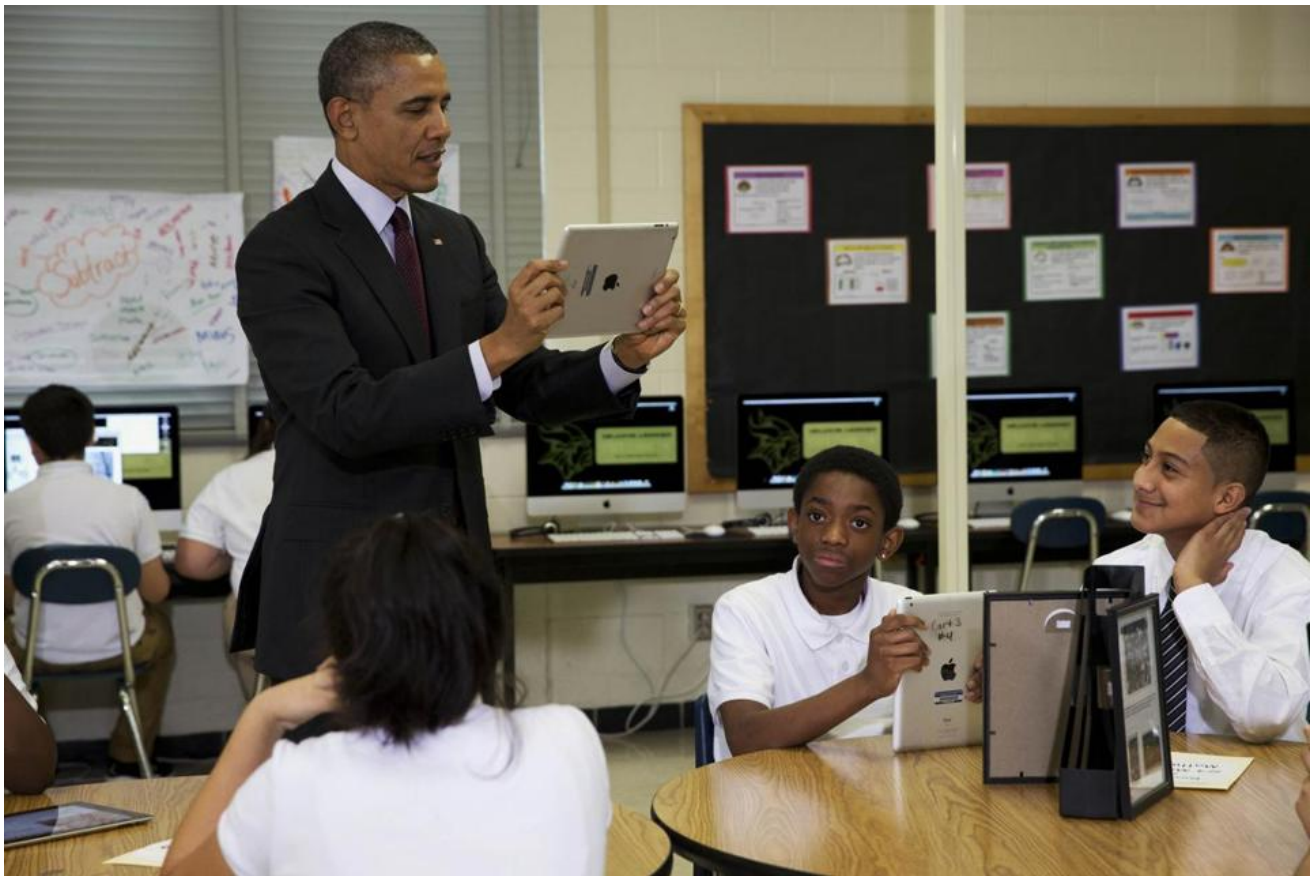


POLITICAL NOTEBOOK

## Businesses pledge \$750m to boost tech in schools

FEBRUARY 05, 2014



JACQUELYN MARTIN/ASSOCIATED PRESS

**President Obama announced the new funding Tuesday at a Maryland middle school. (Jacquelyn Martin)**

ADELPHI, Md. — President Obama says \$750 million in new private-business commitments will help “close the technology gap” in America’s schools.

