

Press Clippings

E-News Brief - Friday, August 23, 2013

US SENATOR
Patrick
Leahy
state of
Vermont

Burlington Free Press

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Obituaries

Conditions for Burlington, VT at 9:52 am EDT



Current Conditions:

Partly Cloudy, 65 F

Forecast:

Fri - Mostly Sunny. High: 74 Low: 50

Sat - Sunny. High: 77 Low: 51

Sun - Partly Cloudy. High: 79 Low: 58

Mon - Scattered Thunderstorms. High: 81 Low: 65

Tue - Mostly Cloudy. High: 76 Low: 62

[Full Forecast at Yahoo! Weather](#)

(provided by **[The Weather Channel](#)**)

Washington -- US divided over how to respond to Mideast violence

AP -- Burlington Free Press

August 23, 2013

Persistent violence in Syria and Egypt has sharply divided senior advisers in the Obama administration over a moral dilemma: How far should the U.S. go to stop the killing when its actions could lead to war with Syria or damage relations with Egypt?

Hundreds have died in Egypt during protests brought on by the military overthrow of President Mohammed Morsi. In Syria, allegations of chemical weapons attacks on civilians by the government of President Bashar Assad come amid reports of hundreds more victims in a 2-year-old civil war that, by U.N. estimates, has already killed more than 100,000.

Pentagon leaders, including Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, have argued for moderation in the U.S. response. They say that cutting off aid to Egypt would threaten key national security agreements and could rattle the peace between Egypt and Israel. They suggest that such action would cost the U.S. its leverage and even risk losing access to the Suez Canal and permission for military flights over Egypt.

Others in the administration, among them close advisers in the West Wing, have countered that the U.S. should take more decisive action to curtail the violence in Egypt as well as the sectarian war in Syria. So far, the White House has taken only incremental steps. In that vein, it's expected to announce in the coming days the suspension of another major weapons shipment to Egypt.

The lack of a unified position — both within the Obama administration and on Capitol Hill — is giving President Barack Obama time and space for his cautious approach. But that is riling those who believe that the U.S. should put stronger pressure on Egypt's military and take military action against Assad's government.

The next military weapons shipments for Egypt are scheduled for next month — including 10 Apache helicopters at a cost of about \$500 million. Also scheduled for delivery are a number of M1A1 tank kits, including machine guns and other equipment used with the tanks, as well as some used missiles. The missiles, which have been moved and handled but not yet fired, could be used for spare parts by the Egyptian military or they could be refurbished for launching.

According to senior U.S. officials, however, the administration is expected to delay the delivery of Apache helicopters. That move, which may not come until next week, would be the second major weapons sale put on hold by the U.S. in an effort to pressure the Egyptian military to halt the bloodshed and take steps toward a more peaceful transition to democracy. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter by name.

To express displeasure about the Egyptian crackdown on pro-Morsi demonstrators, the U.S. suspended the delivery of four F-16 fighter jets to Egypt and canceled biennial U.S.-Egyptian military exercises planned for next month. Obama has said that the United States' long-term cooperation with Egypt "cannot continue as usual."

However, the U.S. military has continued shipments of thousands of spare parts for American weapons systems used by the Egyptian forces. Plans continue for sending armored bulldozers for border security, radars and missiles in the coming months.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said Thursday that he believed the U.S. had reached a "tipping point" on Egypt.

"The Egyptian military needs to let the democratic process go forward," McConnell, R-Ky., told CNN. "I think we're going to be voting on this again in September because it looks to me like the

crackdown is not an indication that they are moving in the direction of having a new election."

Meanwhile, the latest concerns about chemical weapons in Syria prompted a meeting of Obama's national security team. Secretary of State John Kerry, who is on vacation, attended via video teleconference and made a flurry of telephone calls to world leaders to discuss the unrelenting bloodshed in Syria.

The United States said in June that it had conclusive evidence that Assad's government had used chemical weapons against opposition forces. That crossed what Obama had called a "red line" and prompted a U.S. decision to send arms to Syrian rebels, including guns, ammunition and shoulder-fired, anti-tank grenades.

State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said that 1,000 to 1,800 people were killed near Damascus in the latest alleged chemical weapons attack. She said Obama had directed U.S. intelligence agencies to gather additional information, but "right now, we are unable to conclusively determine chemical weapons use."

French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius on Tuesday raised the possibility of the international community using force. Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said at a news conference in Berlin, "Several red lines have been crossed — if sanctions are not imposed immediately, then we will lose our power to deter."

Kerry has also urged other nations to help gather information about the reports of chemical weapons attacks. And the Obama administration is expected to hold more meetings on the matter in coming days.

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., a leading advocate of a more aggressive U.S. response to the events in Syria, said on CNN that if Assad believes there will be no retaliation, Assad would see that "the word of the president of the United States can no longer be taken seriously."

Top military leaders have cautioned against even limited action in Syria. Dempsey, the Joint Chiefs chairman, said in a letter this week to a congressman that the U.S. military is clearly capable of taking out Assad's air force and shifting the balance of the war toward the armed opposition. But such an approach would plunge the U.S. into the war without offering any strategy for ending what has become a sectarian fight, he added.

In Congress, Republicans are split between hawks such as McCain and tea party isolationists such as Sens. Rand Paul of Kentucky and Ted Cruz of Texas. In between there is no clear picture either, with moderates like Sen. Bob Corker of Tennessee voicing opposition to a U.S.-enforced no-fly zone over Syria while others say it is time to act.

On Egypt, Paul, Cruz and 11 other senators voted to halt all U.S. aid to military leaders last month, but they were defeated as a majority of Republicans and all Democrats backed continued assistance. Many in both parties stressed the importance of maintaining U.S. leverage and supporting Israel's security. Since then, however, McCain and some others have switched sides, saying U.S. funds now should be suspended given the harshness of the Egyptian government's crackdown on Islamist opponents.

Among Democrats, Sens. Patrick Leahy of Vermont and Carl Levin of Michigan believe U.S. law compels a halt in aid to Egypt until democracy is restored. Most of their colleagues disagree. On Syria, some in Obama's party see the president wading dangerously toward war by authorizing weapons deliveries to the rebels, while hawks and humanitarian interventionists believe he is doing too little.

Protesters demand Planned Parenthood records

Planned Parenthood calls request a 'fishing expedition'

Matt Ryan - Burlington Free Press

August 23, 2013

Six Vermont women who oppose abortion are seeking personnel records and information about health-care services, abortions in particular, from Planned Parenthood of Northern New England.

The lawyer for the women says he needs the information to support a lawsuit he filed against the city of Burlington about whether the government can prohibit the abortion opponents from protesting less than 35 feet from the clinic on St. Paul Street.

Planned Parenthood's attorney calls the subpoena a "fishing expedition."

"It's really invasive information that they're trying to get," said lawyer Claudine Safar, who works in Burlington.

The women sued the city a year ago, alleging the Burlington ordinance that established the 35-foot buffer zone around reproductive clinics was unconstitutional and was being enforced more at Planned Parenthood than at other reproductive healthcare facilities.

A federal judge upheld the constitutionality of the ordinance in February, but he allowed the lawsuit to go forward on the question of whether Burlington was applying the measure evenly throughout the city.

U.S. District Judge William Sessions III added, however, that the lawsuit also was "unlikely to succeed" on those grounds.

The plaintiffs' attorney, Michael DePrimo of Hamden, Conn., appealed Sessions' ruling and, on July 25, subpoenaed Planned Parenthood.

DePrimo takes anti-abortion cases on behalf of conservative Christian ministries. In the Burlington case, he represents Agnes Clift of South Burlington, Amy Cochran of Richford, Molly Jesse of Essex Junction, Jean Osborne of Colchester, Rita Mantone of Underhill and Bridget Mount of Swanton.

The information he requested included the job titles and duties of all the clinic's employees, the number of abortions performed at the facility, medical referrals for pregnancy counseling and emotional or mental health counseling, and the names and addresses of the people or entities to which such referrals were made.

DePrimo said he needs much of that information to establish for the court that Planned Parenthood is indeed a reproductive healthcare facility as defined by the city ordinance — even though no one involved in the case is disputing that claim.

"The only way that I could verify that, for purposes of the court record, was to get it directly from Planned Parenthood," DePrimo said. "I don't have any doubt that it's a reproductive healthcare facility. But the question is whether you can prove it in court. You need evidence. It's not enough to say everybody knows."

He wrote in a motion supporting the subpoena that he needs personnel records to determine whether people who escort women into the clinic are Planned Parenthood employees, because if they're not, they could be violating the ordinance.

"The complaint alleges that Planned Parenthood 'escorts' stand and walk around inside the buffer

zone," he wrote. "In order to resolve whether these or any other Planned Parenthood employees/agents qualify for exemption under (the ordinance) the scope of their employment must be examined."

DePrimo said he initially asked the city for information about Planned Parenthood before he subpoenaed the organization.

Pietro Lynn, the lawyer who represents Burlington in the case, said the defense provided DePrimo all the relevant information it had.

"We have fully complied with our discovery responsibilities in providing information to the plaintiffs," Lynn said.

Jill Krowinski, director of Vermont public affairs at Planned Parenthood of Northern New England, declined to talk about the case and deferred to Safar, the organization's attorney.

Safar wrote in a motion to quash the subpoena that the abortion opponents' requests "seek information that is not relevant to the issue of whether the ordinance is constitutional as applied."

"The information sought in these requests concerns the abortion activities of Planned Parenthood itself rather than the manner in which the ordinance is being applied against pro-life demonstrators versus pro-choice demonstrators," she wrote.

