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# Romney And Obama Now Fight For The Edge On Medicare

BY CHARLES BABINGTON AND BEN FELLER

Associated Press

SOUTHAMPTON, N.Y. — The jobs-and-economy election suddenly seems all about Medicare — for now, at least.

Republican Mitt Romney is embracing a topic his party usually approaches gingerly. He is taking a calculated risk that voters' worries about federal deficits and the Democrats' health care overhaul have opened the door for a robust debate on the solvency of Medicare, the insurance program for retirees.

President Barack Obama is welcoming the conversation, which has temporarily taken attention from the weak economic recovery.

One party may regret its position on Nov. 6.

Retirees in politically prized states such as Florida have often resisted changes in Medicare, one of the government's most popular but costliest programs. But GOP strategists say today's voters realize Medicare spending must be constrained, and Romney is banking on disenchantment with Obama's 2010 health care law to pave the way for his own proposals.

Romney, who has spent more than a year running almost entirely on the economy and jobs, put Medicare at the campaign's center when he chose as his running mate. Rep. Paul Ryan is Congress' chief advocate of significantly restraining entitlement programs.

Ryan did not address his

Medicare plan at a campaign stop in Glen Allen, Va., on Friday, a break from the previous day's events in Ohio, where the issue figured prominently in his remarks. But the Wisconsin congressman is expected to revisit Medicare in some depth in Florida on Saturday. He will face voters in a retirement community north of Orlando known as The Villages. Ryan's 78-year-old mother, a Medicare recipient, plans to attend.

"We will not duck the tough issues; we will lead," Ryan told the Virginia crowd.

Romney's willingness to tackle the issue was underscored Thursday when he used a marker and classroom-type whiteboard to summarize his thoughts on Medicare, with hardly a word about the unemployment rate. He said his plans would keep Medicare solvent while Obama's would not, a claim Democrats call absurd.

On Friday, summarizing the political view from the right, the Romney campaign distributed a Wall Street Journal editorial that declared: "By governing so far to the left, Mr. Obama may have neutralized 'Medicare' and made voters more receptive to center-right solutions. Medicare is already changing because it must."

Obama's campaign has tried for months to tie Romney to House Republicans and Ryan's budget proposal, which would turn Medicare into a voucher-like system for future retirees.

The Obama campaign released a new TV ad Friday defying the president's record on

Medicare. It points to the AARP, a group that represents senior citizens and said in a letter to lawmakers earlier this year that Ryan's plan would lead to higher costs for seniors.

Romney's campaign disputed the ad, and repeated its own claim that Obama's plans would siphon spending from Medicare without safeguarding the program's long-term stability.

Though Medicare dominated the debate Friday, the parties engaged in another brief skirmish on Romney's personal tax returns. His campaign rejected a call for Romney to release five years of his federal tax returns — instead of the two years he has agreed to — in exchange for the Obama campaign's pledge to drop further demands on the subject.

Romney and the White House also condemned a new round of anti-Israel remarks by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Romney told 80 people at a fundraiser overlooking the Long Island Sound: "Ahmadinejad of Iran made another series of vile statements about Israel, and excising Israel from the body of humanity, and so forth. And you recognize how critical it is to have leadership that describes precisely what it believes, describes what actions it's willing to take, and stands for something."

Otherwise, the Republican National Committee devoted its "weekend messaging memo" mainly to a graphic titled "Obama's Countdown to Medicare Bankruptcy."

## Hezbollah Says Can Make Israeli Lives 'Hell'

BY ZEINA KARAM

Associated Press

BEIRUT — Lebanese Shiite militant group Hezbollah will transform the lives of Israelis to "hell" if Israel attacks Lebanon, its leader said on Friday, adding that the group would not hesitate to hit targets that would leave tens of thousands of Israelis dead.

Speaking in a televised speech marking Jerusalem Day — an annual rally in support of the Palestinians — Sheik Hassan Nasrallah said only a few rockets fired by the group's militia could cause massive casualties, given its well-planned target list.

"Rockets are ready and directed at these targets," he said. "We will not hesitate to use them, if we have to, at any point in time in the course of aggression against our country to protect our people," he added.

"Hezbollah cannot destroy Israel but we can transform the lives of millions of Zionists in occupied Palestine into a real hell," the black-turbaned Nasrallah said.

"We can change the face of Israel."

The threat came as Israel is undergoing an increasingly public debate on whether to attack Iranian nuclear facilities, possibly triggering retaliation from Tehran's allies such as Hezbollah. Israel considers Iran to be its most dangerous enemy and has vowed to prevent it from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Nasrallah said Iran's response to any Israeli attack would be "lightning" quick and "great."

"It would be the golden opportunity Iran has been dreaming of for 32 years," he said, referring to the date of Iran's 1979 Revolution that led to the current clerical state. He did not mention what an attack on Iran would mean for Hezbollah.

Israel and Hezbollah fought an inconclusive monthlong war in 2006 that left 1,200 Lebanese and 160 Israelis dead. Hezbollah fired nearly 4,000 rockets at Israel during the war, and is believed to have upgraded its munitions in recent years.

Nasrallah, who fears Israeli as-

sassination, went underground during the 2006 war and since then has rarely made any public appearances. He speaks to supporters via satellite link.

