

Lawmakers meet with relatives of Newtown victims

By Alan Fram and Nedra Pickler
Associated Press

President Obama and Vice President Biden met Thursday with relatives of the victims of the Connecticut school shooting, who were visiting Washington on the eve of the six-month anniversary of the tragedy to push anew for gun control.

Legislation to expand background checks for gun buyers failed in the Senate in April, and there are no indications it has gained any traction over concerns about protecting gun rights. But some of the Sandy Hook victims' relatives have been making emotional pleas to lawmakers this week and appeared with supportive lawmakers at a Capitol news conference Thursday.

Twenty first-graders and six staffers were killed on Dec. 14 in the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn. Some of the families of the victims have pushed Congress to toughen firearms laws, and Obama spokesman Jay Carney said that the White House commends their "courage and perseverance."

"We want them to know that, as we approach the six-month anni-



JACQUELYN MARTIN/AP

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., said he would not accept watered-down background checks as the price of new gun legislation.

versary of that terrible day, we will never forget, and we will continue to fight alongside them," Carney said.

The White House would provide no details, saying that was intended to protect the families' privacy. But Obama made clear later that he will pursue his gun safety efforts.

"I'm not giving up the fight to keep our kids safe from gun violence," Obama said during remarks at a White House celebration of LGBT Pride Month.

Biden plans to hold a gun control event at the White House on Tuesday, although his office won't discuss any details. Last week, Biden sent an email to Democrats saying he has complete faith Congress will pass meaningful gun laws if everything is done to make it happen and declared, "This fight is far from over."

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., said Thursday that he would not accept watered-down

background checks as the price for pushing new legislation through his chamber. Reid, speaking at the news conference with the families, did not specify what parts of the legislation he would refuse to weaken or remove, or when a fresh vote on the issue might occur.

Gun control supporters have worried that to declare victory, Democrats might remove required record-keeping of gun sales from the measure — which advocates say would render the legislation toothless.

"The bill that passes the Senate must include background checks and not a watered-down version of background checks," Reid said. "We're not going to let the forces of an extreme minority water down and damage the contents" of the legislation.

Reid said talks aimed at finding the 60 votes the measure will need to prevail "have not borne much fruit yet" but predicted they will. Reid and other supporters must find at least five additional votes — which means they will need support from at least one more Republican — even though gun rights advocates have successfully fought against new laws.

Unpaid internships in jeopardy after ruling

Unpaid internships have long been a path of opportunity for students and recent grads looking to get a foot in the door in the entertainment, publishing and other prominent industries, even if it takes a generous subsidy from Mom and Dad.

But those days of working for free could be numbered after a federal judge in New York ruled this week that Fox Searchlight Pictures violated minimum wage and overtime laws by not paying interns who worked on production of the movie "Black Swan."

The decision by U.S. District Judge William H. Pauley III may lead some companies to rethink whether it's worth the legal risk to hire interns to work without pay. For many young people struggling to find jobs in a tough economy, unpaid internships have become a rite of passage essential for padding resumes and gaining experience.

"I'm sure this is causing a lot of discussions to be held in human resource offices and internship programs across the country," said David Yamada, professor of law at Suffolk University in Boston. — AP

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ON WALL STREET

Market surges on new data

NEW YORK — Good news about hiring and spending at retail businesses helped send the U.S. stock market sharply higher Thursday.

For investors, the pair of government reports offered more encouragement that the U.S. economic recovery will continue, even as Europe and Japan struggle. The Standard & Poor's 500 index soared 23.84 points, or 1.5 percent, to 1,636.36.

The gains were broad. All 10 industry groups within the S&P 500 rose, led by retailers and other consumer-discretionary companies. Gannet soared 34 percent, the most in the S&P 500, on news that it would buy another media company, Belo.

Investors have been debating when the Fed will begin cutting back its bond purchases and worrying about the effect. They could get a better sense next Wednesday, when the bank releases its policy statement and Fed Chairman Ben Bernanke holds another news conference. — AP

NEWSMAKER

J. SCOTT TARRANT

Tarrant was promoted to president of RRD International, a Rockville biotech-product-development company. He has been chief business officer since 2010, when he joined the company. Previously, Tarrant was executive vice president of global sales and marketing for Xceleron.

