Beat: Vips

Obama to meet Pope Francis as part of Europe trip in March

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USPA News - U.S. President Barack Obama will meet with Pope Francis at the Vatican in March as part of a week-long European trip that will also take him to the Netherlands and Belgium. It will be Obama`s second visit to the Vatican since becoming president in 2009.

White House Press Secretary Jay Carney said Obama will begin his European trip by attending the Nuclear Security Summit in the Dutch city of The Hague on March 24 and March 25. At the third world summit, leaders from 53 participating countries will discuss progress made to secure nuclear materials and commit to future steps to prevent nuclear terrorism. "He will also hold bilateral events with Dutch officials," Carney added. After visiting the Netherlands, Obama will travel to the Belgian capital of Brussels on March 26 to attend a U.S.-European Union Summit with European Council President Herman van Rompuy and European Commission President José Manuel Barroso. It will mark Obama`s first visit to the EU institutions and will be followed by meetings with Belgian officials and NATO Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen. Belgian Deputy Prime Minister Didier Reynders welcomed Tuesday`s announcement, saying it proves the central role of Brussels as `the capital of Europe.` "The President of the United States will participate in several bilateral events which symbolize the long and strong relationship between our two countries," Reynders said. Following Obama`s visit to Belgium, the president will fly to Italy on March 27 to meet with Pope Francis in Vatican City. "The President looks forward to discussing with Pope Francis their shared commitment to fighting poverty and growing inequality," Carney said. It will mark Obama`s first meeting with Pope Francis, although he met predecessor Benedict XVI at the Vatican in July 2009. In the Italian capital of Rome, Obama also plans to meet with Italian President Giorgio Napolitano and Italian Prime Minister Enrico Letta.

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