

BRIEFLY

Obama vigorously challenges critics of Iran deal

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vigorously challenging his critics, President Barack Obama launched an aggressive and detailed defense of a landmark Iranian nuclear accord Wednesday, rejecting the idea that it leaves Tehran on the brink of a bomb and arguing the only alternative to the diplomatic deal is war.

“Either the issue of Iran obtaining a nuclear weapon is resolved diplomatically through a negotiation or it’s resolved through force, through war,” Obama said during a lengthy White House news conference. “Those are the options.”

The president spoke one day after Iran, the U.S. and five other world powers finalized a historic, yearslong agreement to curb Tehran’s nuclear program in exchange for billions of dollars in sanctions relief. Opposition to the deal has been fierce, both in Washington and Israel. Sunni Arab rivals of Shiite Iran also express concerns.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, perhaps the fiercest critic of Obama’s overtures to Iran, showed no sign he could be persuaded to even tolerate the agreement.

In remarks to Israel’s parliament, Netanyahu said he was not bound by the terms of the deal and could still take military action against Iran.

In Congress, resistance comes not only from Republicans, but also Obama’s own Democratic Party. Vice President Joe Biden spent the morning on Capitol Hill meeting privately with House Democrats, and planned to return Thursday to make a similar pitch to Democrats on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

The president said he welcomed a “robust” debate with Congress, but showed little patience for what he cast as politically motivated opposition. Lawmakers can’t block the nuclear deal, but they can try to undermine it by insisting U.S. sanctions stay in place.

Greek lawmakers pass austerity bill despite dissent

ATHENS, Greece (AP) — Greek lawmakers voted overwhelmingly early Thursday to approve a harsh austerity bill demanded by bailout creditors, despite significant dissent from members of Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras’ own left-wing party.

The bill, which imposes sweeping tax hikes and spending cuts, fueled anger in the governing Syriza party and led to a revolt against Tsipras, who has insisted the deal forged after a marathon weekend eurozone summit was the best he could do to prevent Greece from catastrophically crashing out of the euro, Europe’s joint currency.

The legislation was approved with 229 votes in favor, 64 against and six abstentions — and won the support of three pro-European opposition parties.

Among Syriza’s 38 dissenters were prominent party members, including Energy Minister Panagiotis Lafazanis and former finance minister Yanis Varoufakis, who many blame for exacerbating tensions with Greece’s creditors with his abrasive style during five months of tortured negotiations.

The post-midnight vote might not pose an immediate threat to Tsipras’ government, but it raised more doubts over whether it could implement the harsh new austerity program demanded by rescue lenders.



Justice Kennedy compares gay marriage uproar to flag burning

SAN DIEGO (AP) — U.S. Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy on Wednesday likened controversy over the court’s decision to allow gay marriage to public reaction over the 1989 ruling that said burning an American flag was protected free speech.

Kennedy, who was the deciding vote in both cases, described how the reaction decades ago was critical at first but changed over time.

His remarks at the 9th Circuit Judicial Conference were his first public comments since he wrote the decision last month that put an end to same-sex marriage bans in 14 states. Kennedy drew the comparison in response to a moderator’s question about how justices weather reaction to closely watched rulings.

“Eighty senators went to the floor of the Senate to denounce the court,” he said of the 1989 ruling. “President Bush took the week off and visited flag factories, but I noticed that after two or three months people began thinking about the issues.”

Kennedy went on to say that a lawyer from Northern California approached him at a restaurant after the flag burning decision to tell him how his father, a prisoner of war in Nazi Germany, came around to the decision.

The former prisoner of war — who secretly sewed red, white and blue cloth together in captivity — stormed into his son’s office and said he should be ashamed to be an attorney, Kennedy said. The lawyer, unsure how to respond, gave his father Kennedy’s concurring opinion.

“He thought about it, came back three days later and said, ‘You can be proud of being an attorney,’” Kennedy said, relaying the story.

