

Boehner resigns from Congress

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AP Photo/Steve Helber

House Speaker John Boehner of Ohio pauses during a news conference on Capitol Hill in Washington, Friday. In a stunning move, Boehner informed fellow Republicans on Friday that he would resign from Congress at the end of October, stepping aside in the face of hard-line conservative opposition that threatened an institutional crisis.

Wyden hopes Boehner resignation will keep government open

PORTLAND (AP) — U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden said Friday he hopes resigning House Speaker John Boehner uses his influence to keep the government from shutting down next week.

Wyden, a Democrat, spoke to reporters at the Planned Parenthood offices in Portland, where he held a press conference backing the organization as conservatives try to cut off its federal funding. A group of Republican lawmakers has vowed not to vote for any budget that includes money for Planned Parenthood, threatening a partial government shutdown after the federal fiscal year ends Sept. 30.

"The real question for me is how the speaker will spend these next few weeks, particularly this week, using his influence, and my hope is that his priority will be keeping the government open," Wyden said.

Wyden accused conservatives of prioritizing "ideological trophies" over "bipartisan problem-solving."

tution to go through this," he said. Of his resignation, he said, "Frankly, I am entirely comfortable doing it" — and he broke into a brief refrain of "Zip-a-Dee-Doo-Dah" to demonstrate his point.

Even as he announced his plans to leave, Boehner told lawmakers they could expect to vote next week on legislation to fund the government through Dec. 11 with Planned Parenthood funding intact, a bill likely to pass with Democratic help, notwithstanding conservative complaints.

So no shutdown for now. But Boehner will leave behind a stack of other

problems, including the new December funding deadline, a crucial highway bill, and the annual battle over the federal borrowing limit.

And it's not clear that the next speaker will have any easier time taming the unruly tea party lawmakers who forced Boehner out despite the largest GOP majority in 84 years, or making the deals with the White House and Senate Republicans that Boehner habitually cut to keep the gears of government running.

Although a disorderly leadership race is certain for some of the top jobs, the likeliest contender to replace

Boehner is his current No. 2, Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy of California, whom Boehner endorsed on Friday, saying he "would make an excellent speaker."

After Boehner's announcement, President Barack Obama praised him as "a good man" and a patriot.

"Maybe most importantly, he's somebody who understands that in government and governance, you don't get 100 percent of what you want," the president said. "We can have significant differences on issues but that doesn't mean you shut down the government."

With his relaxed and sociable demeanor, love of golf and well-known tendency to cry in public, Boehner was popular among House Republicans. But though he is also known as a strong conservative, his tactics were never confrontational enough to satisfy the most conservative faction.

He said he had planned all along to announce in November that he was resigning at the end of this year, but had not said so publicly. After emotional moments Thursday at the pope's side, he woke up Friday morning and decided now was the time.

A number of conservative lawmakers cheered the news. "We need bold leadership, and this gives us a chance to get it," said Rep. Louie Gohmert of Texas.

Outside tea party groups also declared victory, underscoring a schism between conservative base voters and establishment leaders that has made Boehner and Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell nearly as scorned in some quarters of the GOP as Obama himself.

At a meeting of the Values Voters Summit in Washington where religious conservatives were gathered to hear from GOP presidential candidates, attendees and some candidates alike erupted in extended applause and cheers at the news Boehner was stepping aside.

BRIEFLY

Syria commander gives equipment to al-Qaida affiliate

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Syrian rebel commander who recently completed a U.S. training program has told the U.S. military that he surrendered six coalition-provided trucks and ammunition to an intermediary linked to the al-Qaida affiliate in Syria, known as the Nusra Front.

U.S. Central Command said late Friday that roughly 25 percent of the equipment assigned to that unit was apparently turned over earlier this week in exchange for safe passage within the region. U.S. officials said the Syrians continue to insist that they have not relinquished any actual weapons to the Nusra Front and that all of their personnel are still accounted for.

Air Force Col. Pat Ryder, a U.S. Central Command spokesman, said the command is looking into the incident. But the report contradicts information the Defense Department provided earlier in the day, which said reports of U.S.-trained Syrian rebels defecting and missing equipment going to the Nusra Front were incorrect.

The report underscores persistent problems with the U.S.-led coalition's effort to train and equip Syrian rebels to fight the Islamic State.

Ryder said the Syrians had told the U.S. earlier Friday that no equipment or people were missing, but the U.S. found out later on that some of those assertions were wrong. He said providing equipment to the Nusra Front is a violation of the training and equipping program.

The commander who turned the equipment over to the Nusra Front was one of about 70 rebel fighters who were in the second U.S. training course. He had only recently returned to Syria to fight the Islamic State militants.

Saudi Arabia accused of neglect over deadly disaster at hajj

MINA, Saudi Arabia (AP) — Saudi Arabia faced new accusations of neglect Friday in the hajj disaster that killed over 700 people, the second tragedy at this year's pilgrimage overseen by the kingdom's rulers who base their legitimacy in part on protecting Islam's holiest sites.

