

Obama and Kenya: first trip to father’s homeland as president

WASHINGTON (AP) — When Barack Obama visited Kenya for the first time nearly 30 years ago, he was astonished that an airport worker recognized his last name.

It was a striking experience for a young man — and future American president — struggling to understand how a country he had never seen and a Kenyan family he barely knew had shaped his identity. “My name belonged and so I belonged, drawn into a web of relationships, alliances, and grudges I did not yet understand,” Obama wrote in his memoir, “Dreams From My Father,” about the airport encounter.

This week, Obama will make his first visit to Kenya as U.S. president, a trip that will bear little resemblance to the 1988 one, when he arrived aboard commercial flight and his luggage got lost. Now, Air Force One will take Obama to a country where children, roads and schools now bear his name, and the world leader is seen as a local son.

Yet traveling with the trappings of the presidency appears likely to diminish the fulfillment of a trip to his father’s homeland.

“I’ll be honest with you, visiting Kenya as a private citizen is probably more meaningful to me than visiting as president because I can actually get outside of a hotel room or a conference center,” he said last week, adding that his trip still would be “symbolically important.”

Security concerns and the logistics of presidential travel will keep Obama at a distance from most Kenyans. He will skip a visit to Kogelo, the rural village in western Kenya where his father was born and buried, and where his step-grandmother and other family



A man walks away after leaning his bicycle against a mural of President Barack Obama, created by the Kenyan graffiti artist Bankslove, at the GoDown Arts Centre in Nairobi, Kenya on Wednesday.



A vendor selling flags, caps and t-shirts, and wearing a T-shirt showing President Barack Obama with words in Luo reading “Father has reached home,” sells his wares near Kisumu, in Kenya Saturday.

members still live. Obama’s two days of events will be confined to Nairobi, the capital where he

society leaders. On Sunday, he will go to Ethiopia.

Despite the limits on Obama’s movement and interactions with the Kenyan people, his visit is highly anticipated in the East African nation. Even as a U.S. senator, he was greeted by cheering crowds when he made his last visit to Kenya, in 2006.

Ahead of Obama’s arrival Friday, some Kenyans have adopted a rousing segment of an Obama speech as their cellphone ringtone. U.S. and Kenyan flags lined the road leading from Nairobi’s main airport.

Obama’s visit is like “a brother coming back,” said Nelly Ngugu, customer relations manager at a Nairobi

cafe.

Before Obama’s travel plans were announced, there had been some disappointment that the U.S. president who has written and spoken emotionally of his Kenyan roots had not returned since taking office. Analysts questioned whether America’s first black president was missing an opportunity to give Africa more prominence in U.S. foreign policy.

Much of Obama’s international focus in his first term was on strengthening ties with Asia and trying to reset U.S. policy in the Middle East. His only visit to sub-Saharan Africa during his first four years in office was a short stop in Ghana.

At the time, there was persistent and inaccurate speculation that he was born in Kenya, not the United States. Some political opponents tried to use the rumors to undercut Obama’s eligibility for president. As late as 2011, a CBS/New York Times poll showed that one-quarter of all Americans believed Obama was not born in the U.S.

Obama’s re-election raised renewed hopes for a visit to Kenya, but the political situation there complicated those plans.

Kenyatta, the son of the country’s first president, was elected president in 2013, but faced charges in the International Criminal Court stemming from his alleged role in stoking ethnic violence following Kenya’s troubled 2007 election.

“The timing was not right for me as the president of the United States to be visiting Kenya when those issues are still being worked on and, hopefully, at some point resolved,” Obama said of his decision to pass over Kenya in favor of South Africa, Tanzania and Senegal during a 2013 trip to Africa.

The charges against Kenyatta were ultimately dropped, clearing the way for Obama to finally visit his father’s home country as president. With his arrival now imminent, the disappointment appears to have faded, overtaken by anticipation and national pride.

