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SECURITY UPGRADE

Lawmakers applaud Obama for consulting

State legislators welcome chance to discuss Syria

By Donovan Slack
 Post-Crescent Washington bureau

WASHINGTON — Members of Wisconsin's congressional delegation from both parties breathed something of a collective sigh of relief when President Barack Obama announced Saturday that he decided to allow Congress to weigh in before authorizing military intervention in Syria.

Several Badger State reps, including Democratic Sen. Tammy Baldwin and Republican Sen. Ron Johnson, had urged him to take such action this past week. Republican Reps. Reid

Ribble of Sherwood, Sean Duffy of Weston, Jim Sensenbrenner of Menomonee Falls and Tom Petri of Fond du Lac joined Democratic Rep. Mark Pocan of Madison in signing letters to Obama asking for a vote.



Petri



Ribble

"I'm glad the president made the right decision to consult Congress before taking military action in Syria," Petri said after the president's announcement. "I will be carefully reviewing what the president puts forward to Congress next week."

"My first reaction was I was extraordinarily pleased that the president made this decision," Ribble said.

Obama made the somewhat surprising announcement that he had decided a military strike is warranted because of the Syrian regime's use of chemical weapons against its own people, but he wanted Congress to give him its support before ordering any strike.

"While I believe I have the authority to carry out this military action without specific congres-

See SYRIA, Page A6

VIDEO

Watch Sen. Ron Johnson and Rep. Reid Ribble discuss Syria during Newsmakers interviews last week on postcrescent.com.

INSIDE

Obama to ask Congress to OK strike on Syria / B3

Fox Cities districts bolster expenditures following last year's deadly shooting at Sandy Hook school in Connecticut

By Jen Zettel | Post-Crescent Media

The Appleton Area School District had a long-range plan in place last year to beef up security at entrances to its school buildings. But that timetable changed after the horrific shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Conn., in December.

"It was our plan to control entrances at all build-

ings over a period of years," said Don Hietpas, chief financial officer for the school district. "I would say (Sandy Hook) pressed the timeline."

Hietpas said a handful of Appleton's schools had buzzer-controlled entrances before the shooting rampage that killed 20 children and six adults. The district originally planned to expand the security measures by a few buildings each year.

Appleton is among a number of Fox Cities districts to put a renewed emphasis on security measures as the 2013-14 school year gets under way.

Some schools began classes last week, but the majority will welcome students back on Tuesday.

School leaders say they're doing everything in their power to keep students and staff members safe.

Appleton's school district has spent \$143,500 on upgrades — an increase of nearly \$129,000 over previous years. Hietpas said the money paid for buzzer entrance controls at buildings throughout the district and video cameras near building entrances.

See SECURITY, Page A6

SCHOOL SECURITY UPGRADES

From 2012-13 year to present

- » Appleton: \$143,500 for buzzer-controlled entrances and video cameras.
- » Chilton: \$28,417 for additional cameras, entry locks and panic buttons.
- » Hortonville: \$979,230 set aside from recent referendum for buzzer-controlled entrances, updated cameras and new door locks.
- » Kaukauna: \$77,000 on cameras and buzzer-controlled entrances.
- » Kimberly: \$54,000 on updated cameras.
- » Little Chute: \$54,000 on updated cameras, additional cameras, more keyless entry points and buzzer-controlled entrances.
- » Menasha: \$10,700 on fob entry system, \$100,000 in camera upgrades, \$5,000 for new entry signage, \$44,000 for re-keying district buildings.
- » Neenah: \$100,000 on security cameras, final \$15,000 spent on total \$60,000 card entry system.
- » New London: \$20,000 for fob entry system — half paid with grant funds, \$14,000 for radios with direct communication with New London Police — all costs covered by donations to the police department.
- » St. Francis Xavier Catholic Schools: Updated security cameras and buzzer-controlled entrances.

Source: Fox Cities school districts

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Index

Advice	C2	Life!	C1
Books	C4	Local	A3
Business	E1	Obituaries	B5
Careers	F1	Sports	D1
Voices	B1	Travel	C14
Crossword	C4	TV book	Inside
Good Neighbors	C3	Vitals	A2
Homes	F3	Weather	B7
Horoscope	C2	Wheels	F4



GOOD MORNING, FOX VALLEY

Today's Best Bets ■ www.postcrescent.com

CONCERT: Fox Jazz Fest at Jefferson Park, Menasha, features local, regional and national jazz artists. Fred Hersch headlines. Free. **Noon.**

ON THE MIDWAY: Calumet County Fair at fairgrounds in Chilton. Live music, carnival rides, catch-a-pig contest and tractor pull. \$6

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Federal cuts affect poor Valley families

Winnebago Co. to get fewer rental vouchers

By Adam Rodewald
Gannett Wisconsin Media

OSHKOSH—Fewer poor people will get housing assistance this year because federal budget cuts have reduced the number of rental vouchers available to Winnebago County residents.