Leading the criticism was regional Shiite powerhouse Iran, which always seeks an opportunity to undermine its Sunni adversary.

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said in New York that at least 140 Iranians were killed. He suggested that "ineptitude" by the Saudi authorities involved in organizing the hajj was to blame for the two accidents this month

that have resulted in at least 830 deaths.

In Tehran, the Iranian Foreign Ministry summoned a Saudi envoy for the second time in as many days to hear protests over the incident, a vice president blamed Saudi "mismanagement," and thousands marched in the streets and denounced the Saudi royal family.

Saudi Arabia has spent billions of dollars and undertaken massive construction projects to make the annual hajj safer for the world's Muslims, and the last serious loss of life had occurred nine years ago.

In the worst hajj disaster in a quarter century, two huge waves of pilgrims converged Thursday on a street near a religious site in Mina, and 719 people were crushed or trampled to death, while 863 were injured. That followed an accident Sept. 11 in which a storm toppled a crane at the Grand Mosque in Mecca that killed 111 people.

While Saudi authorities are still investigating Thursday's accident, Health Minister Khalid al-Falih has blamed it on the masses themselves, telling a Saudi broadcaster that "some pilgrims had moved in the wrong direction amid the crowds."

But a survivor who spoke to The Associated Press said some Saudi guards only exacerbated the stampede at Mina by refusing to open nearby gates that could have relieved the crush.

The street where the incident took place is about 36 feet wide and lined with barricades, behind which are tents of hajj tour groups. Pilgrims move in one direction to and from a religious complex, where they throw stones at pillars representing the devil. On Thursday, the crowds apparently collided with each other at an intersection, the Interior Ministry said.

Pope leaves blessing in UN guest book

As Pope Francis swept on from his address to the United Nations to multiple events in Manhattan, U.N. officials took a peek at the message he left in the visitors' book.

The handwritten note in English was a simple but profound message for the world body, and perhaps for the global community at large.

"May the Almighty bless this assembly, and may its service to the international community be marked by fraternity, solidarity and justice. Francis."

After the somber and slightly weary-looking pope finished writing it, he allowed a brief smile, removed his glasses, stood and moved on to a full day ahead. Pope Francis on Friday offered comfort to 9/11 victims' families, warnings to world leaders and encouragement to schoolchildren in Harlem.

Obama, China's Xi agree to curb cyberspying

WASHINGTON (AP) — Skeptical of Chinese assurances on cyberspying, President Barack Obama on Friday laid out a fresh threat of sanctions for economic espionage emanating from China, even as he and President Xi Jinping pledged their countries would not conduct or support such hacking.

"The question now is: Are words followed by action?" Obama said, standing alongside Xi at a White House news conference.

Obama's wariness underscored deep U.S. concerns about what officials say is China's massive cyber campaign to steal trade secrets and intellectual property from American companies. While China has publicly denied being behind such activities, U.S. officials say their counterparts in Beijing have begun to take the matter more seriously, as well as the potential impact on ties with Washington.

"Confrontation and friction are not the right choice for both sides," Xi said, speaking through an interpreter.

The spying tensions cast a shadow over Xi's state visit to Washington, a grand affair complete with a formal welcome ceremony and a black-tie dinner. Obama faced criticism from some Republicans for honoring China with a state visit given the cyber concerns, as well as U.S. worries about Beijing's human rights abuses and assertive posture in territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas.

While the latter issues were discussed during Obama and Xi's lengthy talks, no discernable progress was made.

Xi said the Chinese have "the right to uphold our own sovereignty" in the South China Sea, where Beijing has alarmed its neighbors with a major campaign of artificial island-building. China has reclaimed about 3,000 acres of land in the past year-and-a-half by dredging sand from the ocean bed.

On human rights, long a divisive issue between the U.S. and China, Xi made no



AP Photo/Andrew Harnik

President Xi Jinping looks toward President Barack Obama during their joint news conference in the Rose Garden of the White House in Washington, Friday.

commitments, saying only that countries must have the right "to choose their own development independently."

Obama and Xi did herald progress on climate change, one of the few areas of bilateral cooperation that has proceeded smoothly in recent months, largely because Beijing has struggled to contain heavy air, water and soil pollution that has destroyed farmland, sent cancer rates soaring and left its cities cloaked in dense smog.

In conjunction with the state visit, Xi announced a blueprint for a nationwide cap-and-trade system beginning in 2017 that would cover highly polluting sectors ranging from power genera-

tion to papermaking. China also said it will commit \$3.1 billion to help developing countries reduce carbon emissions.

At the same time, Obama has warned that progress on climate change and other issues could be threatened by China's continued cybertheft of intellectual property.

U.S. officials say that while they regularly hack Chinese networks for espionage purposes, they don't steal corporate secrets and hand them to American companies. Chinese officials traditionally have viewed that distinction as meaningless, saying that national security and economic security are inextricably linked.

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