

### Syrians Hold Biggest Protests In Months

BEIRUT (AP) — In the largest protests Syria has seen in months, hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets Friday in a display of defiance to show an Arab League observer mission the strength of the opposition movement. Despite the monitors' presence in the country, activists said Syrian forces loyal to President Bashar Assad killed at least 22 people, most of them shot during the anti-government demonstrations. In a further attempt to appeal to the monitors, dissident troops who have broken away from the Syrian army said they have halted attacks on regime forces to reinforce the activists' contention that the uprising against Assad is a peaceful movement. While opposition activists are deeply skeptical of the observer mission, the outpouring of demonstrators across Syria underscores their wish to make their case to the foreign monitors and take advantage of the small measure of safety they feel they brought with them. The nearly 100 Arab League monitors are the first that Syria has allowed into the country during the uprising, which began in March. They are supposed to ensure the regime complies with terms of the League's plan to end Assad's crackdown on dissent. The U.N. says more than 5,000 people have died as the government has sought to crush the revolt.

### Iraqis Celebrate Departure Of American Forces

BAGHDAD (AP) — Hundreds of Sunni Muslims gathered in Baghdad Friday to celebrate the withdrawal of American forces, but in a sign of the sectarian divisions that re-emerged immediately after their departure, Shiite Muslims did not join the event. The celebration took place near the Abu Hanifa mosque, the main house of worship in the primarily Sunni neighborhood of Azamiyah in northern Baghdad. To secure the event, Iraqi troops blocked traffic on roads leading to the mosque and searched people approaching the area. During the rally, men and children waved Iraqi flags and raised banners praising those who resisted the U.S. presence in Iraq. "Baghdad is the castle of resistance," one banner read. "The deeds of the heroes are stronger than the weapons of the occupiers," read another banner. Women threw chocolates to the crowd as a sign of joy. In his sermon, the mosque's preacher, Sheik Ahmed al-Taha, accused the Americans of stirring up sectarian tension among Iraqis.

### Verizon Reverses On Plans To Charge \$2 Fee

NEW YORK (AP) — After a customer backlash, Verizon Wireless on Friday dropped a plan to start charging \$2 for every payment subscribers make over the phone or online with their credit or debit cards. In a statement on its website Friday, the company said "customer feedback" prompted the decision to drop the "convenience fee" it wanted to introduce on Jan. 15. Verizon wanted to steer people to electronic check payments, which are cheaper, and automatic credit card payments, which are more reliable. A petition on Change.org against the fees had gathered more than 95,000 names by Friday afternoon, a day after Verizon, the country's largest cellphone company, announced the fees. The petition was set up by Molly Katchpole, who earlier this year started a successful campaign to make Bank of America drop a \$5-per-month fee for debit-card use. Payment processors for power companies usually charge "convenience fees" of up to \$5 for every payment made by phone or online, but cellphone companies haven't taken the step yet. The furor against Verizon hints that they may have to wait further.

### 2 Accused Of Performing Late-Term Abortions

WASHINGTON (AP) — Authorities say two out-of-state doctors who traveled to Maryland to perform late-term abortions have been arrested and charged with multiple counts of murder, an unusual use of a law that allows for murder charges in the death of a viable fetus. Dr. Steven Brigham, of Voorhees, N.J., was taken into custody Wednesday night and is being held in the Camden County jail, according to police in Elkton, Md. Authorities also arrested Dr. Nicola Riley in Salt Lake City and she is in jail in Utah. Each is awaiting an extradition hearing. A grand jury indicted the two doctors after a 16-month investigation, police said. The investigation began in August 2010 after what authorities say was a botched procedure at Brigham's clinic in Elkton, located near the border of Maryland and Delaware. An 18-year-old woman who was 21 weeks pregnant suffered a ruptured uterus and an injured bowel, according to documents filed in a previous investigation by medical regulators. Rather than call 911, Riley drove her to a nearby hospital, where both she and Brigham were uncooperative and Brigham refused to give his name, documents show.

