

Romney VP Search Guided By Methodical Style

BOSTON (AP) — Don't look for a vice presidential shocker from Mitt Romney. His choice of a running-mate — a search he announced Monday he has begun — will be guided by both his methodical, risk-averse corporate training and the lessons his party learned from Sarah Palin's selection.

Preparedness to serve and loyalty to Romney are likely to trump other credentials as the all-but-sure Republican nominee looks to avoid the blowback John McCain faced four years ago with his surprise choice of the little-known, first-term Alaska governor for the GOP ticket. Questions about Palin's readiness to serve, McCain's decision-making and his advisers' vetting came to define the Arizona senator's flawed campaign.

Mindful of that, Romney will put experience at the top of his list of qualities as he chooses a No. 2, according to senior advisers and GOP operatives familiar with his thinking. They spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to speak candidly about a process Romney himself is trying to keep as private as possible as he works to narrow a field that may begin with as many as a dozen prospective candidates.

"The hallmark for Governor Romney's candidacy, and how he would be as president, is that he approaches these decisions in a well-thought-out methodical way," said Steve Duprey, a former McCain adviser and current New Hampshire-based member of the Republican National Committee. "It won't be like the McCain campaign where there was a big surprise and effort to create a game changer."

AP Wins Pulitzer For Revealing NYPD Spying

NEW YORK (AP) — The Associated Press won a Pulitzer Prize for investigative reporting Monday for documenting the New York Police Department's widespread spying on Muslims, while the turmoil-ridden *Philadelphia Inquirer* was honored in the public service category for its examination of violence in the city's schools.

The *Patriot-News* in Harrisburg, Pa. — and in particular, 24-year-old reporter Sara Ganim — were honored for local reporting for breaking the Penn State sexual abuse scandal that ultimately brought down football coach Joe Paterno.

Another Pulitzer for investigative reporting was awarded to *The Seattle Times* for a series about accidental methadone overdoses among patients with chronic pain.

David Wood of the Huffington Post won for national reporting for a look at the suffering endured by American veterans wounded in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is only the second Pulitzer ever awarded for reporting that appeared online only.

The *New York Times* received two prizes: David Kocieniewski was honored in the explanatory reporting category for a series on how wealthy people and corporations use loopholes to avoid taxes. And Jeffrey Gettleman won for international reporting for his coverage of famine and conflict in East Africa.

GSA Official Asserts Right To Remain Silent

WASHINGTON (AP) — The General Services Administration inspector general said Monday that he's investigating possible bribery and kickbacks in the agency, as a central figure in a GSA spending scandal asserted his right to remain silent at a congressional hearing.

Inspector general Brian Miller, responding to a question at the hearing, said, "We do have other ongoing investigations, including all sorts of improprieties, including bribes, including possible kickbacks."

Jeffrey Neely, who asserted his Fifth Amendment privilege before the committee, has been placed on leave as a regional executive in Western states.

Neely, summoned before the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee, could face a criminal investigation by the Justice Department — where his case was referred by the inspector general.

Neely was largely responsible for an \$823,000 Las Vegas conference in 2010 that was the focus of Miller's report. Three other congressional committees also are looking at the conference spending and a culture of waste at the agency in charge of federal buildings and supplies.

Military 'Embarrassed' By Role In Scandal

WASHINGTON (AP) — The top U.S. military officer said Monday the nation's military leadership is embarrassed by allegations of misconduct against at least 10 U.S. military members at a Colombia hotel on the eve of President Barack Obama's visit over the weekend.

"We let the boss down," Army Gen. Martin Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, told a Pentagon news conference. He said he regretted that the scandal, which also involved 11 Secret Service agents accused of cavorting with prostitutes at the hotel, diverted attention from Obama's diplomacy at a Latin America summit.

"I can speak for myself and my fellow chiefs: We're embarrassed by what occurred in Colombia, though we're not sure exactly what it is," Dempsey added.

