

Obama and Biden pay their respects to Sen. Byrd
Congressional delegation attend memorial service in Charleston, W.Va. Friday



CHARLESTON, W. Va.-- President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden were among the dignitaries attending the memorial service for Sen. Robert Byrd (D-Va.) in Charleston, W. Va. Friday morning. The hour-long service was also attended by a congressional delegation.

Byrd, the Senate's longest-serving member, died at the age of 92 Monday.

Byrd's closed casket was flown from Washington Thursday night where it laid throughout most of the day in repose in the Senate chamber. It was the first time a senator's remains had been laid in the chamber since former Sen. William Langer (R-N.D.) in 1959. Sen. Joe McCarthy (R-Wis.) also received the honor after his death.

The senator's casket was escorted Thursday into the Senate by an honor guard and placed on the Lincoln Catafalque, a seven-foot wooden platform that supported the casket of President Abraham Lincoln in 1865 and has been used rarely since then for national dignitaries.

Byrd's body was flown back to Washington later Friday afternoon, and a funeral service has been scheduled for 11 a.m. Tuesday at Memorial Baptist Church in Arlington, Va. Seating will be open to the public, but limited. Internment is private.

Byrd's office said he will be laid to rest at a cemetery in Virginia alongside his wife Erma, who died in March 2006. The couple will be moved later and reburied in West Virginia once family

members determine a location.

Much of Tuesday in the Senate was devoted to floor speeches in tribute to Byrd.

Byrd, the self-educated son of a coal miner, was a nine-term Democrat whose speeches were laced with references to poetry and the Greek and Roman classics. He was the self-proclaimed "champion of the Constitution."

He was also known as the "King of Pork," using top positions on the Senate Appropriations Committee to steer federal spending to his home state, one of the nation's poorest. He was an outspoken opponent of the war in Iraq, calling his 2002 vote against "a blind and improvident" authorization of military action.

Born in North Carolina on Nov. 20, 1917, Byrd started his political career by running for the state House of Delegates in 1946., while working as a butcher and welder. He won a seat in the House of Representatives six years later, was elected to his first Senate term in 1958 and won his ninth in 2008.

He opposed civil rights when he first ran for office, a stance he came to regret later in life. He blamed that "Southern atmosphere in which I grew up, with all the prejudices and its feelings," for his opposition to equal rights, which included joining the Klu Klux Klan in the 1940s.

Byrd was married to his childhood sweetheart, the former Erma James, for nearly 69 years. They had two daughters.

U. S. Supreme Court extends gun rights
Mayor Daley fights back, introduces new and stricter ordinance

CHICAGO-- Mayor Richard Daley reacted sharply to the U.S. Supreme Court's decision Monday that Americans nationwide have a constitutional right to have a handgun at home for self-defense, even in cities that until now have outlawed handguns.

The 5-4 decision reversed a ruling that had upheld Chicago's ban on handguns and all but declared the 1982 ordinance unconstitutional. The justices sent the case back to a lower court to issue the final decision.

Monday's ruling extends the reach of the Second Amendment and opens courthouse doors nationwide for gun rights advocates to challenge restrictions on firearms as unconstitutional. The high court did not say those challenges will necessarily succeed.

Daley introduced Thursday what city officials say could become the nation's strictest handgun ordinance. The measure, which draws from ordinances around the country, would ban gun shops in Chicago and prohibit gun owners from stepping outside their homes, even onto



their porches and garages, with a handgun.

"As long as I'm mayor, we will never give up or give in to gun violence that continues to threaten every part of our nation, including Chicago," Daley said at a park on the city's South Side. At his side were activists, city officials and the parents of a teenager whose son was shot and killed on a city bus while shielding a friend.

The results of the vote on the ordinance by the City Council Friday were not known at press time.

France puts ex-Panama dictator Noriega on trial



PARIS-- Panama's ex-dictator went on trial in Paris Monday, accused of laundering Colombian drug money in French banks.

Dressed in a dark suit, his hair slicked back, the 76-year-old former military leader calmly gave his name as he stood before three judges. He was not allowed to wear his trademark military fatigues and appeared frail and confused about his age.

Noriega's lawyers, meanwhile, complained about dirty, dilapidated conditions in the prison

where he is being held. The former military strongman, who spent 20 years in U.S. custody for drug trafficking after being disposed in the 1989 invasion of his country, could return to prison for 10 years if he is convicted as charged in France.

His three daughters were seated nearby as the hearings started. It was the second time France put Noriega on trial for money laundering. A French court in 1999 sentenced Noriega in absentia to ten years in prison, but for years he fought extradition until a U.S. Supreme Court ruling quashed his last appeal.

The money funneled in the late 1980s was allegedly used by his wife Felicidad and a shell company to buy three luxury apartments in Paris that have since been seized by the French government. Noriega denies taking money from cocaine dealers and claims the funds were from his brother's inheritance, his wife's fortune and payments made to him by the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency.

