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Lynn Brisendine

PUBLISHER

publisher@brownfieldonline.com

Russ McKee

ADVERTISING MANAGER

ads@brownfieldonline.com

Mattie Garcia

ADVERTISING SALES

classifieds@brownfieldonline.com

Brian Brisendine

NEWS EDITOR

news@brownfieldonline.com

Josie Musico

STAFF WRITER

sports@brownfieldonline.com

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send to
Brownfield News
P. O. Box 1272 • 409 W Hill St
Brownfield, TX 79316
Phone: 806-637-4535
Fax: 806-637-3795
www.brownfieldonline.com

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President Obama nominating Kerry for secretary of state

JULIE PACE,
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama on Friday will nominate Sen. John Kerry as his next secretary of state, a senior administration official said, making the first move in a sweeping overhaul of his national security team heading into a second term.

If confirmed, Kerry would take the helm at the State Department from outgoing Secretary Hillary Rodham Clinton, who has long stated her intentions to leave early next year. Kerry, a longtime Massachusetts senator, is expected to be easily approved for the Cabinet post by his Capitol Hill colleagues.

That would open up the Senate seat Kerry has held for nearly three decades. Recently defeated Republican Sen. Scott Brown is eyeing it, though Massachusetts Democrats insist the party can keep the seat out of GOP hands.

Obama will announce Kerry's nomination from the White House, said the official, who requested anonymity in order to discuss the president's decision before the announcement. Clinton was not expected to attend Friday's event. The secretary fell and suffered a concussion last week, State Department officials said, and hasn't made public appearances since then.

Word about Washington's latest worst-kept secret came at a somber and somewhat unusual time, with both the president and Kerry attending a memorial service for Democratic Sen. Daniel Inouye of Hawaii. At the same time, leaders of the nation's divided government were in utter limbo about how to head off the "fiscal cliff" looming Jan. 1.

Kerry's nomination could bring to a close what has become for the White House a contentious and distracting effort to name a new secretary of state.

Kerry was the Democratic nominee for president in 2004, losing a close election to incumbent George W. Bush. He's a decorated Vietnam veteran who was critical of the war effort when he returned to the U.S., even testifying in front of the Senate committee he eventually chaired.

Kerry's only other rival for the job, U.N. ambassador Susan Rice, faced harsh criticism from congressional Republicans for her initial accounting of the deadly September attack on Americans in Benghazi, Libya. Obama vigorously defended Rice, a close friend and longtime adviser, but GOP senators dug in, threatening to hold up her nomination if the president tapped her for the post.

Rice withdrew her name from consideration last week, making Kerry all but

certain to become the nominee. People familiar with the White House's decision-making said support within the administration was moving toward Kerry even before Rice pulled out.

The Cabinet nomination of Kerry, 69, is the first Obama has made since winning a second term, and the first piece in an extensive shuffle of his national security team. The president is also expected soon to nominate a new defense secretary to take over for retiring Leon Panetta and a new director of the Central Intelligence Agency to replace former spy chief David Petraeus, who resigned last month after admitting to an affair with his biographer.

The White House had hoped to unveil his national security team in a package announcement. But those plans were scrapped as the negotiations on the "fiscal cliff" consumed the administration and questions arose about the front-runner for the Pentagon post, former Republican Sen. Chuck Hagel of Nebraska. Hagel has been dogged by questions about his support for Israel and where he stands on gay rights, with critics calling on him to repudiate a comment in 1998 that a former ambassadorial nominee was "openly, aggressively gay." Kerry, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has long sought the nation's top diplomatic post. Obama considered him for the job after the 2008 election before picking Clinton in a surprise move.

Since then, Obama has dispatched Kerry around the world on his behalf numerous times, particularly to tamp down diplomatic disputes in Afghanistan and Pakistan. He was also part of Obama's debate preparations team during the 2012 election, playing the role of Republican challenger Mitt Romney in mock debates.

Kerry also won praise from Obama aides for his sharp national security-focused speech at the Democratic National Convention in August. He memorably told delegates: "Ask Osama bin Laden if he's better off now than he was four years ago."