### Deepwater Drilling In Gulf Is Thriving

ALAMINOS CANYON BLOCK 857, GULF OF MEXICO (AP) — Two hundred miles off the coast of Texas, ribbons of pipe are reaching for oil and natural gas deeper below the ocean's surface than ever before. These pipes, which run nearly two miles deep, are connected to a floating platform that is so remote Shell named it Perdido, which means "lost" in Spanish. What attracted Shell to this location is a geologic formation found throughout the Gulf of Mexico that may contain enough oil to satisfy U.S. demand for two years. While Perdido is isolated, it isn't alone. Across the Gulf, energy companies are probing dozens of new deepwater fields thanks to high oil prices and technological advances that finally make it possible to tap them. The newfound oil will not do much to lower global oil prices. But together with increased production from onshore U.S. fields and slowing domestic demand for gasoline, it could help reduce U.S. oil imports by more than half over the next decade. Eighteen months ago, such a flurry of activity in the Gulf seemed unlikely. The Obama administration halted drilling and stopped issuing new permits after the explosion of a BP well killed 11 workers and caused the largest oil spill in U.S. history.

### Court Delays Border-Crossing Pollution Rule

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal court Friday put on hold a controversial Obama administration regulation aimed at reducing power plant pollution in 27 states that contributes to unhealthy air downwind. More than a dozen electric power companies, municipal power plant operators and states had sought to delay the rules until the litigation plays out. A federal appeals court in Washington approved their request Friday. The EPA, in a statement, said it was confident that the rule would ultimately be upheld on its merits. But the agency said it was "disappointing" the regulation's health benefits would be delayed, even if temporarily. Republicans in Congress have attempted to block the rule using legislation, saying it would shutter some older, coal-fired power plants and kill jobs. While those efforts succeeded in the Republican-controlled House, the Senate — with the help of six Republicans — in November rejected an attempt to stay the regulation. And the White House had threatened to veto it. The rule, finalized by the Environmental Protection Agency in July, replaces a 2005 Bush administration proposal that was rejected by a federal court. The Bush-era rule, which is expected to cost the industry \$1.6 billion annually to comply, will remain in effect. The new rule would have added \$800 million a year to that price tag. But those investments would be far outweighed by the hundreds of billions of dollars in health care savings from cleaner air, according to the EPA. In the first two years, the EPA estimates that the regulation and some other steps would have slashed sulfur dioxide emissions by 73 percent from 2005 levels, and nitrogen oxides will be cut by more than half.

# In A First, Fuels Are Top U.S. Export

BY CHRIS KAHN  
AP Energy Writer

NEW YORK — For the first time, the top export of the United States, the world's biggest gas guzzler, is — wait for it — fuel. Measured in dollars, the nation is on pace this year to ship more gasoline, diesel, and jet fuel than any other single export, according to U.S. Census data going back to 1990. It will also be the first year in more than 60 that America has been a net exporter of these fuels. Just how big of a shift is this? A decade ago, fuel wasn't even among the top 25 exports. And for the last five years, America's top export was aircraft. The trend is significant because for decades the U.S. has relied on huge imports of fuel from Europe in order to meet demand. It only reinforced the image of America as an energy hog. And up until a few years ago, whenever gasoline prices climbed, there were complaints in Congress that U.S. refiners were not growing quickly enough to satisfy domestic demand; that controversy would appear to be over. Still, the U.S. is nowhere close to energy independence. America is still the world's largest importer of crude oil. From January to October, the country imported 2.7 billion barrels of oil worth roughly \$280 billion. Fuel exports, worth an estimated \$88 billion in 2011, have surged for two reasons: — Crude oil, the raw material from which gasoline and other refined products are made, is a lot more expensive. Oil prices averaged \$95 a barrel in 2011, while gasoline averaged \$3.52 a gallon — a record. A decade ago oil averaged \$26 a barrel, while gasoline averaged \$1.44 a gallon. — The volume of fuel exports is rising. The U.S. is using less fuel because of a weak economy and more efficient cars and trucks. That allows refiners to sell more fuel to rapidly growing economies in Latin America, for example. In 2011, U.S. refiners exported 117 million gallons per day of gasoline, diesel, jet fuel and other petroleum products, up from 40 million gallons per day a decade earlier. There's at least one domestic downside to America's growing role as a fuel exporter. Experts say the trend helps explain why U.S. motorists are paying more for gasoline. The more fuel that's sent overseas, the less of a supply cushion there is at home. Gasoline supplies are being exported to the highest bidder, says Tom Kloza, chief oil analyst at Oil Price Information Service. "It's a world market," he says. Refining companies won't say how much they make by selling fuel overseas. But ana-