DePrimo said he will begin interviewing employees of Planned Parenthood under oath next week, unless the judge intervenes.

Montpelier -- Lawmakers endorse tighter rules on emergency housing

Rules review panel also urges consideration of other revisions on housing homeless in motels

Nancy Remsen - Burlington Free Press

August 23, 2013

A legislative panel has endorsed revisions to the temporary rules the Shumlin administration wrote that tighten access by homeless Vermonters to motel vouchers.

But lawmakers also urged state officials to consider additional revisions when writing the permanent regulations.

"This is far from resolved," Sen. Diane Snelling, R-Chittenden, said. "Without some structure, we had people certainly taking advantage with the motels. This does set a structure that we can work with, but it will need to be constantly improved."

The emergency rules, which are in effect from Aug. 1-Nov. 29, set up a new eligibility system to decide who can be housed in motels when homeless shelters are full. The rules specify that homeless persons over age 65, those receiving federal disability benefits, families with children age six or younger, and women in the third trimester of pregnancy qualify automatically for motel accommodations.

Others would have to show they meet several criteria, such as being a disabled veteran, having older children, and recently having been discharged from a hospital. There are eight eligibility criteria, each counting for one or two points, and the rule says to qualify to stay in a motel an individual or family needs to score four points.

The Legislature ordered the Shumlin administration to make rule changes to better manage emergency housing and because lawmakers capped this year's appropriation for housing in motels at \$1.5 million. Last year, the state spent \$4 million on emergency motel housing.

Rather than continue to rely so heavily on motels, lawmakers added \$1.6 million to programs such as rental subsidies to help keep people from becoming homeless.

Thursday, the Legislature's Administrative Rules Committee, which reviews government regulations to determine if they match the Legislature's intentions, voted 5-0 to endorse the latest version of the emergency housing rules. The vote came after representatives of the Department for Children and Families spent July meeting with advocates for the homeless and other critics to try to resolve the sharp differences that emerged when the rules were first unveiled.

"I want to express appreciation ... for the changes that were made," Erhard Mahnke of the Vermont Affordable Housing Coalition told the rules panel. "They were significant." The original rules didn't give any categories of homeless automatic access to motels, but instead required people to score six points on the eligibility criteria chart.

Still Mahnke and others cited concerns.

Mahnke criticized the lack of flexibility in the rules. "We think the commissioner or his designee ought to have waiver authority."

Mahnke also questioned the requirement that homeless housed in motels contribute 50 percent of gross monthly income and all available resources toward the cost of their motel stay.

"If you are spending more than 30 percent of your disposable income, you are in an unsustainable situation," he said. "You don't have enough resources for other necessities."

Joseph Patrissi, executive director of Northeast Kingdom Community Action Inc., questioned why a family with a child under six was more vulnerable than one with a child of seven, eight, nine or ten.

Chris Carpenter, manager of case management and social work at Fletcher Allen Health Care, warned that the revised rules would result in hospitals keeping homeless patients longer than necessary or paying to put them in motels during their recuperation. Both options shift the costs of providing for the homeless from the state to hospitals, he said.

Fletcher Allen cares for between three and ten homeless individuals a month and many wouldn't qualify for motel vouchers under the new guidelines, Carpenter said. He cited a recent case in which a 51-year-old homeless male required outpatient shoulder surgery, but the surgeon was reluctant to do the operation because the man had no place to recover.

State officials have proposed that the revised emergency rules become permanent. The adoption process is underway with a hearing scheduled for Sept. 20.

Richard Giddings, deputy commissioner at the Department for Children and Families, acknowledged the rules panel's message about considering additional revisions. "People are providing us with feedback and we will take it into consideration."

Moretown steps into the landfill mess

Improper disposal of trash has increased since the landfill's closure in mid-July

April Burbank - Burlington Free Press

August 23, 2013

Moretown officials plans to meet Friday with the state agencies that denied recertification of the town's landfill, leading to its closure on July 15.

Tom Martin, chairman of the Moretown Selectboard, said the meeting is meant to give the town a better understanding of the landfill's settlement with the state Agency of Natural Resources in July. The town had not been involved in the legal process surrounding the closure, Martin said.

The landfill closed because of concerns over odor and groundwater contamination around the landfill. It has indicated that it plans to apply later this year for state approval to open a new portion of the landfill, called Cell 4.

Martin said the town has taken no official position on the landfill's plans to apply to open again.

"At this point, we're not advocating one way or another," Martin said.

Meanwhile, the town continues to see mattresses, tires and trash strewn along its roads, and Martin said he has smelled the sickly odor of burning garbage on a regular basis.

"We're going to start patrolling and try to find out where it's coming from," Martin said of the burning smell. "I've got to believe it's multiple people."

In addition, he said, town officials would begin going through some of the trash bags along roadways in an attempt to identify the people who had dumped them there.

Martin said area residents should bring their trash to transfer stations in Waitsfield and Waterbury for proper disposal.

ED -- Encourage agricultural entrepreneurs

Burlington Free Press

August 23, 2013

Vermont's farmers often need more than farming to stay in business these days. That's why it makes sense for communities to encourage agricultural entrepreneurs — farmers who delve into diversified small businesses based on their agriculture.

The aim is to retain the working landscape that defines Vermont, which agriculture helps maintain.

Communities that see open rural lands as an integral part of their character ought to look for ways to help farmers stay in business.

Hinesburg is exploring changes that would allow farms to operate agriculture-related businesses such as cafes, tours and inns as a way to generate more income.

As the Free Press reported, "The potential would exist for landowner-entrepreneurs to apply for conditional use approval to create a farm cafe, host weddings and other events, process agricultural product, hold day camps and other uses..."

Mike Isham recently restored the dairy barn on his family dairy farm in Williston to host weddings. As the Free Press reports, "Isham is one of several Vermont farmers entering the wedding business ... And it can be big business."

The concept of marrying farming and a sideline is nothing new. Corn mazes, produce stands and pick-your-own fruit have been a regular feature of the Vermont countryside for years.

The Allenholm Farm apple orchard in South Hero features a bed and breakfast as well as a petting zoo.

Farming must remain the main businesses — agricultural land receives special tax consideration from the state — with the other enterprises playing supporting roles. Also important is making sure the new agricultural enterprises don't violate long-term visions for the community.

After all, many people who value a rural lifestyle would be unhappy if their small-town streets were clogged with visitors lining up to get into a new farm attraction in town.

As is often the case, the trick is to strike the proper balance. The goal is to find ways to open the path toward farm innovation and diversification to help preserve something everyone values.

Finding ways to help farms make it as a business in a changing marketplace is far better than resorting to government bailouts or seeing the loss of agricultural land to sprawl.

My Turn by Steve Mann -- Effective prevention in primary care

Burlington Free Press

August 23, 2013

On a recent summer day, as the afternoon cleared from a day of downpours, the late day sun revealed a magnificent scene at the Ethan Allen Homestead. The Brass Balagan marching band was leading a raucous parade, children were making musical instruments, hula-hooping and sack racing, entertainers were singing and dancing, and families were enjoying delicious food from all over the globe.

Families and friends from all over the world, as well as Burlington and local surrounding towns, filled Ethan Allen Homestead with about 400 happy people. We came to celebrate the 25th anniversary of one of Burlington's most cherished organizations: the Visiting Nurse Association's Janet S. Munt Family Room. The staff pulled out the stops for a good time for everyone there. The smiles showed the success.

I had the good fortune to be a volunteer at this event celebrating the 25th anniversary of an organization that I greatly respect. My deep respect and admiration comes from my lifetime work as a family medicine physician working in the Burlington area, and knowing the work of the VNA Family Room to care for, support and nurture babies, children and families.

I know the problems we face from mental health problems, to chronic pain, opioid, other drug and alcohol abuse, bad lifestyle choices, and bad habits, not to mention all the resulting and associated medical disease states that are common. There are a lot of things not going well. In its quiet, unassuming way, the VNA Family Room is helping people be well.

In my effort as a doctor to be helpful to my patients, I have realized my best work with anyone is to look for and emphasize the positive and healthy things in their lives that might really help them be well. One of the most important clues I know about someone is that the person who has a caring supportive family has a better chance of getting well, whatever the problem.

I also learned that the child from a healthy, caring, nurturing family is likely to do better and be more resilient to life stressors than the child who comes from a stressful unsupported environment.

What I know best, from 30 years of working with families, is that it is a really tough job for all of us to raise a healthy family. All families need help and support to do a good job.

That's where the VNA Family Room shines. The VNA Family Room supports families to help grow healthy children. Healthy children have a better chance at becoming healthy adults. Every child needs our help to grow up healthy both physically and emotionally. A supportive, caring, nurturing family is the foundation that every child needs.

The VNA Family Room is a true role model for the world to know about. There are groups for fathers, groups for new moms and babies, playgroups for children, a preschool, parenting classes, nutrition classes, opportunities for parents to learn English or to get their high school diploma, and much more. The true wonderment of the VNA Family Room is that they can do all this important work and still put on a great party.

I believe that the VNA Family Room is a role model for the direction that primary preventative health care needs to take. We currently spin our wheels trying to fix what is broken. We would be better served to focus our energy on growing healthy, resilient, caring and creative children. A sturdy, supported family has the best chance to offer the child an early foundation for a healthy and happy life. Programs like the VNA Family Room that support the family in this task are key

to solving some of our recalcitrant social problems.