Before nominating Kerry, the White House consulted with congressional Democrats about the fate of the Senate seat he has held for five terms. Democrats have sought to assure the White House that the party has strong potential candidates in the state.

Kerry has pushed the White House's national security agenda in the Senate with mixed results. He ensured ratification of a nuclear arms reduction treaty in 2010 and most recently failed to persuade Republicans to back a U.N. pact on the rights of the disabled.

AP World News

Tiny dollar gap between Boehner, Obama on 'fiscal cliff' belies GOP's huge political headache

WASHINGTON (AP) — When it comes to resolving their "fiscal cliff" impasse, the dollar gap between President Barack Obama and House Speaker John Boehner is tiny in federal terms. That masks a monumental political ravine the two men must try to bridge, with most of the burden on the now beleaguered Boehner.

Short of support from his own Republican Party, a chagrined speaker abruptly canceled a House vote Thursday night on his so-called Plan B. The measure would have prevented looming tax increases on everyone but people earning over \$1 million annually, but was opposed by rank-and-file Republican lawmakers unwilling to vote for any tax increases at all.

Now Boehner, R-Ohio, and Obama seem likely to bargain anew over a broad package of tax increases and spending cuts, with Thursday night's GOP retreat weakening Boehner's leverage. Ticking ever louder is the start of the new year, which by law will usher in hundreds of billions in tax increases and spending cuts — the "fiscal cliff" — unless the two men avert it by crafting a compromise deficit-cutting package that can get through the GOP-run House and Democratic-led Senate.

Despite the impassioned political clash that the "cliff" has prompted, weeks of intermittent bargaining between Obama and Boehner have left them facing relatively miniscule dollar differences by Washington standards.

Obama wants to raise taxes by about \$20 billion a year more than Boehner. The two men differ over spending cuts by roughly the same amount.

Obama vows to press ahead on fiscal cliff solution after House GOP leaders scrap vote

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama says he'll press ahead with Congress to prevent across-the-board tax increases set to strike taxpayers Jan. 1 after House GOP leaders unexpectedly put off a vote on legislation calling for higher rates on million-dollar earners was abruptly scrapped Thursday evening.

The measure "did not have sufficient support from our members to pass," House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, conceded in a brief statement.

At the White House, Press Secretary Jay Carney said that Obama's "main priority is to ensure that taxes don't go up on 98 percent of Americans and 97 percent of small businesses," citing statistics associated with Obama's campaign promise to increase top tax rates on household earning more than \$250,000 a year.

"The President will work with Congress to get this done and we are hopeful that we will be able to find a bipartisan solution quickly that protects the middle class and our economy," Carney said. Pointedly, the statement didn't say whether Obama would work with Boehner to revive stalled talks with Boehner or turn to the Democratic-controlled Senate to try to salvage the situation.

Local suspect accused of child molestation



Michael Medina

A local man was arrested Thursday on suspicion that he touched a six-year-old girl in a sexual manner.

Michael Paul Medina, 26, is charged with two counts of indecency with a child by sexual contact, a second-degree felony.

The offense of which Medina is accused allegedly occurred a few months ago in Brownfield. Detectives from the Brownfield Police Department's Criminal Investigation Division reviewed leads, interviewed witnesses and eventually formed a warrant for his arrest.

Sheriff's deputies served the suspect with that paperwork at 4:14 p.m. at his residence in the 300 block of West Powell Street. They returned him to the Terry County Jail, where he remains as of press time awaiting a bond hearing.

If convicted, Medina could face up to 20 years in prison for each of his two charges.

COUNCIL _____ From Page One

Brownfield Power and Light had revenues for the year of \$8.7 million and expenditures of \$4.9 million. The electric department has cash on hand totalling \$4,351,381.

The Water and Sewer department reported revenues of \$2.5 million and expenditures of \$1.5 million.

The water and sewer budget includes amortization because of debt service incurred by the city's involvement with the Canadian River Municipal Water Authority.

