

Oregon Teen Dies After Inhaling Helium At Party

EAGLE POINT, Ore. (AP) — Last weekend, 14-year-old Ashley Long told her parents she was going to a slumber party. But instead of spending the night watching videos and eating popcorn two blocks away, she piled into a car with a bunch of her friends and rode to a condo in Medford, Ore., where police say the big sister of one of her friends was throwing a party with booze and marijuana.

After drinking on the drive, and downing more drinks in the condo, it came time for Ashley to take her turn on a tank of helium that everyone else was inhaling to make their voices sound funny.

“That helium tank got going around,” said Ashley’s stepfather, Justin Earp, who learned what happened from talking to Ashley’s friends at the party. “It got to my daughter. My daughter didn’t want to do it. It was peer pressure. They put a mask up to her face. They said it would be OK. ‘It’s not gonna hurt you. It’ll just make you laugh and talk funny.’”

Instead, she passed out and later died at a hospital, the result of an obstruction in a blood vessel caused by inhaling helium from a pressurized tank.

“It blew her lungs out,” Earp said. “It exploded them. It created air pockets in her veins. Then it went up into her brain and blew it up.”

Study Shows Colonoscopies Cut Deaths In Half

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Millions of people have endured a colonoscopy, believing the dreaded exam may help keep them from dying of colon cancer. For the first time, a major study offers clear evidence that it does.

Removing precancerous growths spotted during the test can cut the risk of dying from colon cancer in half, the study suggests. Doctors have long assumed a benefit, but research hasn’t shown before that removing polyps would improve survival — the key measure of any cancer screening’s worth.

Some people skip the test because of the unpleasant steps need to get ready for it.

“Sure, it’s a pain in the neck. People complain to me all the time, ‘It’s horrible. It’s terrible,’” said Dr. Sidney Winawer, a gastroenterologist at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center in New York who helped lead the study. “But look at the alternative.”

A second study in Europe found that colonoscopies did a better job of finding polyps than another common screening tool — tests that look for blood in stool. Both studies were published in Thursday’s New England Journal of Medicine.

Comic Book Collection Earns \$3.5M At Auction

DALLAS (AP) — The bulk of a man’s childhood comic book collection that included many of the most prized issues ever published sold at auction Wednesday for about \$3.5 million.

A copy of Detective Comics No. 27, which sold for 10 cents in 1939 and features the debut of Batman, got the top bid at the New York City auction Wednesday. It sold for about \$523,000, including a buyer’s premium, said Lon Allen, managing director of comics for Heritage Auctions, the Dallas-based auction house overseeing the sale.

“This really has its place in the history of great comic book collections,” said Allen, who added that the auction was high energy, with “a bunch of applause at a couple of the top lots.”

Action Comics No. 1, a 1938 issue featuring the first appearance of Superman, sold for about \$299,000; Batman No. 1, from 1940, sold for about \$275,000; and Captain America No. 2, a 1941 issue with a frightened Adolf Hitler on the cover, brought in about \$114,000, Allen said.

Among the 345 well-preserved comics bought decades ago by the Virginia boy with a remarkable knack for picking winners were 44 of The Overstreet Comic Book Price Guide’s top 100 issues from comics’ golden age.

Teen Arrested In Flight Sang Of Bin Laden

PORTLAND, Ore. (AP) — The cousin of a Saudi Arabian teenager indicted on charges of interfering with a flight crew says his relative suffers from schizophrenia, was flying home to see his sick mother and hasn’t taken his medication for three weeks.

Authorities allege 19-year-old Yazeed Mohammed A. Abunayyan swung his fist at a flight attendant, tried to hit passengers and mentioned Osama bin Laden during a flight from Portland, Ore., to Houston. Police arrested him Tuesday night at Portland International Airport after his Continental flight turned around following the incident.

Fahad Alsubaie tells the Medford Mail Tribune he was the person escorted off the plane with Abunayyan. The 21-year-old cousin says the disruption began when a flight attendant confronted the two for sitting together, because Alsubaie was in the wrong seat. The cousin says he was trying to sit with Abunayyan “just to make sure he was safe.”

Alsubaie is a Saudi Arabian exchange student studying English at Southern Oregon University in Ashland.

Police: 2 Shot At Conneticut Hospital

NEW BRITAIN, Conn. (AP) — Police say a Connecticut hospital employee shot and wounded two supervisors amid a dispute over a disciplinary issue.

