

THE NATION

GOP: High court judge must be impartial

WASHINGTON (AP) — The senator leading the GOP's review of Sonia Sotomayor said the central question in her Supreme Court nomination should be whether she allows personal views to color her decisions.

In the Republican Party's weekly radio and Internet address Saturday, Sen. Jeff Sessions didn't say whether he thinks Sotomayor crosses that line. But he raised questions that reflect a growing chorus of GOP criticism that the federal appeals court judge sees her role as something more than an impartial umpire.

Obama aide pops the question in Paris

PARIS (AP) — First lady Michelle Obama's spokeswoman got an urgent call Saturday morning, summoning her to the U.S. Embassy ahead of time. An aide told Katie McCormick Lelyveld that Obama's daughters were ready to leave and she had better hurry.

But instead of finding Malia and Sasha waiting for her, she saw her boyfriend and an engagement ring.

"I thought she was going to pass out," said Tommy Vietor, an assistant White House press secretary who handles State and Defense issues for President Barack Obama.

Vietor, 28, took a late Friday afternoon flight from Washington, arrived in Paris at 6:30 a.m. local time, grabbed a taxi and quickly showered and changed into a suit at the U.S. Embassy.

The whole operation was executed under thick secrecy with help from other White House staffers.

Actor cancels speech after student protest

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Actor James Franco says he has dropped a plan to give a commencement speech at the University of California, Los Angeles, a move that may have been prompted by pressure from students.

The "Pineapple Express" star had been the object of opposition from student protest on the social networking Web site Facebook, which claims he was not the right fit for the commencement speech.

"The problem with him as a speaker comes down to the fact he was a peer for so many of us," UCLA senior Erin Moore said. "He was in our class. He's not a role model. And he hasn't had time to accomplish anything with his degree."

THE WORLD

Bodies found near suspected crash site

RECIFE, Brazil (AP) — Searchers have found two bodies in the Atlantic Ocean near where an Air France jet is believed to have crashed, a Brazilian military official said Saturday.

Air force spokesman Col. Jorge Amaral said searchers also recovered a leather briefcase with an Air France ticket for the flight inside of it.

"It was confirmed with Air France that the ticket number corresponds to a passenger on the flight," he said.

Flight 447 disappeared Sunday with 228 people on board and officials believe there were no survivors.

Militant ambush kills two detainees in convoy

ISLAMABAD (AP) — Militants ambushed a military convoy in Pakistan's volatile northwest on Saturday, killing two detained aides of a senior cleric with close ties to the Taliban in the Swat Valley, the army said.

It was not clear if the attack was an attempt to rescue the prisoners or assassinate them before they could provide intelligence to the military — or even if the attackers knew that Taliban-linked prisoners were in the convoy.

But it underscored the instability in the northwestern region, even with some 15,000 troops fighting to end the Taliban's control there.

Military spokesman Maj. Gen. Athar Abbas also conceded that victory could only be

N. Korean missile worries Alaskans

By Mary Pemberton
ASSOCIATED PRESS

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — Alaskans are concerned over the prospect that North Korea is getting ready to test a long-range missile that could reach strategic targets in their home state.

And they're not buying Defense Secretary Robert Gates' assertion during a visit this past week to one of Alaska's many military installations that the missile is not a threat to the United States.

"I think we would definitely be a target because of the oil and the military," said Dale Walberg, owner of a

small greenhouse business in Eagle River. "They are just so secretive. What do we really know?"

There's been no direct threat against Alaska or anywhere else, but the missile North Korea is believed to be assembling for a test may have a range of 4,000 miles, putting Hawaii and much of Alaska within reach.

Alaska's two largest cities, Anchorage and Fairbanks, have both Air Force and Army bases. There's also Fort Greely, home of the Missile Defense Complex. The U.S. plans to store 26 ground-based missile interceptors in silos at the base, about 100 miles south of Fairbanks.

Other high-profile potential targets would include Prudhoe Bay, the nation's largest oil field, or Valdez, the terminus of the 800-mile trans-Alaska pipeline.

Bert Cottle, mayor of Valdez, where 16 percent of the nation's domestic oil production is loaded onto tankers for delivery to the West Coast, said he checked with two military leaders in Alaska to get their take on the developing missile situation and was told everything is status quo.

"We will wait for further updates," he said.

In the meantime, the state's political leaders are using the missile situ-

ation to send a message to the Obama administration: Maintain a strong military presence in Alaska.

Rep. Don Young, R-Alaska, sent a letter to Gates urging him to reconsider a decision to not complete construction of a second missile defense field at Greely and to place a cap on F-22 fighters at Elmendorf Air Force Base.

"We are sending the wrong message to our enemies by stopping the placement of these interceptors," Young's letter said. "While 30 interceptors may be enough to counter the current threat from North Korea, it is clear that it will not be enough in the future."



FRANCOIS MORI/ASSOCIATED PRESS

From left, U.S. President Barack Obama, Britain's Prince Charles, Britain's Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Canada's Prime Minister Stephen Harper, and French President Nicolas Sarkozy walk past an honor guard displaying the flags of each leader's country as they arrive at the American Cemetery at Colleville-Sur-Mer, near Caen, France, on Saturday to attend a ceremony marking the 65th anniversary of the D-Day landings in Normandy.

