



AP Photo/Jacquelyn Martin President Barack Obama, flanked by Vice President Joe Biden and Secretary of State John Kerry, gestures as he speaks about the Islamic State group, Wednesday in the Roosevelt Room of the White House in Washington.

Obama asks for new war powers, says IS forces are ‘going to lose’

By DAVID ESPO AND NEDRA PICKLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Vowing that Islamic State forces are “going to lose,” President Barack Obama urged Congress on Wednesday to authorize military action against terrorists who are cutting a swath across the Middle East. Yet he ruled out large-scale U.S. ground combat operations reminiscent of Iraq and Afghanistan. “I’m convinced that the United States should not get dragged back into another prolonged ground war,” the president said at the White House as he set Congress on a path to its first war-powers vote in 13 years. Despite his words of reassurance, initial reaction in Congress amounted to bipartisan skepticism, with much of the dissatisfaction centered on his attempt to find a political middle ground with respect to ground forces. Republicans expressed unhappiness that he had chosen to exclude any long-term commitment of ground forces, while some Democrats

voiced dismay that he had opened the door to deployment at all. Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., also said Obama had ruled out air support for U.S.-trained rebels battling Syrian President Bashar Assad, adding, “That’s immoral.” Under Obama’s proposal, the use of military force against Islamic State fighters would be authorized for three years, unbounded by national borders. The fight could be extended to any “closely related successor entity” to the Islamic State organization that has overrun parts of Iraq and Syria, imposed a stern form of Sharia law and killed several hostages it has taken, Americans among them. “Make no mistake. This is a difficult mission,” Obama said in seeking action against a group that he said threatens America’s own security. He said it will take time to dislodge the terrorists, especially from urban areas. “But our coalition is on the offensive. ISIL is on the defensive, and ISIL is going to lose.” The 2002 congressional authorization that preceded the American-led invasion of

Iraq would be repealed under the White House proposal, a step some Republicans were unhappy to see. But a separate authorization that was approved by Congress after the Sept. 11, 2001, terror attacks would remain in force, to the consternation of some Democrats. At the heart of the debate, the struggle to define any role for American ground forces is likely to determine the outcome of the administration’s request for legislation. White House spokesman Josh Earnest said the proposal was intentionally ambiguous on that point to give the president flexibility, although the approach also was an attempt to bridge a deep divide in Congress. While asking lawmakers to bar long-term, large-scale ground combat operations like those in Afghanistan and Iraq, Obama said he wants the flexibility for ground combat operations “in other more limited circumstances.” Those include rescue missions, intelligence collection and the use of special operations forces in possible military action.

Congress clears Keystone XL pipeline bill, setting up veto

By DINA CAPPIELLO Associated Press

WASHINGTON — The Republican-controlled Congress cleared a bill Wednesday to construct the Keystone XL oil pipeline, setting up a confrontation with President Barack Obama, who has threatened to veto the measure. The House passed the bill on a 270-152 vote, endorsing changes made by the Senate that stated climate change was real and not a hoax, and oil sands should no longer be exempt from a tax used to cleanup oil spills. Only one Republican, Michigan Rep. Justin Amash, voted against the measure, while 29 Democrats backed it. But neither the House nor the Senate has enough votes to overcome a veto, the first of many skirmishes between the Democratic White House and Congress on energy and environmental policy. Supporters were already strategizing on how to secure the pipeline’s approval using other legislative means. “The evidence is in. The case ought to be closed,” said Rep. Fred Upton, R-Mich., chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Committee. Sen. John Hoeven of North Dakota, the chief Republican sponsor of the bill, said in a statement “we will continue to press for approval by attaching an approval measure to another bill, perhaps an energy bill or must-pass appropriations legislation.” Obama “needs to work with Congress in a bipartisan way and approve the Keystone XL pipeline project for the American people,” he said. For Republicans, the bill’s passage capped weeks of debate on a top priority after they took control of



AP Photo/J. Scott Applewhite House Energy and Commerce Committee Chairman Fred Upton, R-Mich., left, claps hands with Sen. John Hoeven, R-N.D., sponsor of the Senate’s Keystone XL pipeline bill version.

Congress last month. Hours before the vote, they prodded Democrats who did not take their side. House Republicans, who have debated and passed numerous measures on the pipeline only to have them dead end in the Senate, claimed victory. Rep. Cynthia Lummis, R-Wyo., said she was having a “holy cow” moment. “This kind of support ... it doesn’t get any better than this,” she said. Democrats, meanwhile, called the effort a waste of time but said the provisions on global warming and oils spills marked progress for Republicans on those issues. Rep. Alcee Hastings, D-Fla., said the bill was another example of Republicans prioritizing legislation to demonstrate a message, regardless of its chances of becoming law. The vote Wednesday marked the 11th attempt by Republicans to advance the pipeline. “The last few years have been like a hamster on a wheel — spinning and spinning and not getting anywhere,” said Hastings, who at one point held up a toy that looked like the rodent. First proposed in 2008, the pipeline has come to symbolize the difference-

es between the parties on energy and environmental matters. Republicans and the oil industry have argued the \$8 billion infrastructure project is about jobs and boosting energy security, by importing oil from a friendly neighbor and shipping it to domestic refineries subject to more stringent environmental regulations. Democrats, and their environmental allies, have characterized it as a gift to the oil industry that would worsen global warming and subject parts of the country to the risks of an oil spill, with little economic benefit because the oil and its refined product would be exported abroad. A January 2014 analysis found that, with or without the pipeline, the tar sands would be developed, and thus the greenhouse gas emissions resulting from them would enter the atmosphere anyway. But the EPA said earlier this month that that analysis has to be revisited, because lower oil prices could make the pipeline more of a catalyst than the State Department initially predicted. A letter from Canada’s ambassador to the U.S. said the EPA’s assessment was flawed.

BRIEFLY

Boehner challenges Senate Dems to ‘get off their ass’

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Speaker John Boehner challenged Senate Democrats Wednesday to “get off their ass” and pass a bill to fund the Homeland Security Department and restrict President Barack Obama’s executive moves on immigration. His comments seemed unlikely to change Senate Democrats’ behavior. But they underscored a worsening stalemate on Capitol Hill with funding for the Homeland Security Department set to expire Feb. 27. A day earlier, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell declared the Senate “stuck” on the issue and said the next move was in the House’s court. Boehner rejected that, insisting the House has already done its job. He said Senate Democrats are at fault for blocking a

House-passed bill that funds the department through the remainder of the budget year while also overturning Obama’s policies limiting deportations for millions here illegally. Democrats oppose the immigration language. “The House has done its job, why don’t you go ask the Senate Democrats when they’re going to get off their ass and do something other than to vote no?” Boehner told reporters after meeting with GOP lawmakers. “The issue here is not Senate Republicans. The issue here is Senate Democrats.”

SpaceX launches observatory, nixes landing test

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — SpaceX launched an observatory inspired by former Vice President Al Gore toward a solar-storm lookout point a million miles away Wednesday.

The unmanned Falcon 9 rocket blasted off on the third try in four days, successfully hoisting the spacecraft for NASA, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and Air Force. Gore — who dreamed up the idea for an environmentally conscious, Earth-gazing satellite 17 years ago — returned for the sunset launch. He was at the previous two attempts as well, eager to see his brainchild finally soar. Besides watching for solar outbursts, the observatory will provide continuous pictures of the full, sunlit side of Earth. Unlike Tuesday, the wind stayed within safety limits and everything else went SpaceX’s way — at least for launch. But rough seas forced the company to cancel its effort to land the leftover booster on an ocean platform. Waves crashed over the platform floating off the Florida coast.

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