

L.A. Teacher Charged With Molesting 23 Kids

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Authorities say the elementary school teacher told the children that it was a game. Once inside his third-grade classroom, they say, he blindfolded them, gagged them and set cockroaches crawling on their faces.

And then, Mark Berndt photographed them, creating hundreds of images that would eventually lead to his arrest, police say.

On Tuesday, Berndt, 61, was sitting in jail on charges that he committed lewd acts on 23 boys and girls, ages 6 to 10, between 2008 and 2010. None of them complained about Berndt's behavior, authorities said.

Police and school officials only learned of it when a film processor found Berndt's photos more than a year ago. Since the discovery, the school district fired Berndt and police put him under surveillance.

"If it wasn't for the film processor, this could still be continuing today," said Lt. Carlos Marquez of the Los Angeles County sheriff's department.

U.S., Allies Urge Action To End Syria Violence

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Vowing to avoid "another Libya," the U.S. and its allies challenged Russia on Tuesday to overcome its opposition to a U.N. draft resolution demanding that Syrian President Bashar Assad yield power and end the violence that has killed thousands.

"It is time for the international community to put aside our own differences and send a clear message of support to the people of Syria," Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton told the U.N. Security Council in backing an Arab League plan for the country.

Russia, one of Assad's strongest allies, has signaled it would veto any U.N. action against Damascus, fearing it could open the door to eventual international military involvement, the way an Arab-backed U.N. resolution led to NATO airstrikes in Libya.

But Clinton said U.N. action in Syria would not involve military intervention, unlike the NATO-led efforts that resulted in the ouster of Moammar Gadhafi.

"I know that some members here may be concerned that the Security Council is headed toward another Libya," Clinton said. "That is a false analogy."

GOP 'Super PAC' Raised \$51 million In 2011

WASHINGTON (AP) — American Crossroads, the Republican "super" political committee that plans to play a major role in this year's presidential campaign, raised more than \$51 million along with its nonprofit arm last year, The Associated Press has learned.

The figures from Crossroads — the group backed by former George W. Bush adviser Karl Rove — were among the first financial reports being made public Tuesday, the deadline for super PACs and presidential candidates to file financial reports with federal election officials.

While most recent public attention has focused on groups spending major sums for negative TV ads assailing GOP presidential primary rivals Mitt Romney and Newt Gingrich, Tuesday's figures are a sign of even greater spending to come in the general election battle between the Republican nominee and Democratic President Barack Obama.

Other big super PACs required to disclose their donors Tuesday include Restore Our Future, the Romney-leaning PAC that has contributed to a deluge of ads hammering Gingrich, and Winning Our Future, the Gingrich-supportive group that has been critical of Romney's time at a venture capital firm. Both super PACs are run in part by former advisers to the candidates.

The American Crossroads PAC has about \$15.6 million cash on hand, representing only part of the money it has in the bank to spend on defeating Obama. Financial details from Crossroads GPS — the nonprofit arm — are unclear because it doesn't have to disclose its donors under IRS rules, although Crossroads GPS was responsible for most of the groups' fundraising haul.

Gingrich's Moon Base Talk Not An Oddity

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican presidential candidate Newt Gingrich wants to create a lunar colony that he says could become a U.S. state. There's his grand research plan to figure out what makes the human brain tick. And he's warned about electromagnetic pulse attacks leaving America without electricity.

To some people, these ideas sound like science fiction. But mostly they are not.

Several science policy experts say the former House speaker's ideas are based in mainstream science. But somehow, Gingrich manages to make them sound way out there, taking them first a small step and then a giant leap further than where other politicians have gone.

Gingrich's promise that "by the end of my second term we will have the first permanent base on the moon" got amped up in a recent debate in Florida, which lost thousands of jobs with the end of the space shuttle program. By then, the lunar base had become a colony and even a potential state, and his moon ideas were ridiculed by rival Mitt Romney.

Returning to the moon and building an outpost there is not new. Until three years ago, it was U.S. policy and billions of dollars were spent on that idea.

Iran Not Yet Decided On Building A Bomb

WASHINGTON (AP) — Top U.S. intelligence officials on Tuesday asserted that Iran has the means to build a nuclear weapon but has not yet decided to follow through, in contrast to Israel's insistence that time is running out to stop Iran from developing such a weapon.

