

OBAMA LEAVES OFFICE ON HIGH

CNN ONLINE

President Barack Obama will leave office today with his highest approval rating since 2009, his presidency largely viewed as a success, and a majority saying they will miss him when he is gone.

A new CNN/ORC poll finds Obama's approval rating stands at 60%, his best mark since June of this first year in office. Compared with other outgoing presidents, Obama lands near the top of the list, outranked only by Bill Clinton's 66% in January 2001 and Ronald Reagan's 64% in January 1989. About two-thirds (65%) say Obama's presidency was a success, including about half (49%) who say that was due to Obama's personal strengths rather than circumstances outside his control.

Amid those glowing reviews, one-quarter of Americans (25%) say Obama is one of the nation's greatest presidents, far outpacing the share who felt that way about other recent presidents as their terms ended (11% described Reagan that way, 10% Clinton, and 5% or fewer said so about either President Bush). Still, nearly as many (23%) call Obama a poor president, more than said so about

Reagan, Clinton or the first president Bush, but well below the 46% who said George W. Bush was a poor president as he prepared to leave the White House.

Looking back at the critical issues of the Obama years, Americans give the President positive ratings for handling sev-

isions of the United States were at a low point, according to polls.

In the new poll, Obama also scores net-positive approval ratings for his work on education, policies toward gays and lesbians, environmental policy and climate change, all areas where policies shifted sharply during Obama's

All told, Obama's time comes to an end with 50% saying things in the country are generally going well, 50% that they're going poorly. That's a sharp increase compared with the start of Obama's time in office. In early 2009, in the midst of an economic crisis, just 21% said things in the

they are more apt to see improvement on the horizon for the economy, 62% say that will be better a year from today. Asked about their own financial situation, 40% expect it to improve in the next year, 48% say it'll be the same and 11% that it'll get worse in the first year of Trump's presidency.



US President Barack Obama waves to media after his final presidential press conference on Wednesday and a woman takes a "selfie" with a waxwork model of US President-elect Donald Trump at Madame Tussaud's in central London.



PHOTO: AFP

eral issues that were central to his first run for office: the economy, foreign affairs and race relations among them.

Obama took office several months after a massive stock market crash and amid a crisis in the nation's housing market, and at a time when international impres-

tenure.

Majorities disapprove, however, of Obama's work on gun policy. And the public is mixed on his handling of two top domestic issues -- illegal immigration and health care policy -- and two national security concerns -- terrorism and cybersecurity.

country were heading the right way, that rose to 49% by the time of Obama's second inauguration, and peaked at 54% just before last year's election.

Looking ahead, the public is split on whether the country will be better (47%) or worse off (48%) four years from now, but

Obama's favorability rating stands at 63%, among the best for recent presidents and his highest since summer 2009. First lady Michelle Obama scores a 69% favorability rating, her highest mark since 2012, matching her favorability rating in January 2009 just ahead of Obama's first inauguration.

OBAMA'S LAST PRESS CONFERENCE

KEY QUOTES

US President Barack Obama faced the media for the last time on Wednesday, two days before Donald Trump takes office. Here are the key quotes from what he said:

ON TRUMP'S PRESIDENCY

"I have offered my best advice (...) I can tell you that -- this is something I have told him -- that this is a job of such magnitude that you can't do it by yourself. You are enormously reliant on a team."

ON US EMBASSY IN JERUSALEM

"I think the status quo is unsustainable -- that it is dangerous for Israel, that it is bad for Palestinians, bad for the region and bad for America's national security. (...) Obviously it's a volatile environment. What we've seen in the past is when sudden unilateral moves are made that speak to some of the core issues and sensitivities of either side, that can be explosive."

ON RUSSIA RELATIONS

"I think it's in America's interest and the world's interest that we have a constructive relationship with Russia. That's been my approach throughout my presidency."

ON RACE RELATIONS IN US

"We've got more work to do on race. It is simply not true that things have gotten worse. They

haven't. Things are getting better. And I have more confidence on racial issues in the next generation than I do in our generation or the previous generation. I think kids are smarter about it."