lysts say those sales are likely generating higher profits per gallon than they would have generated in the U.S. Otherwise, they wouldn't occur. The value of U.S. fuel exports has grown steadily over the past decade, coinciding with rising oil prices and increased demand around the globe. Developing countries in Latin America and Asia have been burning more gasoline and diesel as their people buy more cars and build more roads and factories. Europe also has been buying more U.S. fuel to make up for its lack of refineries. And there's a simple reason why America's refiners have been eager to export to these markets: gasoline demand in the U.S. has been falling every year since 2007. It dropped by another 2.5 percent in 2011. With the economy struggling, motorists cut back. Also, cars and trucks have become more fuel-efficient and the government mandates the use of more corn-based ethanol fuel. The last time the U.S. was a net exporter of fuels was 1949, when Harry Truman was president. That year, the U.S. exported 86 million barrels and imported 82 million barrels. In the first ten months of 2011, the nation exported 848 million barrels (worth \$73.4 billion) and imported 750 million barrels.

## Polls Suggest Room For Swings In GOP Race Before Iowa Caucuses

BY DAVID ESPO  
AND SHANNON MCCAFFREY  
Associated Press

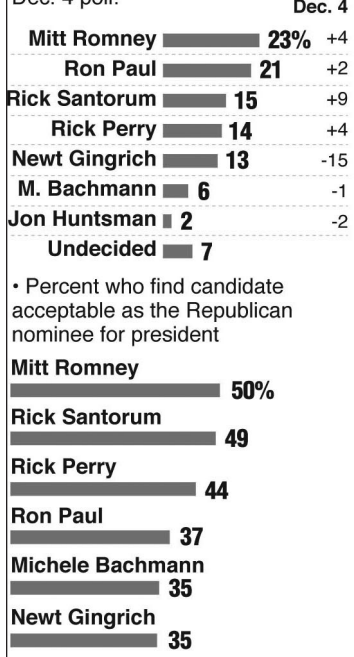
DES MOINES, Iowa — Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich wept Friday as he recalled his late mother's end-of-life illnesses, a moment of poignancy in a notably negative Republican presidential Iowa caucus campaign with four unpredictable days yet to run.

"I do policy much easier than I do personal," Gingrich told an audience of women as he tried to regain his composure. The tears flowed as the former speaker was responding to questions about his mother from a pollster and longtime political ally. Gingrich's emotional moment came as his rivals engaged in traditional campaign tactics, and as polls suggested large numbers of Iowa Republicans could change their minds before caucuses Tuesday night provide the first test of the 2012 campaign.

Former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney sought to marginalize his closest pursuer in most polls, saying, "I don't think Ron Paul represents the mainstream of Republican thought with regards to issues, particularly in foreign policy." Paul gave no ground. "I really can't conceive" of intervening militarily to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons, he said, unequivocally restating his position on an issue on which he differs with Romney and his other rivals. Former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum, claiming momentum based on recent polls, told reporters he recently had the best fundraising day of his candidacy. Yet he also drew criticism from Texas Gov. Rick Perry for advocating earmarks during two terms in the Senate. Minnesota Rep. Michele Bachmann became the latest presidential hopeful to hold a campaign event with Iowa Rep. Steve King — and the latest to

### ELECTION 2012 The GOP battle for Iowa

How the Republican candidates are faring days before the Iowa caucuses:  
• Support among likely Republican caucus-goers including those who are undecided but leaning toward a candidate with change from Dec. 4 poll:



In Dec. 4 poll, 54 percent had said Newt Gingrich was acceptable

Source: NBC News/Marist poll of 433 likely Republican caucus-goers, Dec. 27-28, 2011; margin of error: +/-4.7 percentage points  
Graphic: Judy Treibler © 2011 MCT

hear him say he wasn't ready to give his endorsement.