Testimony from Rosenberg brother released in famous spy case

WASHINGTON (AP) — The brother of Ethel Rosenberg, who was a star trial witness against his sister and brother-in-law in a sensational Cold War atomic spying case, never implicated his sister in an earlier appearance before a grand jury and said that they had never discussed her role, according to secret court records unsealed Wednesday.

The revelation may heighten public suspicion that Ethel Rosenberg was wrongly convicted and executed in an espionage case that captivated the country at the height of the McCarthy-era frenzy about Communist allegiances.

Rosenberg and her husband Julius were put to death in 1953 after being convicted of conspiring to pass secrets about the atomic bomb to the Soviet Union, though they maintained their innocence until the end.

Historians and lawyers who reviewed the transcript said it appears to lend support to both sides of a dueling narrative — that Ethel Rosenberg was framed in an overzealous prosecution even as her husband appears to have played a central role in a sophisticated spy ring.

“You change a black-and-white Cold War narrative — framed, or traitors — into a very nuanced, gray area,” said Tom Blanton, director of the National Security Archive at George Washington University, which fought for the records.

First-hand look shows audacity of drug lord’s escape tunnel

Associated Press

ALMOLOYA, Mexico — Mexico’s most prized prisoner paced his cell, first to the latrine, then the shower, then the bed. At every turn around the tiny room, drug lord Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman checked the shower floor hidden by a half wall, because even jailed criminals get their privacy.

In his final sweep, Guzman sat on his bed and took off his shoes. Then he walked back to the shower, stooped behind the wall and disappeared.

It was the beginning of an escape odyssey straight out of the pages of fiction, and the media were given a peek Tuesday at the deep and sophisticated tunnel that led the leader of the Sinaloa cartel, whose illicit drug trafficking reach includes Europe and Asia, swiftly to freedom late Saturday.

On Wednesday, government officials gave media access to Guzman’s cell. He was housed in cell No. 20 in the Altiplano prison’s highest security wing below ground level. Twenty-two steel doors, most opening only when the previous one is closed, stood between Guzman and the outside. So he chose another exit.

The square of concrete in his shower appeared to have been punched out, rather than cut or chiseled. It was relatively thin, just three or four inches in thickness. It did not include rebar, but rather some thin wire.

Speaking to reporters outside the warehouse where the tunnel exited, leftist Sen. Alejandro Encinas criticized the prison’s construction standards.

“I was in charge of the construction of two prisons in the Federal District and that is not how you do it,” he said.

Government officials have maintained that the prison meets the highest international security standards.

Video released by the authorities showing Guzman’s final moments in his cell and journalists’ climb into the tunnel put real dimensions to a high-tech engineering feat three stories underground, where planners and builders managed to burrow through dirt and rock right to the one spot in Guzman’s cell that surveillance cameras couldn’t see.

Mexico’s security commissioner Monte Alejandro Rubido said Tuesday that up to the moment Guzman disappeared, his pacing was considered normal



AP Photo/Eduardo Verdugo

The photo shows the opening of a tunnel, authorities claim was used by drug lord Joaquin “El Chapo” Guzman, to escape from inside his cell at the Altiplano maximum security prison, in Almoloya, west of Mexico City.

for someone who lives in about 60 square feet with only an hour a day outside for exercise. But there was nothing usual after he lifted a slab of concrete shower floor and descended into a warm and humid man-made underworld, where a motorcycle rigged to two carts on rails waited to whisk him away.

Guzman either rode on the bike or in one of the carts for a mile in the dirt tunnel built just high enough for a man called “Shorty” to stand without hitting his head. When he reached the other end, he climbed a wooden ladder through a large, wood-framed shaft with a winch overhead that had been used to drop construction supplies into the tunnel. After pulling himself up 17 rungs, he reached a small basement, where a blue power generator the size of a compact car provided the electricity to illuminate and pump oxygen into the underground escape route.

