

# US TEA PARTY 'ALIVE AND KICKING'

## TEA PARTY PATRIOTS MARK FIFTH ANNIVERSARY

**WASHINGTON:** The foot soldiers of the tea party movement dismiss the chatter about its demise and stand ready to use their unbending political force against both President Barack Obama and the Republican establishment this election year. The Tea Party Patriots, one of the major grass-roots groups, marked the fifth anniversary of the movement Thursday, attracting hundreds of members and plenty of speakers to a Washington celebration in which they directed their animosity at the Washington establishment.

Keli Carender, national grass-roots coordinator, said the strength of the group was reflected in the \$1.2 million and counting that it raised in 10 days. To the "establishment and permanent political class," Carender said, "we don't need their millions, we've got our own." Republican primaries this election year will be a crucial test for the movement as the GOP establishment has aggressively challenged tea party-backed candidates in Kentucky, Kansas, Idaho, Mississippi, Michigan and elsewhere. Republicans blame the tea party for losses in winnable races in 2010 and 2012 that many believe cost the GOP a Senate majority.

The tactics were on display this week in Colorado. Tea party-affiliated Ken Buck, who lost a close Senate race in 2010, stepped

aside to run for the House while more mainstream Rep. Cory Gardner launched a Senate bid in a political deal. Tea partyers, who helped Republicans capture control of the House in 2010, made clear they don't like what the GOP establishment has done to their conservative agenda of limited government, free-market policies and what they consider fidelity to the Constitution. They signaled they will work hard to elect their uncompromising candidates no matter what the establishment does.

In Kansas, the Tea Party Express endorsed Milton Wolf, who is opposing three-term Sen. Pat Roberts in the Republican primary. Addressing the event, Rep Tim Huelskamp, R-Kan, was interrupted by the crowd, which stood and cheered when he said, "It's high time we retire (House Speaker) John Boehner." When the applause died down, Huelskamp completed his sentence that it was "high time to retire John Boehner's biggest excuse that we only control one-third of the government." Viveca Stoneberry of Spotsylvania, Va., said she was disillusioned with the Republican leadership because Boehner and others "pretend to be on the side of conservatives." Irene Conklin of Gainesville, Va., said Boehner needs to "take a solid stand."

The frustration isn't limited to House leaders. Steve Gibson of Columbus, Ohio, said he had offered to help Matt Bevin, the Republican businessman challenging Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky McConnell, according to Gibson, is conservative 70 percent of the time, but then "throwing in the towel every time." Gibson was particularly upset with McConnell's recent votes on allowing the nation to borrow more money. Boehner, for his part, said Thursday that he has "great respect for the tea party and the energy they brought to the electoral process."

My gripe is with some Washington organizations who feel like they've got to go raise money by beating on me and others." If Boehner and McConnell were drawing the movement's ire, Sen Ted Cruz was collecting praise. The Texas freshman and potential 2016 presidential candidate got a standing ovation and wild applause when he addressed the event, cheered for his fight last fall against Obama's health care law that precipitated the 16-day partial government shutdown. He offered no regrets and argued that the effort has proved successful in the long run, contributing to Obama's low approval ratings

and the law's unpopularity.

Cruz drew a rousing response when he told the crowd he was "absolutely convinced we are going to repeal every single word" of the health care law. Cruz, who has helped raise money for groups targeting incumbent Republicans, has refused to endorse his state's senior senator, John Cornyn, the Senate's second-ranking Republican, in Tuesday's primary. Cornyn faces Rep Steve Stockman. Another tea party favorite and possible 2016 candidate, Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky, told the group it needs to offer a happy message.

Support for the tea party has declined slightly since 2010, when members rallied around opposition to the health care law. Just ahead of the 2010 elections, an Associated Press-GfK poll found that 30 percent of adults considered themselves supporters of the tea party movement. By October 2013, that figure had dipped to 17 percent, then rebounded to 27 percent last month. Separately, a CBS News-New York Times poll this week found that 50 percent of Republicans who say they back the tea party complain that the party's candidates are not conservative enough, while just 19 percent of non-tea party Republicans said the same. —AP

# US NUKE DUMP LEAK RAISES QUESTIONS ABOUT CLEANUP

**CARLSBAD:** Back-to-back accidents and an above-ground radiation release have closed the US government's only deep underground nuclear waste dump indefinitely, raising questions about a cornerstone of the Department of Energy's \$5-billion-a-year program for cleaning up waste scattered across the country from decades of nuclear bomb making. On Feb 5, the mine was shut and six workers sent to the hospital for treatment of smoke inhalation after a truck hauling salt caught fire. Nine days later, a radiation alert activated in the area where newly arrived waste was being stored. Preliminary tests show 13 workers suffered some radiation exposure, and monitors have since detect-

ed elevated levels of plutonium and americium in the air. Ground and water samples are being analyzed.