Noriega has invoked his immunity as a former head of state and also spoke of his failing health to try to win his freedom and return to his home country. He suffers from paralysis and high blood pressure. Panama has asked France to hand him over to face trial for human rights atrocities, but Paris has said that will not happen before the case against him has run its course.

The three days of hearings ended Wednesday and a verdict is not expected for several months. The court could decide to uphold the previous conviction and 10-year jail sentence.

BP hopes to get back to work on oil spill as Tropical Storm Alex slows

MIAMI, Fla.-- Tropical Storm Alex is weakening. Winds across Mexico decreased slightly below 40 mph Thursday, according to the National Hurricane Center. The news also brought hope to BP who temporarily halted work on the massive oil spill.



Alex was downgraded to a tropical storm after making landfall in Mexico and was heaping heavy rains over Mexico and south Texas.

Alex made landfall late Wednesday night as a Category 2 hurricane, striking the Mexican municipality of Soto la Marina with 105 mph winds. The National Hurricane Center said Mexico's weather service said the storm's center made landfall with 96 mph winds in San Fernando

in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas, 75 miles south of the border, according to meteorologist Martin Tellez.

Although Alex was more than 600 miles away from the oil spill, officials said the storm could affect clean-up efforts for days because it stirred up heavy seas across the Gulf of Mexico.

Alex has already disrupted the containment booms meant to limit the amount of oil reaching shore, Coast Guard Rear Adm. Paul Zukunft said in a press briefing Wednesday.

More than 500 skimming ships had to return to shore and efforts to burn oil on the surface and break it down with dispersants were put on hold Zukunft said. Also halted was a move to position a third ship to collect oil at the spill site.

The storm could prohibit skimming and burning of oil at least until Saturday or Sunday.

Heavy rains caused many streets to flood Wednesday in the coastal city of Matamoros, across the border from Brownsville, Texas.

Brownsville appeared to take the brunt of Alex's outer band after as many as six tornadoes were reported in the area.

No injuries were immediately reported from the twisters

near Brownsville, but some damage was reported, including downed trees and power lines, weather and emergency management officials said.

At least 1,000 people in southern Texas took shelter in evacuation centers.

President Barack Obama issued a federal emergency declaration for Texas ahead of Alex's expected arrival, the White House said.

Manhunt for killer of 2 Florida police officers



TAMPA, Fla.-- Police continued their search for an ex-convict charged with fatally shooting two Tampa, Fla. police officers early Tuesday morning. Uniformed and undercover officers, air support and search dogs were being used in the manhunt.

The two officers were Jeffrey Kocab and David Curtis. Both officers were 31, according to

the Tampa police department.

Curtis had pulled over a vehicle and found its male passenger had an outstanding warrant for "minor violations," Tampa Police Chief Jane Castor told reporters Tuesday. Kocab responded to back Curtis up and "as they put their hands on the suspect, the suspect spun around, pulled a firearm and shot both police officers," she said.

The woman, who police believe was driving the car, 22-year-old Nicole Brantly, was taken into custody Tuesday afternoon for questioning, but was not arrested.

The shooter was identified as Dontae Rashawn Morris, 24. Morris was released from prison in April after serving two years for cocaine possession and sales. He also served about nine months on other cocaine possession charges in 2004, according to prison records.

The St. Petersburg Times reported that in 2006, Morris was found not guilty of attempted first degree murder, aggravated battery with a firearm, attempted robbery and possession of a short-barreled shotgun.

Kocab's wife was due to give birth next week, while Curtis leaves behind his wife and four sons, ages 9, 6, 5 and 8 months.

French energy company stops sales to Iran

PARIS-- Total, a French energy company, has stopped deliveries of petroleum to Iran amid growing international pressure over its nuclear program.

Total confirmed the move days after the U.S. Congress passed unilateral sanctions that could punish companies doing business with Iran. The sanctions still have to be signed into law by President Barack Obama.

The U.S. and some allies believe Iran is seeking a nuclear weapon. Several unconfirmed reports indicate the country may already be nearing completion of two atomic bombs. Tehran, however, says its nuclear program is peaceful.

It was not immediately clear on how much petroleum Total had been supplying Iran, or exactly when deliveries were stopped. But the Financial Times newspaper quoted traders as

saying that Total had stopped supplies about a month ago.

The sanctions by the U.S. aim to stop international companies from investing in Iran's oil and gas industries or supplying petroleum products by preventing them from trading in the U.S. if they trade with Iran.

Other companies have taken similar action. Spain's Repsol confirmed on Monday that it had withdrawn from a contract it won with Royal Dutch Shell to develop the South Pars field in southern Iran.

The U.S. hopes to target a weak part of the Iranian economy.

Despite the huge oil and gas reserves, Iran still cannot refine enough petroleum products for domestic demand and depends on imports for 30-40 percent of its petroleum needs.