Obama remembers the price of victory

By Jennifer Loven
ASSOCIATED PRESS

OMAHA BEACH, France — President Barack Obama honored the valiant dead and the "sheer improbability" of their D-Day victory, commemorating Saturday's 65th anniversary of the decisive invasion even as he remakes two wars and tries to thwart potential nuclear threats in Iran and North Korea.

The young U.S. commander in chief, speaking at the American cemetery after the leaders of France, Canada and Britain, held up the sacrifices of D-Day veterans and their "unimaginable hell" as a lesson for modern times.

"Friends and veterans, what we cannot forget — what we must not forget — is that D-Day was a time and a place where the bravery and selflessness of a few was able to change the course of an entire century," he said.

"At an hour of maximum danger, amid the bleakest of circumstances, men who thought themselves ordinary found it within themselves to do the extraordinary."

Obama opened the emotional day by meeting with French President Nicolas Sarkozy in the nearby picturesque village of Caen. Their wives, dueling style icons in similar attire, met separately at the elegant French Prefecture.



U.S. President Barack Obama, left, greets French veteran Rene Mendiondo after being awarded Officer of The Legion of Honor at the American Cemetery at Colleville-Sur-Mer in France on Saturday.

Appearing with Sarkozy before reporters, Obama displayed growing impatience with North Korea and what he called its "extraordinarily provocative" nuclear and ballistic missile tests. He suggested that the North is testing international patience as diplomacy has failed to persuade the reclusive communist government to abandon its nuclear weapons program.

"Diplomacy has to involve the other side engaging in a serious way in trying to solve problems," he said. "We are going to take a very hard look at how we move forward on these issues, and I don't think that there should be an assumption that we will simply continue down a path in which North Korea is constantly destabilizing the region and we just react in the same ways."

Obama also took on Iran, suspected by the West of seeking to build its first nuclear bomb, an accusation Tehran denies. The president has said military action remains on the table, but has offered to change U.S. policy and engage in talks with Tehran. He said Saturday, though, it must be "tough diplomacy."

"We can't afford a nuclear arms race in the Middle East," Obama warned. Sarkozy said he worries about "insane statements" by Iran's president, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad.

At the same time, Obama is directing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan — seeking to end the first and stepping up U.S. engagement in the second. Both have lasted longer than the U.S. involvement in World War II.

This D-Day anniversary assumed special significance because veterans of the battle are reaching their 80s and 90s and their numbers are dwindling. One American veteran, Jim Norene, who fought with the 101st Airborne Division, came back for Saturday's ceremony, but died in his sleep Friday night.

"Jim was gravely ill when he left his home, and he knew that he might not return," Obama said. "But just as he did 65 years ago, he came anyway. May he now rest in peace with the boys he once bled with, and may his family always find solace in the heroism he showed here."

Palestinian singles turn to militant matchmakers for love



HATEM MOUSSA/ASSOCIATED PRESS

Ashraf Farahat, 36, left, and his wife, Rania Hijazi, 28, who married in May 2008, talk about their experience using Hamas' matchmaking service, the Taysir Association, to find spouses.

By Diaa Hadid
ASSOCIATED PRESS

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip — At 29, Tahani is considered a spinster by the standards of deeply conservative Gaza. So in her search for a husband, she turned for help to the best in the marriage business: the Islamic militant group Hamas.

"I gaze at all the men on the street and think, 'Oh God, isn't there just one for me?'" said the young woman with dark skin and honey-colored eyes, set off by a maroon headscarf.

Her application is among 287 from single women in the files of the Tayseer Association for Marriage and Development in Gaza. Photographs stapled to the files show Muslim women in headscarves, some wearing makeup, some smiling, others looking startled. They all want a husband, and the Hamas loyalists run-

ning the association are intent on finding a man for each.

Despite its fearsome reputation elsewhere, Hamas is known here for its cradle-to-grave welfare programs for the poor. It is a cornerstone of its political support in Gaza, where poverty is deepening as Israel and Egypt maintain an almost two-year blockade of the Hamas-run territory. Now, the group is branching out into matters of the heart.

"This is our vision of humanitarian work," said Wael Zard, director of the Tayseer Association. "This makes people close to Hamas and makes Hamas close to the people."

While Tayseer's matchmaking service helps both men and women, it is particularly important for women since staying single is a cruel fate for them in Gaza. They are often treated as unpaid maids

by their extended families and, says Gaza sociologist Naser Mahdi, increasing economic hardship has made the marriage market even harsher.

The dwindling number of middle-class men with steady incomes can have their pick of the prettiest women, leaving others to work hard to find a suitable husband. Meanwhile, poor families are reluctant to marry off working daughters, hoping to keep their salaries.

About 40 marriages have been arranged since Tayseer opened its matchmaking department in 2007. Most women apply in secret because it's taboo for women in Gaza to seek husbands outside the traditional route. Most girls are married in matches set up by their mothers. Dating is nearly nonexistent and love marriages are a novelty.