Pentagon officials said earlier Monday that the number of military members involved in the scandal appears to be greater than the five originally cited. One senior defense official said that at least 10 military members may have been involved. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because the matter is under investigation.

Pentagon press secretary George Little said that military members who are being investigated were assigned to support the Secret Service in preparation for Obama's official visit to Cartagena. He said they were not directly involved in presidential security.

Ban: Syria Must Guarantee Observers Access

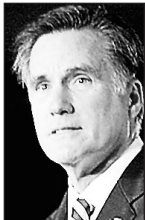
BEIRUT (AP) — U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said Monday the Syrian government is responsible for guaranteeing U.N. observers full freedom of movement to monitor the country's tenuous cease-fire, which appeared to be unraveling as regime forces pounded the opposition stronghold of Homs, activists said.

Even though overall violence in Syria has dropped significantly since the truce took effect Thursday, the government's shelling of the central city of Homs over the past four days has raised doubts about President Bashar Assad's commitment to special envoy Kofi Annan's plan to end 13 months of violence and launch talks on the country's political future.

An advance team of six observers arrived in Damascus late Sunday to negotiate the mission's ground rules with Syrian authorities.

Ban, speaking to reporters in Brussels, called on Assad to ensure the observers' work is not hindered.

"It is the Syrian government's responsibility to guarantee freedom of access, freedom of movement within the country," he said.



Romney

Afghanistan

U.S. Set For Last Major Offensive

BY PATRICK QUINN
Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — For Taliban militants and U.S. strategists alike, all roads in this impoverished country of mountain passes, arid deserts and nearly impassable goat tracks lead to this ancient capital of 3 million people nestled in a high and narrow valley.

The Taliban made their intentions clear over the weekend, mounting spectacular coordinated attacks that spawned an 18-hour battle with Afghan and NATO forces. And now, the U.S. is gearing up for what may be the last major American-run offensive of the war — a bid to secure the approaches to the city.

While bombings and shootings elsewhere in Afghanistan receive relatively little attention, attacks in the capital alarm the general population, undermine the government's reputation and frighten foreigners into fleeing the country. That's why insurgents on Sunday struck locations that were so fortified they could cause little or no damage, including the diplomatic quarter, the parliament and a NATO base.

"These are isolated attacks that are done for symbolic purposes, and they have not regained any territory," U.S. Defense Secretary Leon Panetta said Monday.

The U.S.-led spring offensive, expected to begin in the coming weeks, may be NATO's last chance to shore up Kabul's defenses before a significant withdrawal of combat troops limits its options. The focus will be regions that control the main access routes, roads and highways into Kabul from the desert south and the mountainous east. These routes are used not only by militants but by traders carrying goods from Pakistan and Iran.

The strategy in eastern Afghanistan involves clearing militants from provinces such as Ghazni, just south of the capital. The pivotal region links Kabul with the Taliban homeland in the south and provinces bordering Pakistan to the east.

NATO, under U.S. command, will



JONATHAN S. LANDAY/MCT

Afghan police inspect the body of one of six insurgents Monday who took over a building in Kabul's diplomatic enclave on Wazir Akbar Khan and fired on embassies and government offices. They held off Afghan security forces for more than 18 hours before they were killed.

also conduct more operations in eastern provinces such as Paktika and Paktia that are considered major infiltration routes to the capital from insurgent safe havens in Pakistan.

Afghan and U.S. officials blamed the Pakistan-based Haqqani network, which is part of the Taliban and has close links with al-Qaida, for the weekend attacks that left 36 insurgents, eight policemen and three civilians dead in Kabul and three eastern provinces. But Army Gen.

Martin Dempsey, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, said officials have not concluded whether the attacks emanated out of Pakistan.

Declining numbers of international troops in the coming months are also forcing coalition forces to focus less on remote and thickly populated places such as eastern Nuristan. They hope to move responsibility for those areas to the Afghan security forces.