In Kogelo, the Obama family’s home village, the family’s aging matriarch said even she would not feel bad if the president did not visit her. Sarah Obama, who Obama referred to as “Granny” in his memoir, said the president was coming to Kenya “to discharge his duty.

Contenders scramble to adjust to Trump

Associated Press

AIKEN, S.C. — Donald Trump is on his way to the Mexican border, the latest event in a presidential campaign some of his rivals would like to dismiss as a sideshow — a “carnival act,” as one puts it. But he’s been stealing their thunder for days and left them scrambling to adjust to a race dominated by a bombastic longshot.

The billionaire developer and reality TV host will be in Laredo, Texas, on Thursday, highlighting his unyielding stance on immigration. The trip will revisit a topic that has stirred criticism that has now grown into open hostility from some Republican contenders.

From party heavyweights like Jeb Bush to recently announced candidates like Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker and Ohio Gov. John Kasich, the contenders are confronted by Trump’s hair-trigger habit of calling out his critics by name, vilifying the GOP establishment and roiling the debate over immigration and more.

In Washington, former Texas Gov. Rick Perry was asked about Trump’s planned trip on to Laredo. He snapped, “I hope he can find the border because I’m not sure he’s ever been there before.”

This, after Perry denounced Trump’s campaign as a “cancer on conservatism” and “barking carnival act” in a speech that laced into “Trumpism: a toxic mix of demagoguery, mean-spiritedness and nonsense that will lead the Republican Party to perdition if pursued.”

Indeed, the insults flying between Trump and his critics have been caustic. Sen. Lindsey Graham called him a “jackass” and Trump responded by calling Graham an “idiot” and giving out the senator’s cellphone number, jamming his voice mail.

Others in the field have been more measured, though showing signs of growing exasperation. Bush, in particular, has conspicuously tried to avoid alienating Trump’s supporters — “good people” with “legitimate concerns” — even while branding Trump’s rhetoric “ugly.”

The feud is unfolding as the candidates prepare for the first GOP debate, a venue to which the top 10 in national



Republican presidential hopeful Donald Trump speaks at his South Carolina campaign rally kickoff in Bluffton, S.C., Tuesday.

“Trumpism: a toxic mix of demagoguery, mean-spiritedness and nonsense that will led the Republican Party to perdition.”

— Rick Perry, Former Texas governor and current GOP candidate

polling will be invited out of a swollen lineup of 16. Although they are all accomplished, few are well known nationally, and “Trumpism” isn’t making it easier for them to get their messages out at a time when mere name recognition can drive popularity in polling.

Trump, a longtime celebrity, is almost guaranteed a spot in the debate.

Bush, in South Carolina on Wednesday, said he wasn’t approaching the debate thinking about Trump or any rival who might be on the stage. “My objective with this is to, wherever I can, share my record,” he said.

Kentucky Sen. Paul addressed the Trump feud almost serenely, expressing confidence the primary campaign would “get beyond the novelty of a reality TV star.”

And Walker, campaigning in Tennessee, said he used to run track and “I realized there were some folks sprinting out ahead. I made sure I was ahead at the end of the race when it really mattered.”

Florida Sen. Marco Rubio likened Trump to Barack Obama, a president with “no class” who Rubio said demeaned the office with his appearance on “The Daily Show.”

On Fox News, Rubio said of Trump: “I don’t think the way he has behaved over the past few weeks is either dignified or worthy of the

office he seeks.”

Trump remains unbowed. “I’m called a jackass,” he said Wednesday on CNN. “You have to fight back. “The country has to fight back. Everyone’s pushing our country around. We can’t allow that.”

Meanwhile, federal regulators made public records that show, as he has said, that he is rich.

He has assets of at least \$1.4 billion and debt of at least \$240 million, the regulators said in a report with such broad categories that his wealth could well be much greater. His precise fortune isn’t pinpointed, but the disclosures underscore his financial potential staying power in the race and his freedom from the influence — or muzzles — of the deep-pocketed Republicans who bankroll campaigns.