And, those who do get help may find fewer landlords willing to accept them as funding becomes less reliable and regulatory demands get tighter.

The Oshkosh and Winnebago County Housing Authorities lost more than \$156,000, or 11 percent of their funding, this year for tax-funded vouchers to help the poor pay rent.

That means the agencies, which share staffs and programs, will only be able to fund 368 of the 413 total vouchers they're authorized to hand out, said Brad Masterson, executive director of the two housing authorities.

No one will lose a voucher, but fewer new people, if any, have a chance of getting one unless people drop out of the program.

"We're just not getting everything done we're supposed to," Masterson

said. "I've gotten used to answering phone calls from people who have left messages after messages (seeking assistance). My answer is our case loads are full."

The voucher cuts are just a portion of the losses absorbed by the two agencies in recent years.

Since 2011, they've also lost \$97,000 for administering the voucher program, \$175,000 in public housing funds and \$53,400 in capital projects dollars.

In total, the combined cuts amount to a 7.7 percent decrease in revenue since 2011 for the \$5.8 million operation.

The cuts have resulted in an increased backlog of families waiting for assistance, delayed facility improvements and general maintenance, eliminated program manager positions and larger caseloads for inspectors and other staff, Masterson said.

Getting worse

The reduced funding comes at a time of rising poverty in Winnebago County.

The U.S. Census Bureau estimated 13.4 percent of individuals had incomes below the federal poverty level in 2011, the most recent year for which data is available. That's up from 12.9 percent in 2009 and 9.5 percent in 2007.

HOUSING AUTHORITY CUTS AT A GLANCE

Since 2011, the Oshkosh and Winnebago County Housing Authorities have lost \$481,501 in federal funding. The cuts include:

- » \$252,960 in housing choice voucher funds. The cuts include a \$156,034 cut in voucher dollars and a \$96,929 cut in funds for administering the program.
- » \$175,091 in operating funds. The majority of this cut came in 2012 when the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development required housing authorities to return all reserve funds exceeding a six-month operating cushion.
- » \$53,450 cuts in capital projects allocations.

The cuts will fall heavily on the most vulnerable people in the community, said Brent Wojnowski, co-chairman of the Winnebago Housing Coalition.

Four of five people receiving vouchers in Winnebago County are seniors or people with disabilities.

The rest are largely families with children. Their average annual income of those receiving housing assistance ranges from \$12,077 for single-person households to \$18,763 for households with more than five people, according to housing authority data.

"What we're seeing is people having to stay in (homeless) shelters longer or find other housing solutions rather than rely on a voucher from the housing authority. It's been the same environ-

ment for a long time, but it sounds like it's getting worse," said Wojnowski, who is also the homeless program coordinator for Advocap.

The housing authorities have a waiting list with 1,300 individuals or families seeking rental vouchers. It will likely grow longer, Masterson said, adding that he expects being able to offer no more than 30 new vouchers this year.

Some agencies used to having vouchers available to their clients are already counting on losing them.

Julie Fevola, executive director for Christine Ann Domestic Abuse Services, said she was notified by the housing authority that women coming out of the abuse shelter will no longer be given preference for a voucher because of the cutbacks and waiting list

length.

In the past, the shelter could count on a set number of vouchers available for abuse victims, Fevola said.

Now, "it's like winning the lottery, really. That just makes it harder for our victims to move forward. We don't want to see them up to fail."

Landlords are also starting to reconsider whether they'll accept tenants who use the vouchers.

They're worried the funding will dry up, tenants will lose their vouchers and the property owners will have no way to recoup the lost income, said Nanette Rozelle, a board member for the Fox Valley Apartments Association.

"One part of the concern is the money isn't always there. Another part is the government isn't stable right now," she said. "Many landlords have mortgages and are struggling to keep afloat as it is."

Rozelle is a landlord as well as the president of Rental Finders, Inc., a company that manages rental properties for landlords in Winnebago County and the broader Fox Valley area. She said she currently rents to voucher recipients, but she's not sure if she will accept any more.

Absorbing cuts

Masterson said the agencies have tried to shield people from the cuts by absorbing them administratively. They've eliminated two program and site manager positions, two maintenance positions and a custodian. They also had to delay renovations planned for eight family homes in the Neenah and Menasha areas.

The loss of maintenance and custodial staff means non-emergency work orders are delayed until there are several jobs in the same area. And, inspections of properties rented to voucher recipients will be shorter and no longer include feedback for landlords.

The cuts have so far not hit Winnebago County as hard as other areas. Half of the country's housing agencies have stopped issuing new vouchers altogether, according to a survey by the Public Housing Authorities Directors Association.

However, Masterson said he expects the cuts to continue because of federal sequestration, which includes \$1.1 million in automatic spending cuts spread out over the next eight years.

— Adam Rodewald writes for the Oshkosh Northwestern; on Twitter @ONWAdamRodewald.