The VNA Family Room is already providing solutions for families to grow healthy and strong. The VNA Family Room deserves not only our awareness and support, but also the recognition of the important work they do of helping families be well.

Dr. Steve Mann lives in Charlotte.

Northfield -- Norwich gets contract for cyber war game

Wilson Ring - AP -- Burlington Free Press

August 23, 2013

A nonprofit organization controlled by Vermont's Norwich University is getting a \$9.9 million federal contract to continue work on a cyber-warfare gaming system that helps financial institutions and others learn how to respond to attacks on their computer networks, officials said Thursday.

Norwich's Applied Research Institute will use the money to further refine the program so more private and public groups can plan for cyberattacks through coordinated exercises.

The challenge of learning to respond to cyberattacks is there won't necessarily be a concrete action that is easy to recognize, such as when emergency responders stage mock accidents or the military stages an attack to test their response, said Phil Susmann, the president of the Research Institute.

"In a cyber event, there's not going to be 'there was a bomb, respond,'" Susmann said. Instead, it could show up as an apparently innocuous computer problem or, in the financial sector, an issue with trading.

The program, known as the Distributed Environment for Critical Infrastructure Decision-making Exercises program, or DECIDE, helps organizations recognize that something is happening and respond appropriately.

"The first time they encounter these types of circumstances shouldn't be in a live event. It should take place so that you can make sure that your response plans are adaptable and flexible," Susmann said.

Norwich will use the money from the latest contract to continue developing the system used by financial institutions and other organizations to respond to attacks on their computer systems.

Advancements in DECIDE will allow multiple organizations to take part in cyberattack simulations. Earlier versions have already been used to simulate electronic attacks.

Norwich University offers undergraduate degrees in computer security and information assurance and a master's degree program in information assurance, but the Research Institutes is a separate nonprofit organization controlled by the university, said Norwich President Richard Schneider.

The latest contract is expected to create about a dozen jobs.

Letter -- Tax exemption for bonds is key

Rutland Herald

August 23, 2013

In October of 2009, the Champlain Bridge was forced to close after 80 years of continuous use, severing a vital link between Vermont and New York. Because of the federal tax exemption on municipal bonds, we were able to build a new bridge much cheaper than we might otherwise have. In recent weeks, Congress has proposed eliminating the tax exemption for municipal bonds. Any step toward removing or capping this exemption would increase borrowing costs, placing a greater burden on Vermont's taxpayers.

Why preserve the tax-exempt status of state and local government bonds? Because states and municipalities save an average of 25 percent to 30 percent on interest costs compared to taxable bonds. The new Lake Champlain Bridge is a perfect example: Municipal bonds formed the backbone of the state's financing plan. My office conservatively estimates the project cost would have increased more than \$2 million had these bonds been subject to taxation. It's also estimated that Vermont's taxpayers have saved at least \$85 million in interest costs over the past 10 years on the state's bonds alone. If you add the 300-plus Vermont cities, towns, school districts, colleges, hospitals and other agencies that also use municipal bonds, the savings are many times greater.

That's why I am joining with Senators Leahy and Sanders, Congressman Welch and 41 of my fellow state treasurers from across the political spectrum to oppose any changes to municipal bonds. We know that our states and municipalities cannot afford to lose one of our best tools for a bright financial future.

BETH PEARCE

(State treasurer)

Montpelier

Pearce, delegation defend municipal bonds

Peter Hirschfeld - Rutland Herald

August 23, 2013

A federal tax reform under consideration in Congress could substantially increase the cost of roads, bridges, buildings and other infrastructure funded by bonds, according to State Treasurer Beth Pearce.

Among the revenue-generating tax reforms in the budget proposal unveiled by President Barack Obama earlier this year is a plan to reduce the federal tax exemption on interest earned on municipal bonds.

Investors now enjoy a nearly 40 percent exemption on their municipal bond returns, an enticement that allows issuers like the state of Vermont to secure far more favorable interest rates than they would otherwise.

"And that lower interest rate lowers the cost of borrowing for the state, and ultimately benefits the taxpayer," Pearce said Thursday.

Pearce is among 42 state treasurers nationwide to sign a petition urging Congress and the White House to torpedo the provision. But the proposal is under serious consideration on Capitol Hill, where a new Senate bill aims to go even further by doing away with the federal tax exemptions on municipal bonds altogether.

According to an analysis by Pearce's office, the federal exemption has saved Vermont taxpayers about \$85 million over the past decade in avoided interest payments. While the risk to investors purchasing bonds issued by Vermont would continue to be minimal, Pearce says the interest rate would nonetheless spike.

Vermont last issued general obligation bonds about a year ago, when the state sold \$93 million in bonds at rates of 2.2 percent. Pearce said market rates have since gone up to about 3 percent but could jump by nearly a third without the tax exemptions.

The bonds pay for infrastructure projects that make it into the annual capital bill — everything from improvements to interstate rest areas to the construction of police barracks and the repair of state bridges.

While reducing the exemption, as Obama has proposed, or eliminating it altogether, as the bipartisan Senate bill would do, might raise revenues federally, Pearce said, "I don't think this is a cost-effective way to do it."

The exemption has been in place since 1913.

"This is a program that for 100 years has allowed us to build and maintain our infrastructure in a cost-effective way," Pearce said. "And it's important to our state budget and to our continued economic growth."

Pearce said each member of Vermont's three-man congressional delegation opposes any changes to municipal bond exemptions.

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Federal sequestration cuts hit Head Start hard statewide

Josh O’Gorman - Rutland Herald

August 23, 2013

In a sign you really can't do more with less, the state's Head Start programs will serve fewer needy children as they head back to school this month.

The Budget Control Act of 2011, more commonly called sequestration, resulted in a 5.27 percent budget cut to the Federal Office of Head Start. Local programs are supported by federal grants, and with less grant money, things are looking grim.

The state's seven Head Start programs will receive \$800,000 less, as the cumulative budget drops from \$15.1 million to \$14.3 million, according to Ben Allen, Head Start collaborator for the state.

In terms of employment, the budget cut results in 15 fewer teaching positions and seven fewer people performing home visits. All told, the number of people working in Head Start programs has been reduced from 585 to 552.5.

Fewer workers mean fewer services. In September of 2012, the state had 1,572 spaces available for children and pregnant women. Next month, there will be 1,373 spaces available, meaning 199 fewer at-risk and vulnerable children and their families will have access to services such as health and dental care referrals.

"I think very few people understand the impact of sequestration," said Marianne Miller, director of Head Start and Early Head Start for the Central Vermont Community Action Council, which serves Washington, Orange and Lamoille counties.

Sequestration hit Miller's programs early. This summer, her Head Start locations closed their doors, leaving 115 families without services for nine weeks.

As it is, only half of the people who are eligible for Head Start services — for example, those with an annual household income of \$19,530 for a family of three — actually receive them, according to Paul Behrman, chairman of the Vermont Head Start Association.

"The whole notion we are scaling back these programs is just lunacy," Behrman said. "It makes no sense to cut these programs when we are already not reaching everyone who is eligible."

The budget cuts are hitting every corner of the state, including Windham County, where Head Start programs lost six of their 70 employees and this fall will be serving 37 fewer children and their families. The next cut will likely be to transportation, said Debra J. Gass, executive director of early education services for the Brattleboro Town School District.

"We bus our children in from our more remote areas, and without transportation, many children will be unable to attend Head Start," Gass said.

The value of Head Start can be measured by the data, such as that collected by the Champlain Valley Head Start. Between 2009 and 2011, the percentage of children who needed dental work and received it rose from 76 percent to 89 percent. During the 2010-11 school year, the percentage of children who were prepared for kindergarten rose from 30 percent to 61 percent.

Sequestration cuts are expected to be deeper next year, unless action is taken by the U.S. Congress. For more information, or to send a letter to a member of Vermont's Congressional

Delegation, visit www.saveheadstart.org.

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Vermont studies Obama's tuition plan

Josh O'Gorman - Rutland Herald

August 23, 2013

Vermont higher education officials are studying a national plan that would try to rein in college tuition costs by tying federal aid to school rankings.

President Barack Obama discussed his plan Thursday morning at the University of Buffalo as he embarked on a two-day bus trip with stops in New York and Pennsylvania.

Under his plan, colleges with similar missions would be ranked in comparison to each other. The rankings would use several metrics, such as the number of students who receive federal Pell Grants — awarded to students based on financial need — as well as tuition costs, graduation rates, job placement and debt loads for graduates.

Obama would like to see the ranking system in place by 2015, and by 2018 he wants federal financial aid to be redirected to students who attend schools that rank well. Under the proposal, students at those schools would receive larger Pell Grants and lower interest rates on federal student loans.

The plan is intended to curb tuition costs, which according to the College Board and the U.S. Census Bureau, have risen 257 percent in the past 30 years. According to the same sources, average household income has risen 16 percent in the same period. Those numbers are adjusted for inflation.

"The fact is, college has never been more necessary; it's also never been more expensive," Obama said in a speech Thursday night at Henninger High School in Syracuse, N.Y.

For Vermont college officials reached Thursday, it was too early to say if the proposal would benefit their schools.

"In terms of linking performance to financial aid, that's a laudable goal, but we don't know enough about the plan to support it or not support it," said Kevin Colburn, director of communications for GMC.

James Lambert, director of communications for the College of St. Joseph, echoed Colburn's sentiment.

"Many of the details on how rankings might change the distribution of aid aren't clear yet, but we hope there would be a clear evaluation process in regard to the ranking's impact," Lambert said in a statement. "We support the overall goal to encourage colleges to enroll low- and moderate-income students."