Officials said they're confident the incidents are unrelated. The Waste Isolation Pilot Plant is the nation's only deep underground geological repository for anything contaminated by more than the lowest levels of radiation. And opponents will certainly use the case to fight against any expansion of WIPP's mission, which is to take only transuranic waste from federal nuclear sites. The closure highlights a lack of alternatives for disposing of tainted materials like tools, gloves, glasses and protective suits from national labs in Idaho, Illinois, South Carolina and New

Mexico.

With operations at the plant on hold, so are all shipments, including the last of nearly 4,000 barrels of toxic waste that Los Alamos National Laboratories has been ordered to remove from its campus by the end of June. That waste is now stored outside with little protection. Also on hold are tests to see if the dump can expand its mission to take more than so-called lower level transuranic waste from the nation's research facilities, including hopes by DOE that it can ship hotter, liquid waste from leaking tanks at Washington state's Hanford nuclear waste site. New Mexico Environment Secretary Ryan Flynn said the state will be looking closely at what caused the leak that exposed the workers before deciding whether to back plans to allow the repository to bring in waste from new sources.

"Events like this should never occur," he said at a news conference last week where officials confirmed the leak. Government officials, politicians, the contractors that run the mine and local officials all say it is too soon to speculate on what the short- or long-term impacts of the of the shutdown might be, or where else the toxic waste would go. And they emphasize that all the safety systems designed to react to worst-case scenarios worked. "A lot of people are just jumping up and down and wanting us to shut down," said Farok Sharif, president of the Nuclear Waste Partnership that runs WIPP. "But that's not the case here." Still, no one yet knows what caused the first-known radiation release from the massive rooms that have been dug out of the ancient Permian Sea bed. —AP



**CARLSBAD:** This undated file aerial photo shows the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant near Carlsbad, NM. —AP

# BIG STORM BRINGS NEW WORRIES TO S CALIFORNIA

**LOS ANGELES:** Homes were evacuated as a swift storm with expected heavy rain moved toward drought plagued Southern California, bringing worries of mudslides where recent wildfires left mountainsides exposed. The storm's full force was expected to be felt in the morning, with possible thunderstorms and rains up to an inch per hour, the National Weather Service said. A 10-mile stretch of the Pacific Coast Highway was closed overnight in Ventura County because of a high likelihood of rock slides in an area made bare by last year's Springs Fire in Camarillo, the California Highway Patrol said.

On Thursday, mandatory evacuation orders were issued for about 1,000 homes in Glendora and Azusa, eastern foothill suburbs of Los Angeles that sit beneath nearly 2,000 acres of steep mountain slopes stripped by another fire in January. "We have an hour to get evacuated," said Dana Waldusky as she hurried to evacuate the family home next to the burn area in Glendora. "We're just boarding up all our doors." Waldusky, 22, said she, her parents and sister made sure they had important documents, photos, medicines and their toothbrushes packed. "Last time, at the fire, we had 15 minutes, so this time we made sure we were prepared," she said.

The home survived the fire, which firefighters stopped 15 feet from their back fence. "This time there's nothing you can do. You can't stop water," she said. As a lighter storm moved through the area earlier in the week, residents built barriers of wood and sandbags to keep debris flows in streets and out of homes. While concern was highest in the Glendora-Azusa area, meteorologists also posted flood watches for many other areas denuded by fires over the past two years. Cities in Santa Barbara and San Luis Obispo counties were handing out sandbags in anticipation of heavy rain.

Even waterspouts offshore and small tornados were possible, the NWS said. Strong winds and snow down to elevations of 7,000 feet were expected in the mountains of San Bernardino and Riverside counties, and at lower elevations today. California's rain totals are far below normal and it will take a series of drenching storms to make a dent in a statewide drought that is among the worst in recent history. The state Department of Water Resources took a new survey of the Sierra Nevada snowpack and found the water content at only 24 percent of average for the date.

The northern and central Sierra snowpack normally provides about a third of the water used by California's cities and farms. Back in Glendora, City Manager Chris Jeffers said he understood that no one wants to leave their home but the city had to take an important lesson from history. —AP