The garbage department saw revenues of just over \$1.2 million with expenditures of almost \$1.1 million.

The \$150,000 difference is "about average every year," according to Hayes.

"The city operated within the budget constraints the council approved," he said. "It was a very good year with positive cash flow and a profit at the end. You didn't have to borrow any money and as a tax payer, I appreciate that."

Hayes also added on a personal note that he has sold his accounting firm to the Lubbock-based Bolinger Segars Gilbert Moss, who plan to maintain his Brownfield office location.

"I have had the honor of doing the city's audit every year since I moved here in 1972," Hayes said. "It has been a wonderful relationship through the years and I feel confident that this firm will take good care of all of my clients, including the City of Brownfield."

The audit was approved unanimously. The council also approved a \$150,000 purchase of dumpsters for the city's garbage department.

The steel refuse containers will be purchased from Precision Flame of Plainview, the same vendor the city has used numerous times.

City Hall will be open Monday, Dec. 31, but will close Tuesday for New Year's Day.

Mayor Bob Simpson presided over the meeting and council members present were Cynthia Morin, Tom Hesse, Roxanne Barr, Rod Bearden, Jack Pinson and Brent Besler.

Geronimo Gonzales was absent.

Boehner's attempt to tactically retreat from a longstanding promise to maintain Bush-era tax rates for all was designed to gain at least some leverage against Obama and Senate Democrats in the fiscal cliff endgame. Thursday's drama was a major personal defeat for the Speaker, who retains the respect and affection of his tea party-infused conference, but sometimes has great difficulty in getting them to follow his leadership.

AP IMPACT: Federal crackdown on foreign HGH has led to record sales of the drug by Big Pharma

A federal crackdown on illicit foreign supplies of human growth hormone has failed to stop rampant misuse, and instead has driven record sales of the drug by some of the world's biggest pharmaceutical companies, an Associated Press investigation shows.

The crackdown, which began in 2006, reduced the illegal flow of unregulated supplies from China, India and Mexico.

But since then, Big Pharma has been satisfying the steady desires of U.S. users and abusers, including many who take the drug in the false hope of delaying the effects of aging.

From 2005 to 2011, inflation-adjusted sales of HGH were up 69 percent, according to an AP analysis of pharmaceutical company data collected by the research firm IMS Health. Sales of the average prescription drug rose just 12 percent in that same period.

N Korea says it has detained a US citizen for unspecified 'crimes'

PYONGYANG, North Korea (AP) — North Korea said Friday that it has detained an American citizen who has confessed to unspecified crimes.

State media said in a short dispatch that someone named Pae Jun Ho entered North Korea on Nov. 3 as a tourist but was detained because of crimes.

The North said the crimes were "proven through evidence" but didn't elaborate.

Pyongyang has detained and eventually released several Americans in recent years. Some have been journalists and others Christians accused of religious proselytizing.

In 2009, two journalists were detained after crossing into the North from China while on a reporting trip. They were later released.

FBI: 1 of 2 bank robbers who escaped federal Chicago jail arrested after dayslong manhunt

CHICAGO (AP) — One of the two bank robbers who made a daring escape from a high-rise federal jail in Chicago was arrested after a dayslong manhunt, an FBI spokeswoman said early Friday.

Special Agent Joan Hyde said Joseph "Jose" Banks was captured without incident in Chicago. Agents and officers from the Chicago FBI's Violent Crimes Task Force, along with officers from the Chicago Police Department, arrested Banks about 11:30 p.m. Thursday, Hyde told The Associated Press in an email.

The search continued for Kenneth Conley, who fled the jail with Banks early Tuesday.

Banks, 37, and Conley, 38, somehow broke a large hole into the bottom of a 6-inch wide window of the Metropolitan Correctional Center, dropped a makeshift rope made of bed sheets out and climbed down about 20 stories to the ground.

The escape went unnoticed for hours, with surveillance video from a nearby street showing the two hop into a cab shortly before 3 a.m. Tuesday. They had changed out of their orange jail-issued jumpsuits.

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