FOOD FIGHT

Grocers allege potato group inflated prices

By John Miller
The Associated Press

BOISE, IDAHO — A U.S. wholesale grocer says America's potato farmers have run an illegal price-fixing cartel for a decade, driving up spud prices while spying on farmers with satellites and aircraft fly-overs to enforce strict limits on how many tubers they can grow.

Kansas-based Associated Wholesale Grocers' lawsuit against United Potato Growers of America and two dozen other defendants was shifted this week to U.S. District Court in Idaho, America's top potato-producing state at 30 percent of the nation's supply.

The grocery group, a cooperative which supplies more than 2,000 stores including IGA, Thriftway and Price Chopper in 24 states, contends that the potato growers banded together in 2004 to illegally inflate prices in a scheme akin to the petroleum-producing OPEC cartel, reducing planting acreages and destroying potatoes, all to restrict



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what was available for sale.

"UPGA utilized predatory conduct and coercive conduct in ensuring compliance with the price-fixing scheme," according to the lawsuit, which charges tactics including use of "satellite imagery, fly-overs, GPS systems, and other methods to enforce its agreement to reduce potato supply."

The grocers are asking for triple damages, likely in the millions, and are focusing on growers of fresh potato varieties found in big bags in supermarket produce aisles, as well as potatoes that are processed into golden fries, tater-tots and other products and sold in freezer sections of the group's stores.

United Potato Growers of America has organized growers in 15 states — it has members in Alaska, California, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Kansas,

Minnesota, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Oregon, Texas, Washington and Wisconsin, representing three-quarters of the nation's fresh potato production.

United Potato Growers of America's Salt Lake City-based attorney, Randon Wilson, contends that his group is shielded by the Capper-Volstead Act, the 1922 federal law that under some circumstances exempts agricultural cooperatives from antitrust regulations.

"Right from the beginning, we did everything right, to qualify for Capper-Volstead," Wilson said. "We know what you have to do to qualify for that limited exemption and we followed all those rules."

However, Associated Wholesale Grocers says the growers illegally sought to boost costs of America's most-popular vegetable.

"None of the defendants ... is entitled to the limited protections found in the Capper-Volstead Act for their efforts to restrict potato supply and fix prices," wrote Patrick J. Stueve, the grocer's lawyer in Kansas City.

RECOVERY

Retail sales jump 0.6 percent in May with help from autos

By Martin Crutsinger
The Associated Press

Americans stepped up purchases at retail businesses in May, spending more on cars, home improvements and sporting goods. The gain shows consumers remain resilient despite higher taxes and could drive faster growth later this year.

The Commerce Department said Thursday that retail sales increased

0.6 percent in May from April. That's up from a 0.1 percent gain the previous month and the fastest pace since February.

The April gain was led by a 1.8 percent jump in auto sales, the biggest increase in six months. Excluding volatile autos, gas and building supplies, core retail sales rose 0.3 percent. That's slightly higher than the 0.2 percent April increase.

Sales increased at hardware and

general merchandise stores, but fell at furniture and appliance stores.

Separately, the Labor Department said the number of Americans seeking unemployment benefits dropped 12,000 last week to a seasonally adjusted 334,000. The decline suggests steady job gains will endure.

The retail sales report is the government's first look each month at consumer spending, which drives 70 percent of economic activity.

LOCAL DIGEST

FROM THE WASHINGTON
BUSINESS JOURNAL

SAIC settles overcharging suit for \$12 million

Science Applications International Corp. agreed to pay \$11.75 million to settle a whistle-blower lawsuit that said the company overcharged the federal government for services it provided under grants to train first responders.

Between 2002 and 2012, the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology awarded SAIC subgrants from the federal government to provide course management, development and instruction for a curriculum to train first responders who deal with terrorism events involving explosive devices.

JPMorgan lays off 84 in Falls Church

The ax is falling at JPMorgan Chase & Co. in the D.C. area. The New York financial services giant will be laying off 84 people in its Falls Church mortgage servicing office July 6.

The local cuts are among about 1,800 nationally, which will be spread across several JPMorgan mortgage servicing offices.

Homestead to be bought by Omni Hotels

By the start of next month, one of Virginia's most renowned and historic resorts is set to change hands.

Omni Hotels & Resorts announced Wednesday it has reached a definitive agreement to acquire and operate five properties affiliated with the owner of the Homestead in Bath County.

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