From there, Guzman walked to a shorter ladder and climbed one, two, three steps as the air thinned and the temperature dropped 10 degrees. As Guzman’s head poked above the dirt floor, he climbed three more rungs to stand inside the unfinished bodega built to hide the elaborate scheme.

Digging crews had discarded 4-by

4-inch wooden beams, 8-foot-tall coils of steel mesh, gallons of hydraulic fluid, 10-foot lengths of PVC pipe and an electric disc saw. A battered wheel barrow full of fine gray soil sat just above the opening in the floor. A couple of improvised wooden tables and a wooden bench rounded out the bodega’s furniture, along with shelves of assorted drill bits, a circular wood saw blade, a jar of liquid cement for pipe joining and a bottle of motor oil.

Seven more strides and the man who Mexico’s government said could not possibly repeat his 2001 prison escape stepped through a sliding steel door into the chilly night on a high plain west of the capital.

For the first time since his latest capture on Feb. 22, 2014, Guzman was free.

It was no slapdash project. It appeared no expense was spared, though working quickly was the priority.

A tunnel of such sophistication would normally take 18 months to two years to complete, said Jim Dinkins, former head of Immigration and Customs Enforcement’s Homeland Security Investigations. But Guzman was behind bars barely 16 months.

“When it’s for the boss, you probably put that on high speed,” Dinkins said.

Crews head out to plane wreckage

Teen survivor returns home

SEATTLE (AP) — Ground search crews recovered two bodies Wednesday from the wreckage of a small airplane that crashed into a Washington state mountain-side over the weekend, forcing a teenager who survived the impact to hike her way off a rugged slope to safety.

Deputies and volunteers who reached the wreckage found it burned out and smoldering.

The two victims haven’t been formally identified, but 16-year-old survivor Autumn Veatch has said her step-grandparents, Leland and Sharon Bowman of Marion, Montana, were killed in the crash.

The plane, piloted by Leland Bowman, was bringing Veatch home from a Montana visit. A National Transportation Safety Board team was expected to arrive Thursday to investigate.

The 16-year-old Veatch was released from the hospital Tuesday, and she provided searchers with clues needed to find the wreck.

A different set of searchers on Wednesday located what was believed to be the wreckage of an airplane that took off from Minnesota with two people on board who were scheduled to arrive at Orcas Island on Saturday. Officials said they haven’t been able to confirm the debris is from the missing flight, or find any



Newton Goss via AP

In this undated photo provided by Newton Goss, Goss’ girlfriend, Autumn Veatch plays a bass guitar.

signs of survivors. Barbara LaBoe, a Washington state Transportation Department spokeswoman, also said there was no evidence the two flights were related.

Veatch arrived home in Bellingham shortly before midnight. Family friends had gathered in anticipation of a happy homecoming, bringing balloons and flowers to the apartment of her father, David Veatch.

“We just want to show her and her family that we care and we love her,” said one friend, Amber Shockey. She added that Veatch had said “she was happy to be coming home.”

Bruised by the impact, singed by the fire, fearing an

explosion and knowing she couldn’t help her step-grandparents, Autumn Veatch headed down the steep slope, following a creek to a river.

She spent a night on a sand bar and sipped small amounts of water, worrying she might get sick if she drank more.

She followed the river to a trail, and the trail to a highway. Two men driving by stopped and picked her up Monday afternoon, bringing her — about two full days after the crash — to the safety of a general store in tiny Mazama, near North Cascades National Park.

Okanogan County Sheriff Frank Rogers said the Beechcraft A-35 was flying over north-central Washington on its way from Kalispell, Montana, to Lynden, Washington, when it entered a cloud bank. Then the clouds suddenly parted, and from her seat behind the cockpit, Veatch could see the mountain and trees ahead. Leland Bowman tried to pull up — to no avail.

They struck the trees and the plane plummeted to the ground and caught fire.

“When they came out of the clouds, she said it was obvious they were too low,” Rogers said. “They crashed right into the trees and hit the ground. She tried to do what she could to help her grandparents, but she couldn’t because of the fire.”

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