

High Court Adds Affirmative Action To Slate

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court is setting an election-season review of racial preference in college admissions, agreeing Tuesday to consider new limits on the contentious issue of affirmative action programs.

A challenge from a white student who was denied admission to the University of Texas flagship campus will be the high court’s first look at affirmative action in higher education since its 2003 decision endorsing the use of race as a factor.

This time around, a more conservative court could jettison that earlier ruling or at least limit when colleges may take account of race in admissions.

In a term already filled with health care, immigration and political redistricting, the justices won’t hear the affirmative action case until the fall.

But the political calendar will still add drama. Arguments probably will take place in the final days of the presidential election campaign.

Red Cross Calls For Daily Cease-Fire In Syria

BEIRUT (AP) — Food and water are running dangerously low in the besieged Syrian city of Homs, with frantic cries for help from residents amid government shelling that pounded rebel strongholds and killed at least 30 people Tuesday, activists said.

Shells reportedly rained down on rebellious districts at a rate of 10 per minute at one point and the Red Cross called for a daily two-hour cease-fire so that it can deliver emergency aid to the wounded and sick.

“If they don’t die in the shelling, they will die of hunger,” activist and resident Omar Shaker told The Associated Press after hours of intense shelling concentrated on the rebel-held neighborhood of Baba Amr that the opposition has extolled as a symbol of their 11-month uprising against President Bashar Assad’s regime.

Another 33 people were killed in northern Syria’s mountainous Jabal al-Zawiya region when government forces raided a town in pursuit of regime opponents, raising Tuesday’s overall death toll to 63, activists said. The Local Coordination Committees, an opposition group, said more than 100 were killed Tuesday, but the report could not immediately be confirmed by others.

Russia, one of Assad’s remaining allies, urged the United Nations to send a special envoy to Syria to help coordinate security issues and delivery of humanitarian assistance.

Venezuela’s Chavez Says He Faces New Surgery

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — President Hugo Chavez announced Tuesday that doctors in Cuba found a new lesion in the same place where he had a tumor removed last year and said he will require surgery.

“It is a small lesion of about 2 centimeters (less than 1 inch) in diameter, very clearly visible,” Chavez told state television.

The announcement thrust Venezuelan politics into new uncertainty because the socialist leader is seeking re-election this year, hoping to extend his more than 13 years in power with a new six-year term.

He did not say when he would undergo the surgery, other than “in the coming days.”

Chavez, 57, said the new surgery should be less complicated than what he underwent in Cuba last June, when doctors removed a cancerous tumor from his pelvic region.

Retired Mass. Judge Defends Ordering Abortion

BOSTON (AP) — A retired Massachusetts judge on Tuesday defended her decision to order a mentally ill woman to have an abortion and be sterilized against her wishes, and she blasted Boston University for rescinding a job offer after her ruling sparked controversy.

Christina Harms said she believes the schizophrenic woman would have chosen to have an abortion if she had been mentally competent. In her ruling, she granted a petition from the woman’s parents to have their daughter declared incompetent and awarded guardianship to them for the purpose of consenting to the abortion.

Harms’ ruling drew spirited debate among bloggers on both sides of the abortion issue. Her written ruling remains sealed under family court rules, but the gist of it became public after the state Appeals Court overturned the decision on Jan. 17.

Now Harms has taken the unusual step of defending her decision publicly, both in media interviews and in a letter she sent Monday to other family court judges in Massachusetts. The Boston Globe first reported on the judge’s letter.

Harms, who retired six days before the Appeals Court ruling, said a decision by Boston University’s School of Law to back out of a job offer shortly after the Appeals Court overturned her ruling sends the wrong message about judicial independence.

Mardi Gras Celebration Consumes New Orleans

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Bathed in spring-like warmth and showered with trinkets, beads and music, New Orleans reveled in the excesses of Fat Tuesday. A seemingly endless stream of costumed marching groups and ornately-decorated float parades led by make-believe royalty poured out of the Garden District, while the French Quarter filled up with thrill seekers expecting to see debauchery.

And they did.

Some in the Quarter had a sleepless night after Monday’s Lundi Gras prequel party. The drinking was in full swing again shortly after dawn, and with it came outrageous costumes and flesh-flashing that would continue until police make their annual attempt to break up the merrymaking at midnight, when Lent begins.

Tom White, 46, clad in a pink tutu, bicycled with his wife, Allison, to the French Quarter. “I’m the pink fairy this year,” he said. “Costuming is the real fun of Mardi Gras. I’m not too creative but when you weigh 200 pounds and put on a tutu people still take your picture.”

Dow Briefly Breaks 13,000 Barrier

BY CHRISTINA REXRODE
AP Business Writer

NEW YORK — It came and went in a flash each time, a number on a board for mere seconds, but its symbolic power couldn’t be dismissed.

The Dow Jones industrial average, powered higher all year by optimism that the economic recovery is finally for real, crossed 13,000 on Tuesday for the first time since May 2008.

The last time the Dow was there, unemployment was 5.4 percent, and Lehman Brothers was a solvent investment bank. Financial crises happened in other countries, or the history books.

The milestone Tuesday came about two hours into the trading day. The Dow was above 13,000 for about 30 seconds, and for slightly longer at about noon and 1:30 p.m., but couldn’t hold its gains. It finished up 15.82 points at 12,965.69.