Security

Continued from Page A1

Wide-ranging impact

The Sandy Hook shooting also prompted officials in Chilton, Kaukauna, Kimberly, Little Chute, Menasha, New London, St. Francis Xavier Catholic Schools and Fox Valley Lutheran High School to evaluate current practices.

Many districts accelerated timelines for projects by completing them in the last eight months, rather than pushing the security measures into the future.

The New London Police Department raised money to put police radios in every school in the community. The radios provide instant communication with police officers, which doesn't happen when school officials call 911, said Joe Marquardt, the school district's business services director.

"If we call 911 it would be routed to the Waupaca County Sheriff's Department, then to New London police," he said. "The new radios go directly to New London police cars."

In Little Chute, officials decided not to strictly adhere to the schedule that



Stephen Kuhn, an automated systems technician for the Appleton Area School District, installs an entrance controls system Aug. 20 at the Appleton Public Montessori in Plamann Park. DAN POWERS/POST-CRESCENT MEDIA

was laid out as part of a five-year technology referendum. They opted to push security to the forefront, completing camera upgrades and adding buzzer entry systems to schools, said Supt. David Botz.

But Botz cautioned that all the technology in the world won't replace crisis training or common sense.

"The procedures may increase security, but the bottom line is we rely on our students, staff and community members to

talk and listen to each other," Botz said. "We all know even with the increase in technology if someone wants to get into our buildings, they will get in."

Training is vital

State legislators felt the same way in 2009, and required all public school districts to have a school safety plan in effect by May 2013.

Neenah's security plan was nearly finished before the Sandy Hook shooting.

Shattuck Middle School served as the plan's testing ground. Staff members at the seventh- and eighth-grade middle school were trained in crisis response two years ago. The plan has now been fully implemented at all district schools.

Neenah schools have buzzer-controlled entrances, bulletproof glass and security cameras. But as recent events have made clear, those who want to do harm find ways to accomplish that goal.



An entrance controls system was added to the Appleton Public Montessori to boost security. DAN POWERS/POST-CRESCENT MEDIA

Sheriff's Department to develop procedures and training for students and staff.

Efforts focused on teaching students to think clearly when facing high-pressure emergency scenarios. That emphasis is intended, among other things, to prevent children from letting strangers into a building.

"The whole basis of our training here in Neenah is teaching our kids to be thinkers so they're independent thinkers in any type of situation ... and independent of any adult that may or may not be in the situation with them," Phernetton said.

Even with heightened security, schools are still public buildings, and officials don't want security measures to keep people away.

"We have to have some measures to keep people who are trying to hurt us out, so we try to balance that with being welcoming," Phernetton said.

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Syria

Continued from Page A1

sional authorization, I know that the country will be stronger if we take this course, and our actions will be even more effective," the president said. "We should have this debate, because the issues are too big for business as usual."

Congressional leaders agreed to schedule debate on the matter when they return from recess Sept. 9.

Johnson and Baldwin both welcomed the decision Saturday and underscored the need for Obama to also explain his case better to the American people.

"I still believe there must be a strong and convincing case made to the American people and we must work to build an international coalition before we lead or join any military response," Baldwin said, adding that her vote will be based on whether "clear, focused and achievable objectives and goals are set."

Johnson said he has also not decided which way he will vote yet.

"I will listen respectfully and consider the evidence carefully," he said. "The president says Syria 'presents a serious danger

to our national security.' He must explain what this danger is, and how his plan would reduce it."

Duffy expressed similar sentiments.

"The Constitution reserves the power to declare war for the Congress," he said. "The president has done the right thing by seeking congressional approval. It is his duty now to lay out the case for force and let's hope he can do so in a more coherent manner than he has done to date."

Ribble was participating in the Harley Davidson 110th anniversary celebration in Milwaukee when Obama announced his decision.

"It was the right choice," he said in an interview. "This gives everybody cover. If it's a good or bad decision, we can all go onto it with our eyes wide open."

He said he has received dozens of calls from constituents about Syria and only one was mildly supportive of U.S. intervention. The rest were opposed — a position Ribble has taken from the beginning and continues to hold. Still, he said he looks forward to hearing Obama's case in classified briefings once he returns to Washington.

"As I've said all along, I will go into these briefings

open minded, and then I will make a decision on it," he said.

Pocan had already booked a trip back to Washington for a classified briefing today. He immediately took to his Facebook page after Obama's announcement Saturday to ask constituents what they think.

"What information would you want to know as Congress prepares to debate any role the United States should take? Thanks for your input!" he wrote.

Rep. Gwen Moore of Milwaukee condemned the chemical weapons attack as "a direct violation of human rights and a threat to our international peace," but said she, too, is pleased

Congress will have an opportunity to vote on an appropriate response.

"I look forward to engaging in a comprehensive and productive debate on whether the United States should take military action," she said.

Republican House leadership issued a joint statement saying Congress has the responsibility under the Constitution to declare war and they are "glad" the president is now abiding that directive.

"This provides the president time to make his case to Congress and the American people," they said.

— Donovan Slack: dslack@usatoday.com; on Twitter @donovanslack

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