Tom Sullivan, president of the University of Vermont, said in a statement, "As I have often said, reducing the rate of increase for cost of attendance is one of the most important issues facing America's colleges and universities. We look forward to a productive dialogue in partnership with Vermont's political leaders as this initiative moves forward and more details become available."

Dan Smith is the director of community relations and public policy for Vermont State Colleges, which includes 13,000 students across schools in Castleton, Johnson, Lyndonville, Randolph and the Community College of Vermont.

According to Smith, state colleges are attracting financially needy students, with 45 percent receiving Pell Grants. Students graduating from state schools have an average debt load of \$28,000, slightly higher than the national average of \$26,000.

However, Vermont lags far behind in supporting its colleges, Smith said, noting that 17 percent of their financial support comes from the state, compared to 53 percent nationally.

"We saddle our students with a boatload of the costs," Smith said.

For more information on Obama's proposal, visit www.whitehouse.gov.

josh.ogorman@rutlandherald.com

ED -- A solar city

Rutland Herald

August 23, 2013

The promises and plans emanating from Green Mountain Power would be hard to believe were it not for the company's record of keeping or exceeding its promises.

At a press conference on Wednesday company officials unveiled a long list of energy projects that could make Rutland a national laboratory for innovation, as well as an exemplar in community betterment. It is an ambitious and far-sighted vision that has been embraced by Mayor Christopher Louras and other city officials. Sen. Bernard Sanders was on hand to lend his support.

GMP made big promises when it absorbed Central Vermont Public Service, the Rutland-based utility that was the largest in the state. One was to make Rutland the "solar capital" of New England. That meant it wanted to install the greatest solar capacity per capita of any city in the region — which amounted to 6.25 megawatts by 2017.

The utility is moving so quickly that it will reach that goal by next year, and so it has announced a much more ambitious goal — 10 megawatts by 2015.

Among the other new goals is a grid resiliency pilot project. One hopes that as the utility pursues the development of widely distributed power sources it also pioneers grid mechanisms allowing the region's broader system to receive power from diverse sources. There will be other solar developments, including 40 solar collectors and streetlight monitors.

GMP hopes that its innovations will draw others to Rutland to pursue the technical challenges that the company hopes to pioneer. These include residential heat pump technology and a pilot project to use ice to cool large buildings. It is ingenious but simple. The ice storage unit would create ice at night when power is cheaper and then use the ice during the day to cool the building, when power is more expensive.

The company plans to provide a mechanism for homeowners and businesses to make thermal improvements or sustainable energy investments and to pay for them on their utility bill. It also wants to expand its Cow Power project to small farms and to use local food waste for power generation.

Steve Costello, GMP's vice president for generation and energy innovation, is the guiding force behind the company's efforts in Rutland. And his vision goes far beyond the generation of electric power. For Costello GMP's solar city initiative is a path-breaking exercise in civic improvement. He has enlisted the support of Police Chief James Baker, who understands that to address the problems of drugs, crime, poverty and derelict neighborhoods, the city must promote the welfare of the city as a whole.

Costello has been the animating spirit behind the Gift-of-Life Marathon, the blood drive that was the signature of CVPS and which he has brought with him to GMP. The blood drive, Costello says, is about more than blood. It is about breathing a spirit of pride and ambition into the life of the city. That's what GMP, with the leadership of Costello, is hoping that the utility's energy programs do for the city.

It's hard to overstate the potential for these efforts for the city and the region. It could happen that the name of Rutland becomes synonymous with cutting edge technology, sustainable energy and

climate change awareness. In the past the Springfield and Windsor region was a place of cutting edge technology, known as Precision Valley, and when their industries fell into decline the region's self-image suffered. Similarly, Rutland was an industrial center, home to the Rutland Railroad, among other industries. But those industries declined, and so did the city.

Something electric is happening in Rutland, and it involves more than the flow of electrons. Downtown Rutland is becoming a nexus for the utility's energy efforts, and it is promising more. They are promises we have every expectation will be kept.

Letter -- Corporate coup in the works

Rutland Herald

August 23, 2013

Jobs in this country are hard to come by.

Half the products sampled yesterday in a visit to a new Windham County chain store were made in China, of cheap quality but apparently according to American corporate specifications. Others, of unknown origin, were simply "distributed in the U.S."

Things might get worse.

According to the August issue of Hightower Lowdown, a proposed trans-Pacific partnership (TPP) would enable foreign corporations to bid on any federal purchase. U.S. food safety regulations could be ruled as illegal trade barriers. Our Department of Energy would be unable to regulate exports of fracked natural gas. Any failure to realize "expected profits" overseas could be appealed to an international TPP tribunal.

Some 600 corporate executives are secretly working on the proposed law, most of which actually has nothing to do with trade. If the writers get their way, pharmaceutical patents would be lengthened, generics delayed, and many bulk drug purchases by our government would be prohibited. Any chance to renew Glass-Steagall requirements in order to separate consumer and investment banking functions would be stymied. Internet freedoms would be curtailed. Certain corporate copyright privileges would exceed a hundred years. Governments would be obliged to open public service sectors to private corporations.

This post-NAFTA madness certainly warrants the label of corporate coup d'etat. Other NAFTA-like proposals such as this one have been stopped. Please check hightowerlowdown.org for details.

ALAN O. DANN

Marlboro

Letter -- Judicial overreach cuts both ways

Rutland Herald

August 23, 2013

The title of the op-ed in Tuesday's Herald was eye-catching, and in reading through the piece, it came to mind that the results of the Supreme Court decision in funding the affordable care act (Obamacare) prompted the same reaction from many folks who found it difficult to justify agreement with Justice Roberts. Conventional thinking was that this was judicial overreach of the first order.

So where was the Herald in this instance? Is judicial overreach OK when it promotes a program that is oriented and set in left-wing concrete?

Judicial overreach is wrong, wrong, wrong. Congress is the maker of laws, like them or not. It is not the Supreme Court's place to stretch into that area. The Constitution is very clear in that.

JAMES B. HALL

Center Rutland

Letters -- Won't support changes to bonds

Times Argus

August 23, 2013

Won't support changes to bonds

In October 2009, the Lake Champlain Bridge was forced to close after 80 years of continuous use, severing a vital link between Vermont and New York. Because of the federal tax exemption on municipal bonds, we were able to build a new bridge much cheaper than we might otherwise have. In recent weeks, Congress has proposed eliminating the tax exemption for municipal bonds. Any step toward removing or capping this exemption would increase borrowing costs, placing a greater burden on Vermont's taxpayers.

Why preserve the tax-exempt status of state and local government bonds? Because states and municipalities save an average of 25 to 30 percent on interest costs compared with taxable bonds. The new Lake Champlain Bridge is a perfect example: Municipal bonds formed the backbone of the state's financing plan. My office conservatively estimates the project cost would have increased more than \$2 million had these bonds been subject to taxation. It's also estimated that Vermont's taxpayers have saved at least \$85 million in interest costs over the past 10 years on the state's bonds alone. If you add the 300-plus Vermont cities, towns, school districts, colleges, hospitals and other agencies that also use municipal bonds, the savings are many times greater.

That's why I am joining with Sens. Leahy and Sanders, Rep. Welch and 41 of my fellow state treasurers from across the political spectrum to oppose any changes to municipal bonds. We know that our states and municipalities cannot afford to lose one of our best tools for a bright financial future.

Beth Pearce

Vermont state treasurer

Barre

Montpelier -- Pearce, delegation defend municipal bonds

Times Argus

August 23, 2013

MONTPELIER - A federal tax reform under consideration in Congress could substantially increase the cost of roads, bridges, buildings and other infrastructure funded by bonds, according to State Treasurer Beth Pearce.

Among the revenue-generating tax reforms in the budget proposal unveiled by President Barack Obama earlier this year is a plan to reduce the federal tax exemption on interest earned on municipal bonds.

Investors now enjoy a nearly 40 percent exemption on their municipal bond returns, an enticement that allows issuers like the state of Vermont to secure far more favorable interest rates than they would otherwise.

"And that lower interest rate lowers the cost of borrowing for the state, and ultimately benefits the taxpayer," Pearce said Thursday.

Pearce is among 42 state treasurers nationwide to sign a petition urging Congress and the White House to torpedo the provision. But the proposal is under serious consideration on Capitol Hill, where a new Senate bill aims to go even further by doing away with the federal tax exemptions on municipal bonds altogether.

According to an analysis by Pearce's office, the federal exemption has saved Vermont taxpayers about \$85 million over the past decade in avoided interest payments. While the risk to investors purchasing bonds issued by Vermont would continue to be minimal, Pearce says the interest rate would nonetheless spike.

Vermont last issued general obligation bonds about a year ago, when the state sold \$93 million in bonds at rates of 2.2 percent. Pearce said market rates have since gone up to about 3 percent but could jump by nearly a third without the tax exemptions.

The bonds pay for infrastructure projects that make it into the annual capital bill - everything from improvements to interstate rest areas to the construction of police barracks and the repair of state bridges.

While reducing the exemption, as Obama has proposed, or eliminating it altogether, as the bipartisan Senate bill would do, might raise revenues federally, Pearce said, "I don't think this is a cost-effective way to do it."

The exemption has been in place since 1913.

"This is a program that for 100 years has allowed us to build and maintain our infrastructure in a cost-effective way," Pearce said. "And it's important to our state budget and to our continued economic growth."