ON HIS FUTURE AFTER PRESIDENCY

"I want to do some writing, I want to be quiet a little bit and not hear myself talk so darn much. I want to spend precious time with my girls."

ON TRUMP'S IMMIGRATION POLICY

"There's a difference between that normal functioning of politics and certain issues or certain moments where I think our core values may be at stake. (...) That would merit me speaking out."

ON FUTURE OF AMERICA

"Democracy is messy and doesn't always work the way you want, doesn't guarantee certain outcomes. But if you are engaged and involved, then there are a lot more good people than bad in this country. ... At my core, I think we're going to be okay."

SOURCE: AFP



Senate clears Mattis to be Pentagon boss

AFP, Washington

James Mattis, President-elect Donald Trump's pick for defense secretary, breezed through a Senate committee vote

Wednesday, paving the way for his full confirmation and quick swearing-in after Trump takes office.

The Senate Armed Services Committee approved Mattis's nomination all but unanimously, with just one Democratic senator voting no.

Mattis is the first cabinet nominee to pass the committee stage of his nomination, and he could be fully confirmed as soon as Friday, Senate Democratic minority leader Chuck Schumer said.

Some Democratic senators had initially expressed reservations that Mattis's appointment runs counter to decades of Pentagon tradition -- and US legal custom.

US law prohibits officers from serving as defense secretary for seven years after leaving active duty -- but retired Marine general Mattis only hung up his uniform in 2013.

A cornerstone of US democracy is that civilians, not people in uniform, control the military, and the commander-in-chief is the president.

Mattis is known as a colorful commander and is famed for his pugnacious aphorisms. The media dubbed him "Mad Dog" for his battle-hardened swagger and the sort of blunt language Marines are famous for.

Trump 'needs to learn how to cry' from Obama: experts

AFP, Paris

Donald Trump has one big lesson to learn from outgoing US President Barack Obama -- he needs to learn to be cool about crying.

"If he could squeeze one tear out during his inauguration" on Friday, "people will turn around quite quickly their feelings towards him", British behavioural expert Judi James told AFP.

"Clearly he is going to go swanning out there with his alpha male feathers strutting, but if at the right moment he could squeeze out a tear it would have an amazing effect on people," said the author of "The Body Language Bible".

Showing his emotions certainly worked for Obama, James argued.

The president has wept at least 10 times on camera since he took office, most tellingly when tears poured down his cheeks last year when he talked about the toll gun violence was taking on America. He wiped away another few earlier this month when paying tribute to his wife Michelle and his teenage daughters in a farewell speech in Chicago.

And for Trump, "crying would be ideal" to allay the worries of a world fretting about

what his presidency will hold, she said.

For her, Obama's tears helped show his sincerity, connected him with the public, and undercut his reputation as an intellectual.



Crying specialist Lauren Bylsma said it was clear that Obama is a man that is comfortable expressing his emotions in public. Crying at the pain of others makes politicians particularly attractive, James added.

Whatever the case, psychologist Jean-Pierre Friedman said he could not imagine Trump ever blubbing publicly. "He's someone from another generation. Fifty years ago the attitude was 'men do not cry'. He's a hardened old cowboy."

Hope, despair of Obama yrs

AFP, New York

If Barack Obama was elected on a wave of optimism, eight years later, hopes of a post-racial America have soured amid recognition that it takes more than a black president to overcome centuries of racism.

A recent poll confirmed findings of a number of studies published in the final months of the Obama administration: 52 percent of Americans questioned by Gallup said the country had taken a step backwards on issues of race. Just 25 percent thought things had improved since 2009.

Obama admitted as much in his farewell speech in Chicago.

"After my election, there was talk of a post-racial America," he said. "Such a vision, however well intended, was never realistic."