Coalition forces last summer made gains in traditional Taliban

strongholds such as Kandahar and Helmand provinces in the south, areas they must now hold with fewer troops. By September, as many as 10,000 U.S. Marines are scheduled to leave Helmand and hand over the lead for security to Afghan forces in the former Taliban stronghold.

"It's going to be a very busy summer," Gen. John Allen, the top U.S. and NATO commander, said recently. "The campaign will balance the drawdown of the surged forces with the consolidation of our holdings in the south, continued combat operations" and an effort to push Afghan security forces into the lead.

The U.S. this month finished moving the 1st brigade of the 82nd Airborne into Ghazni to help clear out a Taliban stronghold in Andar district. It could be one of the largest remaining American clearing operations of the war.

It is not known when that operation will take place, but Ghazni is located at a key chokepoint with the country's main highway from the south to Kabul running through it. The highway runs just past Andar district.

"If you secure Andar, you have secured Ghazni, and you have secured Afghanistan," the governor of Ghazni, Musa Khan, told U.S. forces last week at a handover ceremony with departing Polish troops.

Eliminating the Ghazni problem is an important part of the plan to transition security responsibility from foreign forces to the nascent Afghan National Security Forces.

After September, the U.S.-led coalition may not have enough troops on the ground for such large-scale operations and will increasingly have to depend on the Afghans to take the lead.

The U.S.-led coalition is keen to show that the 330,000-strong Afghan forces are capable of filling in a vacuum left by the withdrawal of 33,000 U.S. forces by the end of September. It also wants to use them more and more in operations against insurgent forces in key battlegrounds such as the east.

Economic Outlook Brightens On Retail Report

BY CHRISTOPHER S. RUGABER
AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON — Americans bought more electronics, started home improvement projects and updated their wardrobes last month, inspired by warmer weather and a healthier job market.

Retail sales rose 0.8 percent in March, the Commerce Department said Monday. The gain capped a strong quarter for retail spending, which is contributing to a brighter outlook among economists for growth in the January-March quarter.

Businesses are responding to the higher sales by restocking their shelves at a steady pace, a sign that they expect the trend to carry over into the spring.

More retail spending also helped

offset a decline in confidence among homebuilders. And it could ease concerns about March hiring, which slowed to half the pace of the previous three months.

"Retail sales soared in March with stores in just about every category recording sharp increases over February levels," said Joel Naroff, chief economist at Naroff Economic Advisors. "And let's not forget, the February spending was strong."

The retail sales report is the government's first look at consumer spending each month. The gain contributed to a mixed day of trading on Wall Street.

The Dow Jones industrial average closed up roughly 72 points to end the day at 12,921. But the Standard & Poor's 500 index ended the day essentially flat, while the Nasdaq composite fell 23 points.

Americans are spending more

despite paying higher gas prices and seeing little growth in their wages.

Shoppers bought more furniture, groceries, clothes and sporting goods last month. They also paid more for gas.

Still, excluding cars, gas and food, sales rose 8.2 percent in the first quarter, the most in two years.

The gain pushed total retail sales to a record high of \$411.1 billion, 24 percent higher than the recession low hit in March 2009.

"This is a good report," said Chris Christopher, an economist at IHS Global Insight. "Consumers are spending despite feeling the pump price pinch."

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Maurices Ribbon Cutting

The Yankton Area Chamber of Commerce Ambassador's hosted a ribbon cutting for Maurices at 2101 Broadway Ave in the Yankton Mall. Katie Kiger, store manager said Maurices offers sizes 1-26, our styles are inspired by the girl in everyone, in every size. We are a leading small town specialty store and authority for the savvy fashion-conscious girl with a twenty-something attitude. Maurices stands for fashion, quality, value and customer service. Store hours are M-F 10a.m.-9p.m., Sat. 10a.m.-5p.m. and Sun. 12-5p.m. To contact the store you can call (605)665-2268 or visit their website at www.maurices.com.