But Iran is likely to strike out at U.S. interests if it feels threatened, Director of National Intelligence James Clapper told the Senate Intelligence Committee in an annual report to Congress on threats facing America.

Citing last year's thwarted Iranian plot to kill the Saudi ambassador in the U.S., "some Iranian officials — probably including Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei ... are now more willing to conduct an attack in the United States in response to real or perceived U.S. actions that threaten the regime," Clapper said.

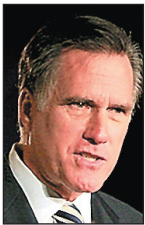
Romney Big Winner In Florida

Despite Poor Showing, Gingrich To Press On

BY DAVID ESPO AND STEVE PEOPLES  
Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. — Mitt Romney routed Newt Gingrich in the Florida primary Tuesday night, rebounding smartly from an earlier defeat and taking a major step toward the Republican presidential nomination. Gingrich vowed to press on despite the one-sided setback.

Romney, talking unity like a nominee, said he was ready to take the Republican helm and "lead this party and our nation." In remarks to cheering supporters, the former Massachusetts governor unleashed a strong attack on Democratic President Barack Obama and said the competitive fight for the GOP nomination "does not divide us, it prepares us" for the fall campaign.



Romney

"Mr. President, you were elected to lead, you chose to follow, and now it's time to get out of the way," he declared.

Returns from 79 percent of Florida's precincts showed Romney with 47 percent of the vote to 32 percent for Gingrich, the former House speaker.

Former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum had 13 percent, and Texas Rep. Ron Paul 7 percent. Neither mounted a substantial effort in the state.

For the first time in the campaign, exit polls showed a gender gap, and it worked to Romney's advantage.

He was leading Gingrich 51-28 among women voters and was winning men by a far smaller margin of 41-35.

Ominously for the thrice-married Gingrich, only about half of women voters said they had a favorable view of him as a person, compared to about eight in 10 for Romney.

Nor was Romney's victory a narrow one. His winning percentage approached 50 percent and a majority that would demolish Gingrich's oft-stated contention that the voters who oppose Romney outnumber those who favor him.

Still, the former speaker said, "We're going to



JOE BURBANK/ORLANDO SENTINEL/MCT

Republican presidential candidate Newt Gingrich, with wife Callista, responds to supporters in Orlando, Florida, after finishing a distant second to challenger Mitt Romney in the Florida Republican Primary, Tuesday night, January 31, 2012.

contest everyplace and we are going to win."

As in Iowa, New Hampshire and South Carolina, about half of Florida primary voters said the most important factor for them was backing a candidate who could defeat Obama in November, according to exit poll results conducted for The Associated Press and the television networks.

Not surprisingly, in a state with an unemployment rate hovering around 10 percent, about two-thirds of voters said the economy was their top issue. Nearly nine in 10 said they were falling behind or just keeping up. And half said that home foreclosures have been a major problem in their communities.

The winner-take-all primary was worth 50 Republican National Convention delegates, by far the most of any primary state so far. That gave

Romney a total of 87, to 26 for Gingrich, 14 for Santorum and four for Paul, with 1,144 required to clinch the nomination.

But the bigger prize was precious political momentum in the race to pick an opponent for Obama in a nation struggling to recover from the deepest recession in decades.

That belonged to Romney when he captured the New Hampshire primary three weeks ago, then swung stunningly to Gingrich when he countered with a South Carolina upset 11 days later.

Now it was back with the former Massachusetts governor, after a 10-day comeback marked by a change to more aggressive tactics, coupled with an efficient use of an overwhelming financial advantage to batter Gingrich in television commercials.

U.S. Confirms Possible Release Of Taliban

BY ANNE GEARAN AND KIMBERLY DOZIER  
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — U.S. intelligence officials acknowledged Tuesday that the United States may release several Afghan Taliban prisoners from the military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, as an incentive to bring the Taliban to peace talks.

Meanwhile, Afghan officials told The Associated Press that a plan to give Afghanistan a form of legal custody over the men if they are released satisfied their earlier objection to sending the prisoners to a third country.

