

French Election

Hollande, Sarkozy Head To Runoff

BY ANGELA CHARLTON
Associated Press

PARIS — Francois Hollande, a mild-mannered French Socialist who wants to take better care of the jobless and the poor, is heading to a presidential runoff election against tough-on-immigration Nicolas Sarkozy in a vote that could alter Europe's political and economic landscape.

Hollande heads into the May 6 second round with the upper hand after narrowly edging the conservative Sarkozy in the first round of France's voting Sunday, according to near-complete official results.

In the campaign's biggest surprise, nearly one in five voters chose far right candidate Marine Le Pen instead, handing her a solid third place and a chance to weigh in on French politics with her anti-immigration platform that targets France's millions of Muslims.

With 93 percent of the vote counted, Hollande had 28.4 percent of the ballots cast and Sarkozy 27 percent, according to figures released by the Interior Ministry.

Le Pen was in third with 18.3 percent of the vote so far, the best showing ever by the far right National Front party founded by her father Jean-Marie Le Pen. In fourth place was leftist firebrand Jean-Luc Melenchon with 11 percent, followed by centrist Francois Bayrou with 9.1 percent and five other candidates with minimal support.

Turnout was also surprisingly high, at more than 80 percent, despite concern that a campaign focusing on nostalgia for a more



OLIVIER DOULIERY/ABACA PRESS/MCT
French citizens go to the polls at the Embassy of France in Washington Saturday, a day ahead of the presidential election in France.

protected past would fail to inspire voters.

Hollande, a 57-year-old who has worried financial markets with his pledges to boost government spending, vowed Sunday night to cut France's huge debts, boost growth and unite the French after Sarkozy's divisive first term.

"Tonight I become the candidate of all the forces who want to turn one page and turn over another," Hollande, displaying a confidence and stately air he has often lacked during the campaign, told an exuberant crowd in his political fiefdom of Tulle in central France.

Sarkozy, speaking at his campaign headquarters on Paris' Left Bank, said he recognized voters' concerns about jobs and immigration, and "the concern of our com-

patriots to preserve their way of life."

Ten candidates faced off for Sunday's first round of voting, a referendum on Sarkozy at a time when many French voters are worried about high joblessness and weak economic prospects and the president is seen as too cozy with the rich.

"Hollande should be happy. ... Sarkozy's objective was to beat him. It will be very difficult for Sarkozy now," said Damien Philippot of polling agency IFOP. "When you see the results it's clearly a vote of sanction for Nicolas Sarkozy."

Three French polls conducted Sunday evening as results came in predicted Hollande would win the May 6 runoff by 8 to 12 percentage

points. Ipsos, CSA and IFOP said their soundings showed worries about jobs and personal income which drove many voters.

Sarkozy is battling to avoid becoming France's first one-term president since Valery Giscard d'Estaing lost to Socialist Francois Mitterrand in 1981. Sarkozy has said he'll pull out of politics if he loses.

The race is on now to sway Le Pen's voters for the decisive second round. Le Pen herself told AP last week that she was not going to give instructions to her voters.

While Sarkozy has borrowed some of her anti-immigrant rhetoric and campaign themes of national identity, Le Pen has repeatedly criticized Sarkozy and says he is a has-been with no chance of returning to office.

The Socialist camp — not a natural ally for Le Pen supporters — reached out to her voters after Sunday's result.

"We also have to think of those who are angry," who feel forgotten and humiliated by Sarkozy's first term, Socialist Party chief Martine Aubry said.

Sarkozy ally and Foreign Minister Alain Juppe, asked by the AP about Le Pen's strong showing, said, "We have to speak to these French people — that doesn't mean doing a party-to-party accord, surely not. Their aspirations must be taken into account, and Nicolas Sarkozy has largely done that by developing certain themes like a Europe that protects us against some mishaps of globalization."

Auditors: End Medicare Bonus Program

BY RICARDO ALONSO-ZALDIVAR
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a rebuke to the Obama administration, government auditors are calling for the cancellation of an \$8 billion Medicare program that congressional Republicans have criticized as a political ploy.

The nonpartisan Government Accountability Office says in a report to be released Monday that the \$8.3 billion the administration has earmarked for quality bonuses to Medicare Advantage insurance plans would postpone the pain of cuts to the plans under the new health care law. Most of the money would go to plans rated merely average.

The administration is defending the program, saying that without the bonuses many plans wouldn't have an incentive to improve quality.

But Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, says the GAO report suggests that the administration abused its authority, pumping money to the plans to avoid more criticism over unpopular cuts.

Medicare Advantage is a popular private insurance alternative to the traditional health care program for seniors. More than 3,000 private plans serve nearly 12 million beneficiaries, about one-fourth of Medicare recipients. They offer lower out-of-pocket costs, usually in exchange for some limitations on choice.

President Barack Obama's health care law trimmed Medicare Advantage to compensate for prior years of overpayments that had allowed the plans to offer attractive benefits — and pocket healthy profits.

Republicans fiercely attacked those cuts during their successful campaign to take control of the House in the 2010 midterm elections. Seniors, a key constituency of swing voters, responded by backing GOP candidates.

After the election, the administration announced what it called a "demonstration program" to test whether a generous bonus program would lead to faster, broader improvements in quality. (The health care overhaul law had already provided a smaller bonus program only for top-rated plans.)

GAO, the investigative agency

of Congress, did not address GOP allegations that the bonuses are politically motivated. But, its report found the program highly unusual. It "dwarfs" all other Medicare pilots undertaken in nearly 20 years, the GAO said.

Most of the bonus money is going to plans that receive three to three-and-a-half stars on Medicare's five-star rating scale, the report said.

Available through 2014, the bonuses will soften much of the initial impact of the Medicare Advantage cuts, acting like a temporary reprieve.

This year, for example, the bonus program offset more than two-thirds of the cuts in the health care law. Indeed, Medicare Advantage enrollment is up by 10 percent and premiums have gone down on average.



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But GAO questioned whether the bonus program will achieve its goal of finding better incentives to promote quality. "The design of the demonstration precludes a credible evaluation of its effectiveness in achieving (the administration's) stated research goal."

Iran: Date Retrieved From Captured U.S. Drone

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iran claimed Sunday that it had recovered data from an American spy drone that went down in Iran last year, including information that the aircraft was used to spy on Osama bin Laden weeks before he was killed. Iran also said it was building a copy of the drone.

Similar unmanned surveillance planes have been used in Afghanistan for years and kept watch on bin Laden's compound in Pakistan. But U.S. officials have said little about the history of the particular aircraft now in Iran's possession.

Tehran, which has also been known to exaggerate its military and technological prowess, says it brought down the RQ-170 Sentinel, a top-secret drone equipped with stealth technology, and has flaunted the capture as a victory for Iran and a defeat for the United States.

Tea Party To Stay Involved In Utah Senate Race

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — The tea party movement solidified its presence as a force within the Republican Party two years ago when it helped orchestrate the defeat of three-term Sen. Bob Bennett at Utah GOP's nominating convention. But it fell short this weekend of doing the same to Sen. Orrin Hatch.

The different outcomes raise at least one question: Has the tea party lost some momentum or was it simply outflanked this time by Hatch, who had superior resources and tacked to the right on certain issues?

A national leader of tea party efforts, FreedomWorks, spent more than \$700,000 through a super PAC to defeat Hatch. Yet, Hatch was able to easily advance to a primary and only fell 32 votes short of earning the nomination outright.

Russ Walker, national political director for the super PAC, said Saturday that the measure of the tea party's success was less about the outcome and more about the steps that Hatch needed to take to advance.

Many College Grads Jobless, Underemployed

WASHINGTON (AP) — The college class of 2012 is in for a rude welcome to the world of work.

A weak labor market already has left half of young college graduates either jobless or underemployed in positions that don't fully use their skills and knowledge.

Young adults with bachelor's degrees are increasingly scraping by in lower-wage jobs — waiter or waitress, bartender, retail clerk or receptionist, for example — and that's confounding their hopes a degree would pay off despite higher tuition and mounting student loans.

An analysis of government data conducted for The Associated Press lays bare the highly uneven prospects for holders of bachelor's degrees.

Explosion Heard In Southwest Likely A Meteor

RENO, Nev. (AP) — Astronomers say a loud explosion heard across a large swath of Nevada and California on Sunday morning was likely caused by a meteor.

The sound of the explosion around 8 a.m. prompted a flood of calls to law enforcement agencies on both sides of the Sierra Nevada in the two states.

The explosion rattled windows and shook houses from Reno to Winnemucca in Nevada, and from the Sacramento to Bakersfield areas in California.

Some people in the two states reported seeing a fireball streak across the sky at the same time.



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