Pearce said each member of Vermont's three-man congressional delegation opposes any changes to municipal bond exemptions.

Projects in Calais highlight shoreline issues

Times Argus

August 23, 2013

A state commission is touring Vermont to get the public's input on lakeshore protection and development issues.

The commission is meeting amid concern that in the absence of regulation, some shorelines are being damaged by excessive land clearing.

Two such projects took place recently on the shores of Mirror Lake in Calais, a pristine water body also known by the more prosaic name of No. 10 Pond. But "Mirror Lake" really does it more justice. The water is crystal clear, darkening to a deep blue where it drops to more than 100 feet deep.

Anthony Iarrapino wants to keep it that way.

"I come to this lake all the time to swim. I see a lot of people from central Vermont here, from all economic backgrounds, including people who aren't fortunate to own a camp here," he said. "And it's really clean water. And I think that's one of the reasons it's so popular."

Iarrapino is a senior attorney with the Conservation Law Foundation, a regional environmental group that's following the shore land commission's work. Iarrapino was out in a canoe on Mirror Lake to get a closer look at two recent clearcuts on the shoreline - land clearing that might have been prevented under legislation now pending in the Legislature.

On the far side of the pond, a landowner got a local zoning variance to clear a swath of shore land 90 feet wide and more than 150 feet long up a steep hill to a house across the road.

"It's unbroken forest until you get to this really wide cut where there's one or two trees still left standing and some low, low shrubs and vegetation," he said.

Lake scientists say shoreline trees and other plants are nature's own best tools for keeping water clean and habitat friendly to fish and other creatures. The vegetation holds back and filters polluting runoff. Overhanging branches provide cool shade for fish.

A bill that would regulate land clearing and some construction within 250 feet of a shoreline passed the House last spring but stalled in the Senate. Lawmakers instead set up the special commission to get public input and make the case for why more lakeshore protection is needed.

The commission met first in Newport two weeks ago. Questions from the public were filtered through a facilitator, but several themes emerged. One was a complaint that the lakeshore issue was being singled out while other pollution problems - such as runoff from dirt roads — were not being addressed.

State officials have said they haven't seen a rush to develop lakeshore property while the Legislature considers more restrictions. But at the Newport meeting, some residents raised concerns about a large clearcut for a second home on Lake Willoughby.

Essex-Orleans Sen. John Rodgers tackled the issue of environmental enforcement. He also addressed the tension between protecting the environment and protecting property rights. Rodgers said that any legislation must still allow people who own small lakefront lots the ability

to build on their property.

"The folks with the big checkbook have absolutely no problem — and we've seen that on Willoughby Lake. They thumb their nose at the regulations and just pay the fine," he said. "I'm concerned that the average person be able to, without degrading the water quality, be able to enjoy their property without a big checkbook."

Back on Mirror Lake, Iarrapino made the case for more protection. He said a Maine law modeled after a former Vermont statute has been on the books for 40 years. Vermont allowed its law to expire, while a recent study found Maine's lakes are cleaner.

"So it's been proven here in New England that it can work. Robust property rights can coexist with reasonable environmental protection," he said.

Iarrapino said Vermont law gives too much control over lake water quality to towns.

"It's clear that the volunteer officials in many of these municipalities aren't equipped with the scientific resources to make decisions," he said.

Just then, the wild call of the loon punctuates his point that some creatures need an undisturbed shoreline to thrive. Iarrapino and other environmentalists hope lawmakers will get out on the water and listen.

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ED -- What happened to clemency?

Times Argus

August 23, 2013

Attorney General Eric Holder said many encouraging things in his important speech on the future of sentencing reform, but the most striking thing may have been what he did not say. In all his 4,000 words on the United States' "broken" legal system - and particularly on its outlandishly harsh and ineffective sentencing laws - there was not one mention of executive clemency.

That power, which the Constitution explicitly grants to the president, has always served as an indispensable check on the injustices of the legal system and as a means of demonstrating forgiveness where it is called for. It was once used freely; presidents issued more than 10,000 grants of clemency between 1885 and 1930 alone. But mercy is a four-letter word in an era when politicians have competed to see who can be toughest on crime.

As ProPublica has documented, the pardon process has devolved into a mockery of itself, riven by arbitrariness, racial disparity and charges of abuse. Pardons of powerful, well-connected individuals like Marc Rich, by Bill Clinton, and Lewis Libby, by George W. Bush, have only increased cynicism about the process.

Meanwhile, President Barack Obama's use of the pardon power remains historically low. In 4½ years, he has received almost 10,000 applications for clemency and has granted just 39 pardons and one sentence commutation. No one seems to know why some requests are granted and others denied. To call it a lottery is unfair to lotteries; at least if you pick the right numbers, you're guaranteed to win.

Many proposals for reform have been put forth over the years, the most promising of which would reduce the power of the Justice Department over the process, where career prosecutors are predictably reluctant to question their own decisions.

Obama's first White House counsel, Gregory Craig, understood this conflict of interest. Early in Obama's first term he proposed an independent commission of former judges, prosecutors, defense lawyers and others who would make pardon recommendations to the president. But he left soon after, and any motivation to reform seems to have disappeared with him.

As the experience of many states shows, a functional pardon system must also be accountable. This can mean requiring the executive to publish an annual report on pardon policy and practice. Currently the president has no obligation to explain his grants or denials, which undermines public trust in the system.

In this light it is disheartening that the Obama administration continues to resist calls to remove the current head of the pardon office, Ronald L. Rodgers, despite a finding by the Justice Department's inspector general that in 2008, Rodgers misrepresented material information in recommending that the president deny a petition for clemency.

In a 2003 speech, Justice Anthony Kennedy said that "a people confident in its laws and institutions should not be ashamed of mercy." In the 10 years since that speech, requests for mercy have increased even as the prospects for reform have not. In the first 10 months of fiscal 2013, 2,000 inmates applied for commutations, more than in any single year in history.

Executive clemency may not be the ideal way to ameliorate the system's excesses, but for many people stuck with an unjustly long sentence or a conviction that prevents them from getting jobs,

business licenses or even public housing, it remains the only way. In his speech Holder denounced such "unwise and counterproductive" collateral consequences of imprisonment, which makes his failure to address pardons all the more perplexing.

Holder was right to call for a substantial overhaul of our criminal justice system. But any meaningful reform must include the clemency process, by which we temper our most punitive tendencies. It is long past time for the president to heed the words of Kennedy and reinvigorate this fundamental executive prerogative.

Commentary by Tom Watkins -- Torture or coercion?

Times Argus

August 23, 2013

Anyone who has served in the military for any length of time ends up with a handful of ribbons, medals and other symbols of recognition or accomplishment. One that I value very highly is a small patch showing a small loop of barbed wire and the letters SERE - search, evasion, resistance and escape. The SERE (pronounced "sear") patch represents an experience that I'll never forget.

SERE starts with three days in classroom sessions followed by two cold, wet days and nights on an isolated part of a Pacific Coast beach with no food or shelter. We students made up a weak soup of clams, crabs, seaweed and other items we thought might be remotely edible. After that, we were bused 150 miles to a camp in the San Bernardino Mountains for five more days. That camp started with another cold night and another weak soup of bugs, roots, snakes and leaves - and then the real fun began.

We were told to get from our camp in the woods to a cabin about 5 miles away. If we got there without being captured, we would get a hot meal and a bed to sleep on. What they didn't tell us was that no one ever gets to the cabin. I managed to evade capture for about five hours.

The POW portion of the school tries to make your experience as real as possible. We were told that the acting guards would not break character and that everything is intended to be a lesson. The only rule was that we were forbidden to fight back. We were told that if we had any ideas of how we would act in a real situation, now was the time to try it out because this will be as real as it gets without being an actual POW. I was anxious about whether I would weaken and give up under pressure and vowed to try to act like Rambo. Besides, I figured they would never get as rough as the real thing. That was a big mistake.

Within 30 minutes of capture, I was waterboarded. For failure to return a deep bow correctly, I was tied, face up, lying on a bench. Then a towel was pressed over my face and water was poured onto the towel. The effect was ingenious, immediate and very effective. I was convinced I was drowning, but I swallowed very little water. As soon as I agreed to bow properly, they stopped.

I recovered very quickly after the towel was taken away. By the time I was untied, I felt good enough to be defiant again. The head guard gave me a deep bow at the waist and then demanded I return the gesture. I nodded my head up and down about an inch. This enraged the guard, and I was waterboarded again. This sequence repeated three more times before we were all rushed off on buses and taken to our POW camp.

In the POW camp, we were kept in small boxes, interrogated, indoctrinated and subjected to various unpleasant physical coercions - what some would call torture. In the post-camp debrief, I was told to tone down the macho act - in a real POW camp, I would have been shot. I left the camp four days later, very hungry and tired with a lot of soreness and bruises and a few cuts and scrapes. I was waterboarded 13 times, but I would not classify what I experienced as torture.

Torture is what the North Vietnamese did to our POWs — like John McCain and James Stockdale — that inflicted permanent bodily damage. Torture is what they did during the Spanish Inquisition. Torture is not the unpleasant discomfort of loud music, meager meals or physical exhaustion. These forms of coercion just don't seem to be bad when compared with saving lives.

I would certainly agree with Richard Posner, a judge on the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit, when he said, "If torture is the only means of obtaining the information necessary to prevent the detonation of a nuclear bomb in Times Square, torture should be used — and will be used — to obtain the information. ... No one who doubts that this is the case should be in a position of responsibility."