On Thursday, he plans to hold a news conference at the U.S.-Mexico border, meet members of the union that represents U.S. Customs and Border Patrol agents and speak to law enforcement officers, his campaign said. The border became a flashpoint in the GOP debate when Trump branded Mexican immigrants rapists and drug-bearing criminals.

After that episode came a broadside against Arizona Sen. John McCain, who earned Trump’s ire by saying his remarks about immigrants had brought out “crazies.”

Social Security disability fund to run dry next year

WASHINGTON (AP) — The 11 million Americans who receive Social Security disability face steep benefit cuts next year, the government said Wednesday, handing lawmakers a fiscal and political crisis in the middle of a presidential campaign.

The trustees who oversee Social Security and Medicare said the disability trust fund will run out of money in late 2016. That would trigger an automatic 19 percent cut in benefits, unless Congress acts.

The average monthly benefit for disabled workers and their families is \$1,017. The typical beneficiary would see a reduction of \$193 a month.

In more bad news for beneficiaries, the trustees project there will be no cost-of-living increase in benefits at the end of the year. It would mark only the third year without an increase since automatic adjustments were adopted in 1975.

Separately, about 7 million Medicare beneficiaries could face a monthly premium increase of at least \$54 for outpatient coverage, an increase of more than 50 percent.

The annual report card on the financial health of Social Security and Medicare shows that the federal government’s largest benefit programs are feeling the strain of aging baby boomers.

Medicare turns 50 at the end of the month and Social Security turns 80 two weeks later. Together, the programs accounted for more than 40 percent of federal spending.

Charges include hate crimes for accused shooter

WASHINGTON (AP) — The man accused of killing nine black church members in Charleston, South

BRIEFLY

Carolina, was motivated by racial hatred and a desire to commit a “notorious attack” when he opened fire inside a historic house of worship last month, according to a federal grand jury indictment issued Wednesday that makes him eligible for the death penalty.

The 33-count federal indictment charges Dylann Roof, 21, with hate crimes, firearms violations and obstructing the practice of religion in the June 17 shootings at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church.

The charges announced Wednesday by Attorney General Loretta Lynch are in addition to state murder charges brought against Roof days after the shooting.

The Justice Department has not decided whether it will seek the death penalty against Roof, nor whether its prosecution will come prior to the state’s case. But in mounting a federal case, Justice Department prosecutors made clear that they consider the killings rooted in racial hatred and the type of attack that their hate-crime statutes are designed to cover.

Because South Carolina has no state hate-crime law, federal charges were needed to adequately deal with a defendant who “decided to seek out and murder African-Americans because of their race,” Lynch said.

The state’s case has so far been sparse in its details, but the federal grand jury indictment accuses Roof — who is white and had appeared in photos waving Confederate flags — of setting his sights for months

on murderous attacks on blacks because of their race and of wanting to carry out violence in a black church.

Ferguson hires black police commander as interim chief

FERGUSON, Mo. (AP) — Ferguson leaders introduced a new interim police chief Wednesday, tasking the black police commander from Arizona with building trust between residents of the predominantly black St. Louis suburb and its mostly white officers, nearly a year since Michael Brown’s death roiled racial tensions.

Andre Anderson, a 50-year-old with a quarter century in law enforcement, starts in Ferguson on Thursday, essentially on six-month loan from the Phoenix suburb of Glendale, Arizona. Anderson had an inside track for his new, albeit interim gig — Ed Beasley, a black man recently hired as Ferguson’s interim city manager — had been Glendale’s city manager.

Touted for his knack for community outreach in policing, Anderson arrives in Ferguson as it is still working to get its law enforcement house in order after a scathing U.S. Department of Justice report in March.

pressed for reforms. That critique cited racial bias and profiling in policing as well as a profit-driven municipal court system that frequently targeted blacks, who make up about two-thirds of Ferguson’s populace.



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