

President Obama Delivers State of the Union Address

Monique Kresiman, staff writer

President Obama delivered the annual State of the Union address on Tuesday. He began with a quote from President Kennedy: "The Constitution makes us not rivals for power, but partners for progress." Throughout the rest of the speech, he continued to emphasize bipartisan work and collaboration.

Obama declared that it is our task to revive the middle class. He said, "The American people don't expect the government to solve every problem, but they do expect us to put the nation's interests before a party's... They do expect us to forge reasonable compromise where we can." These compromises include basic decisions about the budget. The deficit has already been reduced by \$2.5 trillion, but it is still far from the goal of reduction by \$4 trillion. If Congress cannot reach an agreement, \$1 trillion in cuts will go into effect automatically. Obama reminded Congress that this sequester would jeopardize national defense and slow down economic recovery.

President Obama next discussed the need for "modest reforms" in Medicare. He said, "We can't expect seniors and working families to shoulder the whole burden... [and] we can't just cut our way to prosperity." Instead of cutting Social Security, Medicare and education, Obama proposed closing loopholes for wealthy taxpayers.

He further said that the tax code should help small businesses, not give breaks for companies that move overseas. Wealthy businessmen, Obama quotes, should not pay a lower tax rate than their hardworking secretaries. Again, he urged bipartisan cooperation. He implored, "Let's set party interests aside," telling Congress that "we cannot drift from one manufacturing crisis to the next. Let's agree right now... to uphold the full faith and credit of the United States of America."

Obama also devoted a portion of his speech to environmental issues. He said, "For the sake of our children and our future, we must do more to combat climate change." He reminded Congress that heat waves, droughts, wild fires, and floods are now more frequent and more intense. He said, "If congress won't act soon to protect future generations, I will." His plan includes reducing pollution, preparing communities for the consequences of climate change, further investing in clean energy like wind and solar power, and --continued on page 2

North Korea Conducts Nuclear Test, Continues to Defy U.N.

Monique Kresiman, staff writer

The United Nations Security Council held an emergency session on Tuesday in response to a nuclear test in North Korea. The test was conducted in open defiance of three United Nations resolutions and it was condemned by President Obama and the governments of Russia, Britain, and China. The United Nations is expected to pass a fourth resolution on the issue. David Sanger reports in a February 12th New York Times article that the bomb had an estimated explosive force of six to seven kilotons. North Korea has conducted two previous nuclear tests, but they were of smaller explosive force. In a February 12th CNN article, Jethro Mullen reports that it is unknown if North Korea tested a plutonium or uranium bomb. It is also unknown if the device is small enough to be fitted to a missile.

President Obama Calls for Troop Reduction in Iraq

Hannah Thornton, staff writer

A Washington Post poll on Tuesday reported an approval rating of 80% on the President's policy to end the war in Afghanistan. In order to rapidly increase troop reduction in Afghanistan, President Obama is proceeding with a plan to cut the size of American forces



American Troops In Afghanistan
Image via Salon.com

in Afghanistan in half by February 2014, according to administration and defense officials. Initially intended to be announced in summer 2013, this announcement has come an entire season ahead of schedule.

The revised plan to pull out troops, which is the first time the adminis-

tration has officially given specific numbers, will take the current 66,000 American military force down to 34,000 in a series of seasonal phases.

The decision to pull out troops was made in agreement with Afghan President Hamid Karzai in January. Military commanders have officially signed off on the plans as well.

Many Afghan administrative leaders and other military officials are not supportive of this plan, which they see as detrimental to the overall security of the country. The Wall Street Journal writes of the concerns of Hanif Atmar, an opposition leader and former interior minister, "This decision runs against the advice of top NATO and Afghan generals."

American troops currently in Afghanistan are training Afghan soldiers, who are now leading almost 90% of the country's operations. With America's reduced presence, this strategic training is expected to continue. However, there are no decisions on long-term troop levels, proposals of which range from a presence of none up to 15,000.

Many surprised Afghans are concerned of what this will do with the upcoming 2014 elections, fearing that the troop withdrawal will not give the trained military and leaders the support they need.

N.C. Man Released From Georgia Prison After Six Years

Ablgail Gupton, staff writer

John McNeil, a 46 year old man from Wilson, North Carolina, was released from prison in Macon, Georgia this week after six years and many appeals of his life sentence. In 2005, McNeil was charged with killing a man that McNeil claimed was unwilling to get off of his property. For the past six years, McNeil, his wife and other family members, and the NAACP have tried to have this sentence overturned and on Tuesday, a judge in the Cobb County Superior Court accepted McNeil's plea of voluntary manslaughter. The sentence for the new conviction took into account seven years of prison time as added thirteen years of probation. As McNeil walked out a free man, he was greeted by family members, members of the NAACP and other supporters. His wife, who died on February 2 after a battle with breast cancer, was unable to see the moment she'd fought so hard to make happen. The chairwoman for the National Board of Directors for the NAACP said "His

release today is a bittersweet victory, because he also returns home in sorrow following the recent death of his loving wife Anita, who fought for his release until her last breath."

Pope Benedict XVI Resigns

Kim Dixon, staff writer

On Monday, the Vatican announced the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI effective February 28. Elected at age 78, the now 85-year-old pope cited health concerns as the reason for his decision. On Monday, February 11, 2013, The Associated Press quoted Pope Benedict as saying, "After having repeatedly examined my conscience before God, I have come to the certainty that my strengths due to an advanced age are no longer suited to an



Pope Benedict XVI
Image via Telegraph.co.uk

adequate exercise of the Petrine ministry... in today's world, subject to so many rapid changes and shaken by questions of deep relevance for the life of faith, in order to govern the barque of St. Peter and proclaim the Gospel, both strength of mind and body are necessary — strengths which in the last few months, has deteriorated in me to the extent that I have had to recognize my incapacity to adequately fulfill the ministry entrusted to me." According to the AP, a new pope will be elected by mid-March. Though there is no "obvious front-runner," possible successors include Cardinal Angelo Scola, archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Christoph Schoeborn, archbishop of Vienna, and Cardinal Marc Ouellet, the Canadian head of the Vatican's office for bishops. The AP also names Cardinal Timothy Dolan of New York as a "longshot," stating that Cardinal Dolan is "popular and backs the pope's conservative line," but "the general thinking is that the Catholic Church doesn't need a pope from a superpower."

The last pope to step down was Pope Gregory XII, in 1415. His forced relinquishment of the papacy ended the Western Schism.