A more modest statement was offered by Albert Mohler, president of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary: "Under certain circumstances, most morally sensitive persons would surely allow interrogators to yell at prisoners and to use psychological intimidation, sleep deprivation, and the removal of creature comforts for purposes of obtaining vital information. In increasingly serious cases, most would likely allow some use of pharmaceuticals and more intensive and manipulative psychological techniques. In the most extreme of conceivable cases, most would also allow the use of far more serious mechanisms of coercion — even what we would all agree should be labeled as torture."

I agree and would not hesitate to use waterboarding and other physical coercion techniques if I were convinced that it would result in getting information that would save lives. Ah, but therein lies the dilemma. It works often enough that most nations still do it, but research shows that more often than not, physical coercion results in false information. Any honest and objective analysis shows that the benefits are usually not justified. Usually, but not always.

Tom Watkins is a retired Navy officer and former business consultant. He lives in Montpelier.

Leahy aide likely to get USDA post

WCAX

August 22, 2013

MONTPELIER, Vt. -

One of the state's top federal jobs is likely to go to an aide to Senator Patrick Leahy.

Molly Lambert retired as the director of the Vermont and New Hampshire USDA rural development office in May. The state director manages hundreds of millions of dollars in loans and grants for Vermont and New Hampshire.

It's up to the president to name a replacement on the recommendation of Sen. Patrick Leahy.

One possible candidate for the job is Ted Brady, Sen. Leahy's field representative on Community and Economic Development, Transportation and Telecommunications.

Leahy spokesman David Carle said, "He'd be a perfect choice. Senator Leahy put Ted's name forward, and we hope there will be an announcement soon."

US pressed to react to violence in Syria, Egypt

Deb Riechman - The Associated Press

August 22, 2013

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. is poised to suspend another major weapons shipment to Egypt amid sharp divisions within the Obama administration over whether to cut off aid to the military-backed government. The debate mirrors similar disagreements over intervening in Syria, where there are new reports that chemical weapons have been used by the government.

Factions within the administration line up largely along two fronts: those who want the U.S. to take more decisive action to counter widespread violence in both Egypt and Syria, and senior military and some diplomatic leaders who are arguing for moderation.

The lack of a unified position — both within the administration and on Capitol Hill — is giving Obama time and space for his cautious approach. But it also poses a moral question: How far should the U.S. go to stop violence against civilians when its actions could drag America into the war in Syria or damage U.S. relations with Egypt — and undermine the Egypt-Israel peace accord.

The next military weapons shipments for Egypt are scheduled for next month — including 10 Apache helicopters at a cost of about \$500 million. Also scheduled for delivery are a number of M1A1 tank kits, including machine guns and other equipment used with the tanks, as well as some used missiles. The missiles, which have been moved and handled, but not yet fired, could be used for spare parts by the Egyptian military or they could be refurbished and fired.

According to senior U.S. officials, however, the administration is expected to delay the delivery of Apache helicopters. That move, which may not come until next week, would be the second major weapons sale put on hold by the U.S. in an effort to pressure the Egyptian military to halt bloodshed and take steps toward a more peaceful transition to democracy.

The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly

The Pentagon has argued for pragmatism in the U.S. response to Egypt. Defense officials say cutting off aid would threaten key national security agreements and could rattle the peace between Egypt and Israel. Pentagon leaders, including Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel and Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, say that would rob the U.S. of any continuing leverage, and also risk agreements that give America access to the Suez Canal and allow military flights over Egypt.

Even as officials continue to review aid to Egypt, the U.S. military has continued shipments of thousands of spare parts for American weapons systems used by the Egyptian forces, including armored bulldozers for border security, radars and missiles.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said Thursday that he believed the U.S. had reached a "tipping point" on Egypt. "The Egyptian military needs to let the democratic process go forward. I think we're going to be voting on this again in September because it looks to me like the crackdown is not an indication that they are moving in the direction of having a new election," he told CNN.

Meanwhile, the latest concerns about chemical weapons in Syria prompted a more than 90-minute meeting of the U.S. national security team. Secretary of State John Kerry, who is on vacation, attended via video teleconference and made a flurry of telephone calls to world leaders to discuss the unrelenting bloodshed in Syria.

So far, the U.S. response on both Egypt and Syria has been measured. That cautious approach is riling those who believe America should take immediate action against actions by Egypt's military and Syrian President Bashar Assad's government.

To express displeasure about the Egyptian crackdown on demonstrators calling for the reinstatement of ousted President Mohammed Morsi, the U.S. suspended the delivery of four F-16 fighter jets to Egypt and canceled biennial U.S.-Egyptian military exercises planned for next month. Obama has said that America's long-term cooperation with Egypt "cannot continue as usual."

On Syria, the United States said in June that it had conclusive evidence that Assad's government had used chemical weapons against opposition forces. That crossed what Obama had called a "red line" and prompted a U.S. decision to send arms to Syrian rebels, including guns, ammunition and shoulder-fired, anti-tank grenades.

State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said between 1,000 to 1,800 people were killed in the latest alleged chemical weapons attack near Damascus. She said Obama had directed the U.S. intelligence community to urgently gather additional information but that "at this time right now, we are unable to conclusively determine chemical weapons use."

"The red line is the use of chemical weapons," she said. "That was crossed a couple of months ago. ... If these reports are true, it would be an outrageous and flagrant escalation of use of chemical weapons by the regime."

She said Kerry had spoken on the phone with Syrian National Coalition chief, Ahmad al-Jarba, to express U.S. condolences to the Syrian people, to U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and to other foreign officials.

French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius on Tuesday raised the possibility of the international community using force. Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu said at a news conference in Berlin, "Several red lines have been crossed — if sanctions are not imposed immediately, then we will lose our power to deter."

Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz., a leading advocate of a more aggressive U.S. response to the events in Syria, said on CNN that "If (Assad) feels there's not going to be any retaliation," he would see that "the word of the president of the United States can no longer be taken seriously."

So far, top military leaders have cautioned against even limited action in Syria.

Dempsey, the Joint Chiefs chairman, said in a letter this week to a congressman that the U.S. military is clearly capable of taking out Assad's air force and shifting the balance of the war toward the armed opposition. But such an approach would plunge the U.S. into the war without offering any strategy for ending what has become a sectarian fight, he said.

But Congress is divided.

The GOP is split between hawks such as McCain and tea party isolationists including Sens. Rand Paul of Kentucky and Ted Cruz of Texas. In between there is no clear picture either, with moderates such as Sen. Bob Corker of Tennessee voicing opposition to a U.S.-enforced no-fly zone while others say it is time to act.

On Egypt, the picture is even murkier. Paul, Cruz and 11 other senators voted to halt all U.S. aid to military leaders last month, but were defeated as a majority of Republicans and all Democrats backed continued assistance. Many in both parties stressed the importance of maintaining U.S. leverage and supporting Israel's security. Since then, however, McCain and some others have switched sides, saying U.S. funds now should be suspended given the harshness of the Egyptian government's crackdown on Islamist opponents.

Among Democrats, Sens. Patrick Leahy of Vermont and Carl Levin of Michigan believe U.S.

law compels a halt in aid to Egypt until democracy is restored. Most of their colleagues disagree. And on Syria, some in Obama's party see the president wading dangerously toward war by authorizing weapons deliveries to the rebels, while liberal hawks and humanitarian interventionists believe he is doing far too little.

Associated Press writer Bradley Klapper in Washington contributed to this report.

Obama: U.S. aid to Egypt no longer 'business as usual'

Dan Merica - CNN

August 23, 2013

(CNN) —President Barack Obama said on Thursday that while United States aid to Egypt is unlikely to influence the military government's crackdown on protests, there is "no doubt that we can't return to business as usual."

"My sense with Egypt is that the aid itself may not reverse what the interim government does," Obama said in an exclusive interview with CNN "New Day" anchor Chris Cuomo.

The United States provides \$1.2 billion in military aid and \$250 million in economic aid to Egypt every year. After the Egyptian military ousted popularly elected Egyptian President Mohamed Morsy in July, many in Congress called on the Obama administration to cut the U.S. assistance. After the Morsy ouster, Egypt's military began to crack down on his party, the Muslim Brotherhood. The crackdown led to ferocious clashes in the streets of Cairo and other Egyptian cities, many of which have led to condemnation from the international community. Around 900 people have been killed in the clashes. The violence was Egypt's worst since the 2011 revolution that ousted President Hosni Mubarak. During the interview, Obama said that the U.S. is working with a shortened time frame in Egypt, alluding to the fact that the time is nearing for a definitive American response to the violence. "It's a more abbreviated time frame?" Cuomo asked Obama. "Yes," Obama said. Despite the turmoil, Obama emphasized the importance of U.S.-Egypt relations. "This is a partnership that's been very important to us, in part because of the peace treaty with Israel and the work that's been done to deal with the Sinai," Obama said. Egypt is seen as a key ally in a highly complicated and volatile region. The country is one of two Middle East nations that has signed a peace treaty with Israel and has been a lynchpin for wider diplomacy in the Middle East.

