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8 dead, 50 injured in Oklahoma tornadoes

LONE GROVE, Okla., Feb. 11 (UPI) -- Eight people died and about 50 were injured as tornadoes ripped through Oklahoma, mangling homes and snapping trees, officials said Wednesday.

All of the deaths and most of the injuries happened Tuesday in Lone Grove, Okla., about 90 miles south of Oklahoma City, CNN reported.

Also hard hit by twisters were the towns of Pawnee and Edmond, both north of the capital, the Oklahoma Department of Emergency Management said.

The storms were expected to weaken Wednesday, the broadcaster reported.

"The wind started blowing really hard and then died down," a Lone Grove man told CNN. "All heck broke loose. I mean, it just broke loose. The whole house shook."

Officials at Mercy Memorial Health Center in Ardmore, Okla., said the hospital received 46 people with injuries, with seven of them considered major. Emergency workers said the tornadoes knocked out power to about 29,000 electric utility customers, including 9,957 in Bethany, Okla.

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Parties scramble after close Israeli vote

JERUSALEM, Feb. 11 (UPI) -- Israel has entered a political limbo after an inconclusive election sent party leaders scrambling to find coalition partners, analysts said.

Coalition talks were already starting Wednesday, less than 24 hours after Israeli voters gave Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni's centrist Kadima Party an apparent first-place finish with 28 of the Knesset's 120 seats, while Binyamin Netanyahu's right-wing Likud Party followed closely behind at 27 seats with 99 percent of the vote counted, The Jerusalem Post reported.

The newspaper said Netanyahu met Shas Party leader Eli Yishai and was waiting to talk with Avigdor Lieberman, the ultranationalist Yisrael Beiteinu party chairman, who had earlier met with Livni.

Analysts told the Israeli newspaper Haaretz it was unclear if Livni could muster the 61-seat coalition needed to form a government, and that Netanyahu had a better chance to do so because of the emergence of Lieberman as a potential kingmaker. His far-right party surged into third place with 15 seats on its platform of denying citizenship to Israeli Arabs deemed to be insufficiently loyal.

Lieberman told reporters he was leaving his options open, saying he could choose to join a Likud or a Kadima-led government, but he added he preferred a "nationalist" government.

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Dems: Final stimulus bill to come quickly

WASHINGTON, Feb. 11 (UPI) -- Democratic leaders in the U.S. Congress say they hope to have a final version of the massive economic stimulus measure ready for a vote by the end of the week.

U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., and Senate Democratic leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., said Tuesday they will work hard to quickly iron out the differences between the Senate and House versions of the stimulus bill after an \$838 billion measure passed the Senate by a 61-37 vote Tuesday, The Washington Post reported.

Pelosi said a final version could be negotiated "hopefully before the end of this week," while Reid said a first draft could be produced as early as Wednesday.

"I think the differences really are fairly minor and we're going to work very hard to resolve those differences as soon as we can," he said.

The Senate bill provides less in spending and more in tax breaks than the House's \$819 billion measure, with likely flash points likely to include spending on Medicaid and school construction, the Post said.

A broad framework on the bill was hammered out in an unpublicized White House meeting early Monday with U.S. President Barack Obama, Reid and Pelosi, sources told CNN.

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#### House panel prepares for bank execs

WASHINGTON, Feb. 11 (UPI) -- The U.S. House Financial Services Committee prepared Wednesday to grill bank executives in a hearing about bailout funds.

The executives represented eight banks that received the first installments of the \$700 billion bailout plan, collectively given \$165 billion, CNN reported.

The bottom line question was likely to be: What happened to the money? In line with that, members likely wanted to know how much of money was hoarded and how much was used to increase lending to customers.

Committee members also wanted to know if banks have cut spending and how bonus pay could be justified in the face of massive bank failures.

The executives represented Citigroup, Bank of America, J.P. Morgan Chase, Wells Fargo, Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, Bank of New York Mellon and State Street.

Bert Ely, a principal at Ely & Co., told CNN the session was going to be "a beating-up exercise" because of the continued strain on the country's financial system.

"Right now we are in a situation where (small businesses) are cutting productive people. I point my fingers at the banks for that," said Duke University finance Professor Campbell Harvey.

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#### Attackers storm Kabul government buildings

KABUL, Afghanistan, Feb. 11 (UPI) -- Suicide attackers stormed a pair of Afghanistan government buildings Wednesday, killing 11 police officers and civilians, officials said.

Seven attackers died in the assaults, in which militants wielding guns and wearing explosives-laden vests burst into the Afghan Justice Ministry's headquarters in central Kabul and the ministry's corrections department in the northern part of the city, The New York Times reported.

The Taliban took responsibility for the attacks and said several other suicide bombers may be at large in the city.

Police officials said five gunmen stormed the Justice Ministry headquarters, killed an official at the entrance and spread out into the building. All of the gunmen were eventually killed, as were two civilians and two members of the security forces.

In the second attack, two suicide bombers blew up devices at the corrections department, killing seven police officers and wounding 15, senior prisons officer Gen. Mohammad Arif told the Times.

The attacks came ahead of a scheduled visit to Kabul by Richard Holbrooke, U.S. President Barack Obama's newly appointed envoy to Afghanistan and Pakistan, and highlighted the challenge facing U.S. and NATO forces in curbing Taliban insurgents, the newspaper said.