Obama announced the new funding Tuesday at a Maryland middle school. The money will be used to provide high-speed Internet access, hardware, and software to more students.

The White House hopes the pledges will help fulfill a goal Obama set last summer to have 99 percent of students in schools wired at high speeds within five years. The president says access to the Internet will help American children compete with students from around the world.

The initiative also builds on Obama’s focus for 2014 on helping more Americans join and stay in the middle class amid an economic recovery in which the benefits have come more quickly for those at the top of the income scale.

— *ASSOCIATED PRESS*

## **Surgeon general pick says obesity is No. 1 health threat**

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration’s nominee for surgeon general says his top priorities will be fighting obesity and helping communities promote healthier living.

Dr. Vivek Murthy, a Harvard Medical School physician, told a Senate committee Tuesday that obesity is the defining public health challenge of our time.

Conservatives questioned whether Murthy’s main credential is a political one, because he founded a doctors’ organization that has advocated for the Affordable Care Act and he has tweeted about gun control.

But Murthy said if he is confirmed as the nation’s doctor, he will not use the job as a bully pulpit for gun control. Murthy also said the surgeon general is an educator who should help find common ground in improving public health.

Senators haven’t yet scheduled a vote on Murthy’s nomination.

— ASSOCIATED PRESS

## **Senate panel OK's Baucus as ambassador to China**

WASHINGTON — The Senate Foreign Relations committee has easily approved President Obama's nomination of Max Baucus to become ambassador to China on Tuesday.

Baucus is a Montana Democrat and chairman of the Senate Finance Committee, which oversees trade issues. The 72-year-old was first elected to the Senate in 1978.

Baucus has said he wants to help build a better economic relationship with China.

The full Senate is expected to confirm Baucus's nomination this week.

— ASSOCIATED PRESS

## **Ambassador to Syria will retire by the end of February**

WASHINGTON — The State Department's top diplomat on Syria is planning to retire by the end of the month, officials said Tuesday, leaving the Obama administration without one of its lead negotiators on one of its biggest security concerns.

State Department officials confirmed that Ambassador Robert Ford has told friends and associates that he plans to leave by the end of February. Ford has been ambassador to Syria since January 2011, but has not lived in Damascus since February 2012, when the State Department suspended embassy operations there.

Since then, he has been a key negotiator in Western efforts to bolster Syrian opposition leaders in their three-year civil war to push President Bashar Assad from power. Ford also has been instrumental in efforts to unite the fragmented Syrian opposition and get its leaders to negotiations with Assad's regime to broker a peace agreement.

Ford is a longtime Mideast specialist who has served in US embassies across the region. Last summer, the White House considered tapping him to become the US ambassador to Egypt.

However, that never happened amid some objections within the new government in Cairo, which has been irritated over US policy in Egypt.

— *ASSOCIATED PRESS*

## **Congressman facing inquiry announces resignation**

WASHINGTON — Representative Robert E. Andrews insists that his resignation from Congress after more than two decades has nothing to do with a bleak outlook for Democratic chances of retaking the House or with an ethics investigation into alleged misuse of his campaign funds.

“I love Congress, but I love my family more,” Andrews, who represents southern New Jersey, said in an interview.

On Tuesday, Andrews, 56, announced at his Haddon Heights office that he would leave office Feb. 18 to lead the government relations practice of Dilworth Paxson, a law firm that once employed his wife and is run by partners who attended his wedding.

“It’s an offer that won’t be there at the end of my term,” said Andrews, who said he joined the firm to “help my family be financially secure.”

Andrews has two college-age children, but the resignation also coincided with a sinking feeling among Democrats that the House is slipping out of reach.

His announcement comes in the wake of the decision to retire by George Miller of California.

Andrews, who entered Congress in 1990 in a special election to replace Jim Florio, pointed out that he would “eventually” succeed Miller as chairman of the Education and Labor Committee in a Democrat-controlled chamber.

“I frankly would have benefited enormously from Democrats being back in the majority,” he said.

Andrews cited his support for the Affordable Care Act as his proudest vote in the House but did not want to talk about the ethics probe into allegations that he used campaign funds for trips to California and Scotland.

— *NEW YORK TIMES*

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