Obama echoed other officials in his administration, stating that right now his administration is evaluating the situation and trying to establish what is in the long term interest of the United States. "There was a space right after Mr. Morsy was removed in which we did a lot of heavy lifting and a lot of diplomatic work to try to encourage the military to move in a path of reconciliation," Obama said. "They did not take that opportunity." There is currently uncertainty in Washington over whether aid to Egypt has been cut off. While a U.S. official told CNN on Tuesday that the Obama administration is withholding some military aid to Egypt as it reviews how to proceed, the White House said repeatedly that any suggestion aid had been halted beyond two areas that have already been announced was inaccurate. "Providing foreign assistance is not like a spigot," White House spokesman Josh Earnest said Tuesday. "You don't turn it off and on, or turn it up or down, like a faucet. Assistance is provided episodically. That is, it's provided in specific tranches." Leaders on Capitol Hill, however, were telling a different story. David Carle, a spokesman for Sen. Patrick Leahy, confirmed to CNN on Monday that his office was told that military aid has been halted. Leahy, a Vermont Democrat, is chairman of the committee that oversees such funding. "As we noted yesterday, the State Department and Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee was told that the transfer of military aid was stopped, that this is current practice, not necessarily official policy, and there is no indication of how long it will last," an aide to Leahy reiterated in a statement on Tuesday. Debate over aid to Egypt began when the Obama administration did not classify Morsy's ouster as a "coup." If the administration had done that, as many lawmakers called on it to do, it would have been forced to cancel aid. More than half of Americans in a new poll believe the United States should halt military aid. But the situation is complex. "The United States is kind of in a 'damned if you do, damned if you don't' situation," said Tarek Radwan, associate director for research at the Atlantic Council.

Analyst Jon Alterman said the issue centers on what Washington wants to accomplish. "If you are trying to change the decision-making process of the Egyptian military -- that is very hard to do right now because they believe they are locked in an existential struggle," said Alterman, Middle East program director at the Center for Strategic & International Studies. "If what you are trying to do is demonstrate our resolve to the rest of the world and people looking on, that is another issue." CNN's Jessica Yellin and Alan Silverleib contributed to this report.

Government study calls for tougher patent reviews

Brendan Sasso - The Hill

August 22, 2013

The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office should do more to ensure that unclear and overly broad patent applications are rejected, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) recommended in a report released Thursday.

The GAO, Congress's audit arm, noted that the Patent Office has already taken steps to improve patent quality and reduce litigation, including developing uniform definitions for software terms. Imprecise terms can make it difficult for the courts to determine whether a particular product is infringing on a patent, the GAO wrote.

But overly broad patents remain a problem, especially in the software industry, the GAO concluded. The agency recommended that the Patent Office more closely examine trends in patent litigation to determine how to better weed out improper applications.

Industry groups claimed that the report shows the need to crack down on "patent trolls"—firms that use bogus patent infringement claims to extort settlements out of businesses.

Numerous businesses have complained in recent years that they are facing an onslaught of patent complaints from firms that have no plans to create any products. Settling is often cheaper than fighting the charges in court. Several lawmakers have introduced bills to address the problem.

"We see this report as a sign that legislation is needed," said Michael Beckerman, the CEO of the Internet Association, a lobbying group that represents Google, Facebook and other websites. "[The patent troll] issue is hurting businesses of all sizes across the country, and it's hurting jobs."

In a statement, the National Retail Federation said the report affirms the group's "position that patent trolls are increasingly threatening the U.S. economy."

"Patent trolls are growing in size and strength and exploiting legal loopholes to extort hefty payments from American companies, ranging from retail to technology," the lobbying group said.

But the GAO report noted that "nonpracticing entities"—firms with no plans to create products—accounted for only one fifth of all patent lawsuits between 2007 and 2011. The agency also noted that many nonpracticing entities, such as universities, bring legitimate patent infringement claims.

"Our analysis indicates that regardless of the type of litigant, lawsuits involving software-related patents accounted for about 89 percent of the increase in defendants between 2007 and 2011, and most of the suits brought by [patent monetization entities] involved software-related patents," the GAO wrote. "This suggests that the focus on the identity of the litigant—rather than the type of patent—may be misplaced."

The agency found a major surge in patent lawsuits between 2010 and 2011, but attributed the spike to the anticipated passage of the 2011 Leahy-Smith America Invents Act, which made a variety of changes to the patent system, including limiting the number of defendants in a suit.

Obama: NSA revelations show 'oversight worked'

Justin Sink - The Hill

August 23, 2013

Recent revelations that the National Security Agency violated its own surveillance rules on thousands of occasions is evidence "all these safeguards, checks, audits, oversight worked," President Obama said.

In an interview with CNN, Obama expressed confidence nobody at the spy agency would use its surveillance abilities to spy on Americans.

"This latest revelation that was made, what was learned was that NSA had inadvertently, accidentally pulled the e-mails of some Americans in violation of their own rules, because of technical problems that they didn't realize," Obama told CNN's "New Day" in an interview airing Friday.

"They presented those problems to the (Foreign Intelligence Surveillance) court. The court said, 'This isn't going to cut it. You're going to have to improve the safeguards, given these technical problems.' That's exactly what happened. So the point is, is that all these safeguards, checks, audits, oversight worked."

A report in *The Washington Post* last week found that an internal NSA audit revealed thousands of instances where the spy agency broke its own privacy rules. In 2012 alone, the NSA reported 2,776 instances of "unauthorized collection, storage, access to or distribution of legally protected communications."

Obama insisted that there was nobody "out there trying to abuse this program or listen in on people's e-mail," but admitted that the government had not done enough to explain how the programs function.

The administration has been on the defensive for weeks following revelations by former defense contractor Edward Snowden about two previously unknown NSA surveillance programs.

"What's been clear since the disclosures that were made by Mr. Snowden is that people don't have enough information and aren't confident enough that, between all the safeguards and checks that we put in place within the executive branch, and the federal court oversight that takes place on the program, and congressional oversight, people are still concerned as to whether their e-mails are being read or their phone calls are being listened to," Obama said.

Lawmakers from both sides of the aisle, including top Democrats like Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), expressed outrage last week at the revelations.

Leahy said in a statement he would "continue to demand honest and forthright answers from the intelligence community."

"I remain concerned that we are still not getting straightforward answers from the NSA," Leahy continued.

The revelations in *The Post* were the latest in a series of disclosures by Snowden, who has claimed responsibility for leaking documents outlining the top-secret surveillance programs. Since their release, the White House has been besieged by concerns over privacy rights, while President Obama has seen his approval numbers fade.

In the interview, Obama acknowledged that "the capabilities of the NSA are scary to people."

"We've got to do it in the right way, we've got to do it in a way that makes sure that people know

their own government is looking out for their interests, but we've also got to do it in a way that recognizes that we've got some hostile folks out there that potentially are trying to do us harm," Obama continued.

Voting Rights Act, Immigration Reform on the Agenda for 50th Anniversary of the March on Washington

Rebecca Kaplan - The National Journal

August 22, 2013

For black and Hispanic leaders, the 50th anniversary of the March on Washington offers not only a chance to commemorate the civil-rights movement, but also an opportunity to make a high-profile push for some of their top public-policy priorities.

Members of the Congressional Black Caucus, who were already fighting restrictive voter-ID laws in several states, took another hit earlier this year when the Supreme Court gutted part of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Meanwhile, advocates for comprehensive immigration reform that includes a path to citizenship have spent the summer urging Republicans to join their cause, but they remain largely at the mercy of the GOP.

Both communities see the themes of the 1963 march and the call for equal rights and jobs memorialized in Martin Luther King Jr.'s historic "I Have a Dream" speeches applicable to the battles they are fighting today.

"What you'll hear is people articulating a national agenda of how we can move both economic and political empowerment forward," said Rep. Terri Sewell, D-Ala., whose state sparked the Supreme Court case over the Voting Rights Act. "We owe it to the legacy of those freedom fighters to continue to make strides forward, not just on the political front, but on the economic front as well."

Although this weekend's march is celebrating an event from 50 years ago, participants are portraying it as the chance to renew the civil-rights movement with a focus on both voting rights and economic inequality. Reps. Marcia Fudge, D-Ohio, chairwoman of the CBC, and John Lewis, D-Ga., a civil-rights icon, will be among those speaking.

"While it is a celebration of the milestones that we've accomplished, the many goals that we've accomplished, at the same time it's a time to guard what we have accomplished," said Rep. Elijah Cummings, D-Md. "We're talking about basic rights, we're talking about people trying to live the very best lives that we can, we're talking about equality and equity, and I think that, in a way, it's what Dr. King talked about."

Cummings said it would be "political malpractice" to omit the Voting Rights Act as a central topic of the weekend's events. The speakers will address the broad importance of the law, he said, but might also call upon specific members like House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio to take action.

In June, the Supreme Court ruled unconstitutional the formula that determined that nine, mostly Southern states must seek advance approval from the federal government before changing their election laws. That formula, the Court said, was out of date, and without it, the section of the law mandating that states seek preclearance loses its teeth.

The Supreme Court left the law in Congress's hands, saying it could still seek to oversee those states by writing a new formula, but lawmakers have taken only preliminary steps to do so. In June, the Senate Judiciary Committee and the House Judiciary's Constitution and Civil Justice Subcommittee held hearings on the Supreme Court decision. Only Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, has stressed the importance of quick action to restore the full force of the law.

For now, the Obama administration has shouldered most of the work of individually challenging state laws they find to be discriminatory. On Thursday, the Justice Department filed a lawsuit

challenging Texas's new voter identification law. DOJ is also joining an additional suit over the state's redistricting laws.

Meanwhile, the pace of work on immigration reform has slowed significantly since the Senate passed a bill in late June. The House of Representatives left for the August recess with no definitive floor action scheduled on the handful of bills that have come out of committee. There is no pending legislation that addresses a solution for most of the million of immigrants living illegally in the United States.