It is a sensitive time for Hezbollah, which is backed by Iran and Syria, as it faces the possibility of losing a crucial ally if Syrian rebels manage to topple President Bashar Assad.

Its reputation as a popular resistance movement has already taken a severe beating for siding with Syria against the anti-Assad uprising even after it supported Arab revolts in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Bahrain.

Assad's fall would be a nightmare scenario for Hezbollah. Any new regime led by the country's majority Sunni Muslims would likely be far less friendly to Shiite Muslim Hezbollah, or even outright hostile. Iran remains the group's most important patron, but Syria is a crucial supply route. Without it, Hezbollah will struggle to get money and weapons as easily.

**Report Accuses U.S. General Of Lavish Travel**

WASHINGTON (AP) — The four-star general who headed U.S. Africa Command used military vehicles to shuttle his wife on shopping trips and to a spa and billed the government for a refueling stop overnight in Bermuda, where the couple stayed in a \$750 suite, a Defense Department investigation has found.

A 99-page report alleges excessive unauthorized spending and travel costs for Gen. William "Kip" Ward, including lengthy stays at lavish hotels for Ward, his wife and his staff members, and the use of five-vehicle motorcades when he traveled to Washington.

It also said that Ward and his wife, Joyce, accepted dinner and Broadway show tickets from a government contractor during a trip on which he went backstage to meet actor Denzel Washington and they and several staff members spent two nights at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel.

The allegations, coming after a 17-month investigation, deliver an embarrassing blow to the Army and to Ward, who had claimed a place in history as the military's first commander of U.S. Africa Command.

"We conclude Gen. Ward engaged in multiple forms of misconduct related to official and unofficial travel," the inspector general's report said. "He conducted official travel for primarily personal reasons and misused" military aircraft. It said he also misused his position and his staff's time and received reimbursement for travel expenses that far exceeded the approved daily military rate without approval.

**Facebook Stock Has Lost Half Its Value Since IPO**

NEW YORK (AP) — Facebook's stock fell to \$19 for the first time on Friday, losing half its market value since the company's initial public offering in May.

The stock dipped 87 cents, or 4 percent, to briefly hit \$19, just minutes before it closed the trading day at \$19.05. Facebook's shares ended the week down nearly 13 percent.

Facebook hit the \$19 milestone a day after the expiration of a lock-up period that had previously prevented some early investors and insiders from selling their shares. Stakeholders who owned a combined 271 million Facebook shares before Thursday can now sell their holdings.

A breakdown of just how many major Facebook Inc. shareholders sold their stock this week won't be available until next week at the earliest, when sellers must disclose such transactions.

Facebook's stock has struggled since the company's mid-May IPO. It closed its first day of trading barely above its initial offering price of \$38. It has been below that level since.

**Teacher Convicted After Sex With 5 Students**

FORT WORTH, Texas (AP) — A former Texas high school teacher was convicted Friday after having sex with five 18-year-old students at her home.

It took the jury less than an hour to conclude that Brittni Nicole Colleps, 28, of Arlington, was guilty of 16 counts of having an inappropriate relationship between a student and teacher. The second-degree felony is punishable by two to 20 years in prison per count.

Sentencing was scheduled for Friday afternoon.

The former Kennedale High School English teacher had sex with the students at her home over two months in 2011, authorities said.

Colleps is married and has three children. She turned herself in after a cellphone video of one encounter that involved multiple students emerged. That video was shown at trial.

**Man Survives After Surgery For Bar In Skull**

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — A 24-year-old construction worker survived after a 6-foot metal bar fell from above and pierced his head, doctors said Friday.

Luiz Alexandre Essinger, chief of staff at Rio de Janeiro's Miguel Couto Hospital, said doctors successfully withdrew the iron bar from Eduardo Leite's skull during a five-hour surgery.

"He was taken to the operating room, his skull was opened, they examined the brain and the surgeon decided to pull the metal bar out from the front in the same direction it entered the brain," Essinger said.

He said Leite was conscious when he arrived at the hospital and told him what had happened.

He said Leite was lucid and showed no negative consequences after the operation.

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**Tropical Storm Helene Forms Off Mexican Coast**

VERACRUZ, Mexico (AP) — Tropical Storm Helene formed just offshore in the southwestern Gulf of Mexico on Friday, threatening coastal areas of eastern Mexico where thousands of people are still recovering from flooding spawned by Hurricane Ernesto.

The National Hurricane Center said aircraft found the tropical storm about 90 miles (145 kilometers) east-southeast of Tuxpan. It had maximum sustained winds of 45 mph and was moving northwest at 7 mph (11 kph).

The storm's center was expected to make landfall Saturday in the northern part of Veracruz, a lush coastal state with hundreds of towns and villages sitting along streams and rivers that can swell dangerously in heavy rain. Many were evacuated during Ernesto, which hit last week.

Mexico's government declared a state of emergency in more than 100 population centers in Veracruz and was providing them with emergency aid. The hurricane center said Mexico had issued a tropical storm warning along the Gulf coast from Barra de Nautla to La Cruz.

Helene was predicted to bring 5 to 10 inches of rain, with as many as 15 inches across northeastern portions of Mexico. A storm surge could raise water levels by as much as 1 to 2 feet above normal along the immediate coast and to the north of where landfall is made. Heavy rain was expected in the city of Tampico, an oil-refining center and important port in the southernmost part of Tamaulipas state.

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