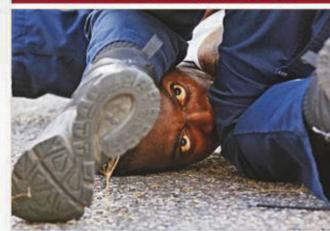
"Race remains a potent and often divisive force in our society," he said, warning that attitudes can take generations to change.

Quoting America's much loved literary hero, Atticus Finch from "To Kill a Mockingbird," Obama added: "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his

point of view, until you climb into his skin and walk around in it."

It was an appeal for understanding that the 44th president repeated numerous times throughout his presidency, particularly in the later years as the country grappled with police shootings -- often of unarmed

RACE RELATIONS IN US



black men.

The Black Lives Matter movement, established in 2013 after a white man was acquitted over the fatal shooting of unarmed black teenager Trayvon Martin, rose up against the killings in a series of protests that in some cities degener-

ated into clashes and vandalism.

In some quarters, people raged openly on social media against having a black president. Hardly surprising then that more than 50 years after segregation was outlawed and 150 years after slavery was abolished, some thought progress had stalled.

"Everybody was hopeful and people cried" over Obama's inauguration, remembered Maria Fragoza, a self-employed Puerto Rican.

"But it did not change anything," she added. "Racism is still going on and I don't think anybody can change that."

For now, what's clear is that no one is expecting a rapid improvement under President-elect Donald Trump, who used his campaign to rile up and espouse divisive rhetoric, particularly against Hispanics and Muslims.

But Jena Delville-Joseph, a 32-year-old black colleague of Carlson's, hopes that younger generations will move things along. "This was probably the last push by people who think this country should look a certain way," she said of Trump's election. "In 20 years, this country will look a lot different, because of the demographics."

Baghdad eyes west Mosul

AGENCIES

Iraqi forces battled the last holdout jihadists in east Mosul yesterday after commanders declared victory there and set their sights on the city's west, where more tough fighting awaits.

The announcement that the left bank of the Tigris River that divides Mosul had been retaken was a key milestone in an offensive that began three months ago but could yet last several more.

Staff General Talib al-Sheghati, who heads the Counter-Terrorism Service (CTS) spearheading the fighting in Mosul, declared the left bank "liberated" at a big press conference on Wednesday.

Iraqi forces were still fighting there yesterday, flushing out fighters from the Islamic State group in two key northern locations by the river: a large hotel and a presidential compound.

Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi said around the new year that ridding the

country of IS, which seized around a third of Iraq in 2014, could take three more months.

He had initially promised to do so by the end of 2016 and many observers have argued his new timetable was still optimistic.

Before Iraq launched its massive

WAR IN SYRIA, IRAQ AND LIBYA

Assad says Astana talks will focus on Syria ceasefire

'Dozens' of IS fighters killed in US strikes in Libya

offensive against IS-held Mosul on October 17, the west bank had always been thought to be where federal forces would meet the toughest resistance.

But elite troops struggled in the east too and only broke the back of the jihadists there in recent days, after stepped up coordination and

increased aerial and advisory support from the US-led coalition.

Once they have fully secured the east coast, Iraqi forces will need to tackle the west bank of the river, which is a little smaller but more densely populated.

According to an estimate by the United Nations, around 750,000 people still live on Mosul's west bank, which includes the old city and key landmarks such as the mosque where IS supremo Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi proclaimed his "caliphate" in June 2014.

In Syria, President Bashar al-Assad has said peace talks in the Kazakh capital next week will focus on enforcing a cessation of hostilities to allow aid access across the country.

"I believe that they will focus, in the beginning, and will prioritise, as we see it, reaching a ceasefire," Assad told Japanese television channel TBS, according to excerpts released by his office.

The talks, sponsored by rebel backer Turkey and regime allies Russia and Iran, are set to begin in Astana on Monday.



An aerial view shows Hotel Rigopiano in Farindola, central Italy that was hit by an avalanche yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

AVALANCHE ON ITALY HOTEL

Up to 30 feared dead

REUTERS, Penna

A huge avalanche swallowed up a luxury mountain hotel in central Italy after a series of strong earthquakes rocked the area, burying up to 30 people under tonnes of snow and debris, officials said yesterday.