Proponents of a path to citizenship, who have been actively advocating for an immigration-reform bill over the congressional recess, are using the march to press for quick action on their priorities. Janet Murguía, the president of the National Council of La Raza, told reporters on a conference call that King's speech 50 years ago resonated with the Latino community. "He remains a beloved icon to everyone," she said.

"African-Americans understand the inherent power of citizenship," said Wade Henderson of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, who spoke to reporters on the conference call with Murguía and others. Leaders from both the black and Hispanic communities have said joining efforts will make them stronger, not dilute either message.

Rep. Luis Gutierrez of Illinois, perhaps the most prominent Democratic advocate for immigration reform, made this case from his own personal experience. "Quite simply, without the march and the movement, there is no Voting Rights Act, and with no Voting Rights Act, there is no majority Latino district carved out in Chicago in 1990," he said. "I wouldn't be on this call as Rep. Luis Gutierrez."

A Question of How Women's Issues Will Fare, in Washington and Overseas

Sarah Wheaton - The New York Times

August 23, 2013

WASHINGTON -- Catherine M. Russell's portfolio includes half the population of the planet, roughly 3.5 billion women. But working with the 70,000 employees of the State Department to make women's issues a permanent priority, she said, may be the "harder slog" in a difficult new job.

"It's something that most people in the building I think are very receptive to, but it's a long process," Ms. Russell said in a recent interview in a coffee shop in downtown Washington.

Ms. Russell's position, ambassador at large for global women's issues, was created by Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton in 2009 to elevate one of Mrs. Clinton's longtime causes.

But Ms. Russell's new boss, Secretary of State John Kerry, is primarily focused on forging Middle East peace, not women's issues. The question at the State Department, and among Mrs. Clinton's friends, is whether the ambassador at large and women's issues over all will get the attention they once did.

So far the White House says yes. Ms. Russell was a close aide to Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr. when he was in the Senate, and most recently she was chief of staff to Mr. Biden's wife, Jill. She is married to Tom Donilon, a former national security adviser to President Obama, who stepped down in June.

"She's extremely well connected, in a quiet way," Mr. Biden said in a telephone interview. Ms. Russell is empowered, he said, by "two important things: John Kerry and me." He quickly added, "And the president."

Still, Ms. Russell's White House connections will be tested in a field where success is hard to define and the goals are often amorphous. In a speech in April, Mrs. Clinton said in a typical formulation that she had created the job to weave the perspective of women's issues "into the fabric of American foreign policy."

Mrs. Clinton chose as the first women's ambassador her close friend Melanne Verveer, who was her chief of staff as first lady. In Ms. Verveer's subsequent travels to more than 60 countries -- where she often said that "no country can get ahead if it leaves half its population behind" -- leaders always knew she was channeling one of the world's most famous women.

Ms. Russell does not have that advantage, but said she was determined to carry on Mrs. Clinton's work. Her mission, she said, is to build on the efforts of the Office of Global Women's Issues -- with its staff of 24 and budget last year of \$3.4 million -- to "put in place the structure and the mechanisms to keep moving this effort forward long after all of us are gone."

Officials in the office cite as accomplishments their push to ensure that 300 women took part in nationwide peace talks in Afghanistan in 2010 and their insistence that women's advancement be codified in the strategic partnership agreement that set forth the relationship between the United States and Afghanistan after 2014.

The office also counts as success stories a \$17 million effort in 2009 to crack down on sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo -- including training for police officers and judges, and health care and jobs courses for survivors -- and an extensive public-private partnership in the Americas that provides female entrepreneurs better access to markets and credit.

"Investing in women, advancing and protecting their rights, is not just the right thing to do

morally," Ms. Russell said during her confirmation hearing in July. "It is the smart thing to do economically and strategically."

But in the interview, her first since her confirmation as ambassador, Ms. Russell seemed less at ease discussing her new global terrain and more comfortable talking, at length, about the federal bureaucracy she lives and breathes in Washington. She joked that she would have advised Mrs. Biden against giving that kind of long-winded answers. At 52 and the mother of two teenagers, she said she had recovered fully from a minor stroke she suffered last December.

Ms. Russell has not always made women's issues a professional focus. But they have "been the center of her life and her interests," Mrs. Biden said in an interview.

In Reading, Pa., Ms. Russell's parents raised five children -- she was the oldest -- and ran a small plastics business. She studied philosophy at Boston College before earning a law degree at George Washington University. Ms. Russell first met Mr. Donilon when they worked on Walter F. Mondale's presidential campaign in 1984. They married in 1991.

By then, Ms. Russell was senior counsel to Senator Patrick J. Leahy, Democrat of Vermont, who testified at her confirmation hearing and is now chairman of the Senate subcommittee in charge of the State Department's purse. She was also an associate deputy attorney general in the Clinton administration in the mid-1990s.

But most of her experience in Washington comes with the Bidens. In 1994, Ms. Russell helped shepherd the Violence Against Women Act through Congress when Mr. Biden was the chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee. Later, when Mr. Biden led the Foreign Relations Committee, she drafted an international version of the bill as his top adviser on women's issues. Last year Ms. Russell oversaw an effort by multiple departments to develop an ambitious plan for combating violence against women worldwide.

"I feel like I have a pretty good sense of how the government works," Ms. Russell said, "and how to move things through the government."

But she knows she faces hurdles. Jennifer Klein, Ms. Verveer's former deputy who continues to advise Mrs. Clinton on women's issues, said, "We obviously dealt with a lot of people at the State Department who were very interested in this, and then we dealt with a lot of people who thought that has nothing to do with their work."

Others see women's issues as a marginal focus when there are so many violent conflicts around the world.

"Certainly the problems specifically affecting women in Syria are not unimportant," said Kenneth M. Pollack, a former staff member of the National Security Council who is now a scholar at the Brookings Institution. But in such a humanitarian catastrophe, he said, "until you have an answer to the military problem in Syria, you can't solve any other problem."

Ms. Russell's first trip abroad as ambassador -- to Bali for a forum on women held at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit meeting, a gathering of business and political leaders from the region -- reflects another effort of her office: inserting discussions about women into diplomatic talks.

Mr. Kerry, for his part, held a meeting with businesswomen during his first visit to Afghanistan, and in an opinion article that ran on March 8, International Women's Day, wrote, "The world's most pressing economic, social and political problems simply cannot be solved without the full participation of women."

Such attention to women is a sharp shift from the 1970s and 1980s, when the State Department was embroiled in court battles with female officers who said they had been passed over for policy-making jobs.

As the first man to serve as secretary of state since 2005, Mr. Kerry "will be so effectively powerful as a male secretary to raise these issues with male counterparts," Ms. Verveer said. "I think it is so counterintuitive, so unexpected."

These days a course on women's issues will soon be mandatory for new foreign service officers. In May, a three-day elective version of the course met for the second time in Arlington, Va., at the Foreign Service Institute. But of the 24 students, a mix of seasoned officers and newer recruits, women outnumbered men by a 2-to-1 ratio.

Still, Ms. Russell knows she has the support of one male-dominated organization: the White House. Denis McDonough, the White House chief of staff, called her this summer to congratulate her on her confirmation. She told him, she said, that "the bad thing is now I'm going to start bugging you about how the president can help us."

U.S. suspends police assistance for St. Lucia over alleged killings

Sarah Peter - Reuters

August 22, 2013

CASTRIES, St. Lucia, Aug 22 (Reuters) - The United States has suspended assistance to the police department of the Caribbean island of St. Lucia as a result of allegations of serious human rights violations, the State Department confirmed on Thursday.

The government of St. Lucia was officially notified of the decision last Friday, the State Department said in a statement.

"The Department of State has made a policy decision to withdraw training and material assistance to the Royal St. Lucia Police force due to credible allegations of gross human rights violations," the statement said.

The island's prime minister, Kenny Anthony, acknowledged the cut off during an address to the nation on Tuesday evening, citing a U.S. law, known as the Leahy amendment after its principal sponsor, Democratic Senator Patrick Leahy of Vermont, which bars aid to foreign security forces accused of human rights violations.

Neither the State Department nor the St. Lucia government was immediately available to give the amount of the assistance.

It was unclear whether the U.S. action would have a significant impact on the small island of 163,000 inhabitants in the eastern Caribbean whose police force suffers from limited resources and is heavily dependent on foreign aid.

The allegations stem from 12 killings committed between 2010 and 2011, some of which were committed by an "ad hoc task force within the police department," a U.S. State Department Human Rights Report said.

The alleged extra-judicial killings stemmed from the circulation of a hit list targeting persons deemed to be criminals. Five suspects whose names were on that list were shot and killed during police operations.

Anthony, during his speech on Tuesday, confirmed seeing such a list while he was in the opposition.

The killings occurred during a government led by the United Workers Party under the leadership of then Prime Minister Stephenson King.

At the time, King issued a warning to criminals prior to the commencement of a police action, dubbed Operation Restore Confidence, saying they would be "hunted down," Anthony noted in his speech.

The prime minister promised to take immediate action to deal with the matter. "It is in our vital interest to maintain close ties of cooperation with the United States in security matters," he said, adding that he has invited CARICOM, the regional Caribbean community of nations, to identify three senior investigators to probe the killings.

"The investigators will be asked to evaluate all available evidence and determine whether or not these matters warrant further action," he said.

Anthony also said he planned to draw up new legislation to investigate extra-judicial police killings. "This measure is needed to ensure that a mechanism exists to deal with such situations in the future, should such unexplained or suspicious deaths occur." (Reporting by Sarah Peter;

Edited by David Adams and Eric Beech)