Still, Wall Street took note of the marker.

It was just last summer that the Dow unbundled itself of 2,000 points in three terrifying weeks. Standard & Poor’s downgraded the United States’ credit rating, Washington was fighting over the federal borrowing limit, and the European debt crisis was raging.

A second recession in the United States was

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SCOTT BROWN

a real fear. But the economy grew faster every quarter last year, and gains in the job market have been impressive, including 243,000 jobs added in January alone.

“Essentially over the last couple of months you’ve taken the two biggest fears off the table, that Europe is going to melt down and that we’re going to have another recession here,” said Scott Brown, chief economist for Raymond James.

The tumult of last summer and fall left the Dow as low as 10,655. It closed Tuesday 22 percent above that low. The Dow is 1,199 points from an all-time high, a 9 percent rally from here.

A long-awaited bailout to help Greece pre-

vented a potentially catastrophic default, announced before dawn in Europe after 12 hours of talks, helped the Dow clear 13,000.

Greece will get (euro) 130 billion, or about \$172 billion, from other European nations and the International Monetary Fund. In a separate deal, investors in Greek bonds will be asked to forgive (euro) 107 billion in debt.

After months in which talks crawled along and vague headlines yanked the market up and down, the conclusion was almost anticlimactic because the markets were already expecting an agreement.

European markets didn’t take the news as well. Stocks closed down 3.5 percent in Greece, where stocks have lost 80 percent of their value since 2007. Stocks declined less than 1 percent Tuesday in Germany, France and Britain.

Investors noted that Greece remains in a deep recession. Its bond investors will take a 53.5 percent loss on the face value of their bonds, which could discourage future investment.

In the U.S., investors were cheered early by earnings from Home Depot, watched closely as a barometer of American spending on homes, and Macy’s. Wal-Mart missed Wall Street expectations, and its stock lost 4 percent, worst among the 30 stocks in the Dow.

GOP Candidates Blast President

Santorum Attacks Obama’s Motives On Power, Abortion

BY CHARLES BABINGTON
Associated Press

PHOENIX — A surging Rick Santorum is making increasingly harsh remarks about President Barack Obama, questioning not just the president’s competence but his motives and even his Christian values.

Santorum, the former Pennsylvania senator who suddenly is threatening Romney in his native state of Michigan, says Obama cares only about power, not the “interests of people.” He says “Obamacare,” the health care overhaul Obama enacted, includes a “hidden message” about the president’s disregard for impaired fetuses, which might be aborted.

Santorum even seemed to compare Obama to Adolf Hitler, although he denies trying to do so.

Santorum’s remarks have gotten only scattered attention because he weaves them into long, sometimes rambling speeches. Romney’s team is monitoring Santorum’s comments, privately suggesting they could hurt him in a general election.

But it’s difficult for Romney to openly criticize Santorum on these points because Romney already has trouble appealing to the party’s socially conservative base. Santorum’s remarks could come up in Wednesday’s debate in Mesa, Ariz., sponsored by CNN.

Gingrich, campaigning Monday in Oklahoma, called Obama “the most dangerous president in mod-



Santorum

ern American history.” Gingrich said the administration’s “willful dishonesty” about alleged terrorists’ motives threatens the country.

Gingrich has long been known for over-the-top rhetoric, and Santorum’s rapid rise in the polls has drawn much of the campaign’s focus away from the former House speaker.

Some of Santorum’s remarks echo attacks on Obama during the 2008 presidential race, when critics portrayed him as a mysterious politician with hidden motives and questionable allegiance to the United States. More recent examples include:

—Saturday in Columbus, Ohio, Santorum criticized Obama for requiring health insurance plans to cover prenatal testing. He said such tests lead to “more abortions and therefore less care that has to be done, because we cull the ranks of the disabled in our society. That too is part of Obamacare, another hidden message as to what President Obama thinks of those who are less able than the elites who want to govern our country.”

Obama campaign spokeswoman Lis Smith said “prenatal screenings are essential to promote the health of both the mother and baby and to ensure safe deliveries.”



ANDRE J. JACKSON/DETROIT FREE PRESS/MCT

Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney shakes hands with supporters after a town hall meeting at Eagle Manufacturing in Shelby Township, Michigan, Tuesday, February 21, 2012.

Romney Says Obama Has ‘Fought Against Religion’

BY KASIE HUNT
Associated Press

SHELBY TOWNSHIP, Mich. — Republican presidential candidate Mitt Romney said Tuesday that President Barack Obama’s administration has “fought against religion” and sought to substitute a “secular” agenda for one grounded in faith.

Obama’s campaign seized on the characterization, calling Romney’s comments “disgraceful.”

Romney rarely ventures into social issues in his campaign speeches, but people participating in a town hall-style meeting one week before the Michigan primary asked how he would protect religious liberty.

“Unfortunately, possibly because of the people the president hangs around with, and their agenda, their secular agenda — they have fought against religion,” Romney said.

The Obama campaign linked Romney’s remarks to recent comments by rival Rick Santorum, who has referred to Obama holding a “phony theology” only to say later that he wasn’t attacking Obama’s faith but the president’s environmental views.

“These ugly and misleading attacks have no place in the campaign and they provide a very clear contrast with what President Obama is talking about: how to restore economic security for the middle class and create jobs,” said Lis Smith, an Obama campaign spokeswoman.

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