Italian media said three bodies had been retrieved from the site. Rescue workers declined to comment on the reports, but said they had yet to find any sign of life.

The gabled peaks of parts of the roof and a row of windows were the only sections of the four-storey Hotel Rigopiano still visible after the wall of snow smashed into the four-star spa resort early on Wednesday evening.

Local authorities said about 30 people had been in the building at the time,

including two children, but more than 20 hours later, only a couple of survivors had been found -- two men who had been outside when the disaster struck.

"The hotel is almost completely destroyed. We've called out but we've heard no replies, no voices," said Antonio Crocetta, a member of the Alpine Rescue squad who was on the scene.

The avalanche shunted the 43-room hotel located in the Gran Sasso mountain range in the central Abruzzo region., which is 1,200 metres above sea level, some 10 metres down the hill, according to media reports.

The disaster struck just hours after four earthquakes with a magnitude of above 5.0 hit central Italy, sparking fears about possible avalanches.

CIA reveals its psychic control plans public

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

The CIA has revealed details of its "Project Star Gate" mission to develop psychic abilities for the first time.

The revelations come as part of a huge dump of documents -- almost 12 million in all -- that are being made available on the internet. And they show the organisation's plans to harness the supernatural in ways that have never been seen before.

Project Star Gate, as it was known, was the codename for a US government project intended to use psychic and supernatural phenomenon for spying and military uses. In one of the pages, it lays out why the government wants to use it -- the benefits include the fact that it is "passive", "inexpensive" and that there is "no known defence".

The papers show how the organisation was looking to harness those powers to spy on people, to make changes to important objects. And all of that would be done by operatives far from the people and things that were actually being affected.

The document defines a number of the key terms used by those within the project.

"Psychoenergetics", for instance, describes a "mental process" where a person can perceive, communicate or change characteristics of something or someone that it separate from that person in space or time. It also describes things such as remote viewing,



where people can see things in another place, and telekenisis, where someone can move an object that they're not actually touching.

The CIA's files suggest that those in charge of the project did believe that they had some success. The project was ended in 1995, when its existence stopped being secret.

Japan tells people to stop working

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

The Japanese government has announced measures to limit the amount of overtime employees can do -- in an attempt to stop people literally working themselves to death.

A fifth of Japan's workforce are at risk of death by overwork, known as karoshi, as they work more than 80 hours of overtime each month, according to a government survey.

And several high-profile cases, such as the death of an advertising agency employee who was working 100 extra hours a month before she took her own life, have prompted calls for a dramatic shift in Japan's work culture.

Prime Minister Shinzo Abe is said to be seeking to impose a cap on the number of overtime hours people can work, and a government scheme called "Premium Friday" is set to launch in February.

The campaign, spearheaded by the Japan Business Federation, will allow workers to leave the office early on the last Friday of every month.

Japan needs to "end of the norm of long working hours so people can balance their lives with things like raising a child or taking care of the elderly", Bloomberg reported government spokesperson Yoshihide Suga as saying.

Some companies, including Japan Post Insurance, have taken to switching all the lights off at night to encourage workers to leave the office, according to the Washington Post.

Advertisorial

চিশতী এজি ফ্যানের পক্ষ থেকে স্কুল ব্যাগ বিতরণ

চিক্কিলিয়া স্কুল এন্ড কলেজ, বাগের হাট এর ১০১তম প্রতিষ্ঠা বার্ষিকীতে ১০০০ কোমলমতি ছাত্র ছাত্রীদের মধ্যে স্কুলব্যাগ বিতরণ করেন চিশতী গ্রুপের এম ডি জনাব মো: শাহ নেওয়াজ হোসেন।

চিক্কিলিয়া স্কুল এন্ড কলেজ, বাগের হাট

সহযোগিতায় : চিশতী এজি ফ্যান।