Director of National Intelligence Jim Clapper told Congress Tuesday that no decision had been made on whether to trade the five Taliban prisoners, now held at Guantanamo Bay as part of nascent peace talks with the Taliban. He and CIA Director David Petraeus did not dispute that the Obama administration is considering transferring the five to a third country.

U.S. officials and others had previously spoken only vaguely, and usually anonymously, about the proposal to send the prisoners to Qatar, a Persian Gulf country that has asserted a central role in framing talks that might end the 10-year war in Afghanistan. The lead U.S. negotiator trying to coax the Taliban into talks had also publicly acknowledged the possibility of a release, but said there was no final decision.

The prisoners proposed for transfer include some of the de-

tainees brought to Guantanamo during the initial days and weeks of the U.S. invasion that toppled the Taliban government in Afghanistan in 2001. At least one has been accused in the massacre of thousands of Shiite Muslims in Afghanistan, according to U.S. and other assessments, but none are accused of directly killing Americans.

"I don't think anybody harbors any illusions about it, but I think the position is to at least explore the potential for negotiating with them as a part of this overall resolution of the situation in Afghanistan," Clapper said during a Senate Intelligence Committee hearing.

The Obama administration has recently embraced the possibility of negotiation with the Taliban much more openly, saying that although they remain cautious they are also encouraged that the militants may be ready to bargain. Peace talks, if they come to pass, would include the elected Afghan government and, at least at the outset, representatives of the U.S. government.

With nearly 100,000 troops in Afghanistan and a war and development budget in the billions of dollars, the U.S. remains the largest power broker in Afghanistan.

Afghan President Hamid Karzai supports a prisoner release as a means to build confidence among the Taliban militants that talks are worthwhile, but he had balked at the U.S.-backed plan to send them to Qatar instead of home to Afghanistan. That plan appeared

Scientists Puzzled By Region Outside Solar System

BY ALICIA CHANG  
AP Science Writer

LOS ANGELES — A glimpse beyond our solar system reveals the neighborhood just outside the sun's influence is different and stranger than expected, scientists reported Tuesday.

One oddity is the amount of oxygen. There are more oxygen atoms floating freely in the solar system than in the immediate interstellar space, or the vast region between stars.

Scientists were unsure why, but they said it's possible some of the life-supporting element could be hidden in dust or ice.

"We discovered this big puzzle — that the matter just outside of our solar system doesn't look like the material inside," said David McComas of the Southwest Research Institute in San Antonio, Texas.

The discovery came from NASA's Interstellar Boundary Explorer spacecraft, which launched in 2008 to study the chaotic boundary where the solar wind

from the sun clashes with cold gases from interstellar space.

Circling 200,000 miles above Earth, the Ibx spacecraft spots particles streaming into the solar system. A protective bubble surrounding around the sun and planets prevents dangerous cosmic radiation from seeping through, but neutral particles can pass freely, allowing Ibx to map their distribution.

The presence of less oxygen outside the solar system should not have any bearing on the search for Earth-like planets, scientists involved in the exoplanet hunt said.

There's plenty of oxygen in all the stars in the galaxy and in the material out of which stars and planets form, Geoff Marcy of University of California, Berkeley said in an email.

While Ibx probes the edge of the solar system from Earth orbit, NASA's long-running, nuclear-powered twin Voyager spacecraft are at the fringes. Launched in 1977, the spacecraft have been exploring the solar system boundary since 2004.

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Register To Submit Your Photos: One Entry Per Email Address

Upload your photo to one of the following categories:

- 0-6 months • 7-12 months • 13 months-2 years • 3-4 years

You have until February 3rd to submit your photos. They will then be voted on by the public. You can help promote your child to win through Facebook and email! People will be able to vote once per day per registered email address. Voting will take place from February 4th-19th. Winning photos will be published in the Yankton Daily Press & Dakotan on February 22nd. First place winners will receive a framed winners print and gift certificates to local businesses. Employees and family members of Yankton Media Inc. and any of its subsidiaries are ineligible to win. Your online submission authorizes the publication of this photo in this contest in print and online at <http://www.yankton.net> and <http://play2win.upickem.net>. If you have any questions please email us at [classifieds@yankton.net](mailto:classifieds@yankton.net) and we will help you with your online submissions.

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