

Firefighters and rescuers search for survivors at the site of a bomb attack in Baghdad, Iraq, on Tuesday. A series of coordinated attacks took place, including three car bombs that blew up near government sites.

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