Whatever the impact of Gingrich's tears on the race for the White House, the episode seemed destined to be replayed endlessly on televisions, personal computers and hand-held devices.

That was the case nearly four years ago, when Hillary Rodham Clinton appeared to choke back tears while campaigning in New Hampshire a few days before the state's Democratic presidential

primary. The episode also became the subject of intense political analysis. Clinton won the primary in an upset a few days later.

Gingrich was surging in the polls a little more than a week ago, but was hit by a barrage of negative ads and has been struggling in recent days. Normally a combative politician, he shed tears as he appeared before a group of mothers and responded to a question from Frank Luntz, a Republican pollster and longtime ally of the former speaker.

Asked about his mother and an event in his life that influenced his policies and views, Gingrich recalled her as happy and having friends before she ended up in a long-term care facility suffering from bipolar disease, depression and physical ailments.

"My whole emphasis on brain science comes in directly from dealing with the real problems of real people," he said, his face distorting as he began to cry. "And so it's not a theory. It's, in fact, my mother," he said.

Kathleen "Kit" Gingrich died in 2003. She was 77. Romney, who leads in most polls in Iowa, criticized Paul in an interview with Fox News Channel.

"I don't think Ron Paul represents the mainstream of Republican thought with regards to issues, particularly in foreign policy," he said, referring to the Texan's statement that he would oppose military action to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

At the same time he said Paul was outside the GOP mainstream, Romney pledged to support whoever wins the party's nomination to oppose President Barack Obama in the fall.

Campaigning later in western Iowa, Paul said he would probably have difficulty voting for any of the other Republicans in the race if they win the party nomination. "They all are part of the status quo," he said.

## North Korea Names Kim Jong Un Supreme Commander

PYONGYANG, North Korea (AP) — North Korea announced Saturday that Kim Jong Un has been officially named supreme commander of the military, further strengthening his authority after the death of his father, longtime North Korean leader Kim Jong Il.

Officials and state media have bestowed on Kim Jong Un, who is in his late 20s, a string of titles as North Korea's elite rally around him in the wake of his father's death this month after 17 years in power.

But the title Supreme Commander — and its formal proclamation by the powerful Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party — is a clear sign that Kim Jong Un is fast consolidating power over North Korea. It's also the latest step in a burgeoning personality cult around him.

Kim Jong Un should be "the only center of unity, cohesion and leadership" of the Workers' Party, North Korea's state media said, and the 1.2 million-strong military should uphold the "songun," or military-first, politics laid down by Kim Jong Il.

The party said the country should unite around Kim Jong Un and strengthen "the monolithic leadership system of Kim Jong Un in the whole party and society."

An unannounced Workers' Party meeting Friday proclaimed that the younger Kim "assumed supreme command of the Korean People's Army" according to a will made by Kim Jong Il on Oct. 8, the North's official Korean Central News Agency said in a statement early Saturday morning.

The meeting of the North's ruling party came one day after the official mourning period for Kim Jong Il ended and senior military and political officials publicly declared Kim Jong Un leader of the party, military and people at a memorial for his father attended by hundreds of thousands.

### New Year Cheer Starts Early In Time-Jumping Samoa

APIA, Samoa (AP) — The New Year's Eve parties started a whole day early on the Pacific island nation of Samoa, after a hop across the international date line transported the country 24 hours into the future. Samoa and neighboring Tokelau are close to the international

dateline that zigzags vertically through the Pacific Ocean, and both sets of islands decided to realign themselves this year from the Americas side of the line to the Asia side.

That makes them the first in the world to ring in the new year rather than the last.

Samoans began celebrating at the stroke of midnight on Thursday, Dec. 29. That's when the country skipped over Friday and moved straight into 12:01 a.m. on New Year's Eve. Pools and beaches have been crowded with revelers.



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