New Britain Police Chief William Gagliardi says 65-year-old Victor Valcarcel Sr. was arrested at his home without incident a mile away from the hospital.

Gagliardi says the two victims are in serious but stable condition at a hospital in Hartford.

The shootings took place late Wednesday afternoon at the Hospital for Special Care, a private nonprofit facility specializing in rehabilitation and long-term acute care.

A helicopter with a search light flew over the hospital as police cars and ambulances responded to the shooting.

Jury: 26 Years Total For Former U.Va Player

CHARLOTTESVILLE, Va. (AP) — A jury says a former University of Virginia lacrosse player should serve 25 years in prison for the second-degree murder of his ex-girlfriend.

The jurors recommended the punishment hours after they found George Huguely V guilty of second-degree murder of Yeardley Love. The suburban Baltimore woman was found dead in the bedroom of her Charlottesville apartment in May 2010. He also was sentenced to 1 year for a grand larceny conviction.

Huguely’s head was bowed during sentencing.

Love suffered a bashed in right eye and other facial injuries. Prosecutors said Huguely killed her in a drunken, jealous rage.

Circuit Judge Edward Hogshire scheduled an April hearing for formal sentencing. He is not bound by the jury’s recommendations.

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Romney, Santorum Swap Charges In Debate

BY DAVID ESPO
AP Special Correspondent

MESA, Ariz. (AP) — Primed for a fight, Mitt Romney and Rick Santorum traded fiery accusations about health care, spending earmarks and federal bailouts Wednesday night in the 20th and possibly final debate of the roller-coaster race for the Republican presidential nomination.

Santorum, surging in the race, also took his lumps from the audience, which booed when he said he had voted several years ago for the No Child Left Behind education legislation even though he had opposed it.

“Look, politics is a team sport, folks,” he said of the measure backed by Republican President George W. Bush and other GOP lawmakers.

With pivotal primaries in Arizona and Michigan just six days distant — and 10 more contests one week later — Romney and Santorum sparred more aggressively than in past debates, sometimes talking over each other’s answers.

Texas Rep. Ron Paul chimed in from the side, saying with a smile that Santorum was a fake conservative who had voted for programs that he now says he wants to repeal. Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich acted almost as a referee at times.

On foreign affairs, all four Republicans attacked President Barack Obama for his handling of Iran and its attempt to develop a nuclear program, but none of the contenders advocated providing arms to the rebels trying to topple the government of Syrian President Bashar Assad.

The most animated clash of the evening focused on health care in the United States.

Santorum said that Romney had used government money to “fund a federal takeover of health care in Massachusetts,” a reference to the state law that was enacted during Romney’s term as governor. The law includes a requirement for individuals to purchase coverage that is similar to the one in Obama’s landmark federal law that Romney and other Republicans have vowed to repeal.

In rebuttal, Romney said Santorum, a former Pennsylvania senator, actually bore responsibility for passage of the health care law that Obama won from a Democratic-controlled Congress in 2010, even though he wasn’t in office at the time. Romney said that in a primary battle in 2004, Santorum had supported then-Sen. Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania, who later switched parties and voted for the law Obama wanted.

“He voted for Obamacare. If you had not supported him, if we had said no to Arlen Specter, we would not have Obamacare,” Romney contended.

Santorum was the aggressor on bailouts.

While all four of the Republicans on the debate stage opposed the federal bailout of the auto industry in 2008 and 2009, Santorum said he had voted against other government-funded rescue efforts.

“With respect to Governor Romney that was not the case, he supported the folks on Wall Street and bailed out Wall Street — was all for it — and when it came to the auto workers and the folks in Detroit, he said no. That to me is not a principled consistent position,” he said.

The debate had a different look from the 19 that preceded it. Instead of standing behind lecterns, the four presidential rivals sat in chairs lined up side by side. Romney, Santorum and Paul recently announced they would not participate in

another four-way appearance that had been scheduled in Atlanta, raising the possibility that the 20th debate might be the last.

There was another difference, as well, in the form of polls that underscored the gains that Obama has made in his bid for re-election.

An Associated Press-Gfk poll released Wednesday found that Obama would defeat any of the four remaining Republican contenders in a hypothetical matchup. It also found that the nation is showing more optimism about the state of the economy, the dominant issue in the race.

But for two hours, Romney, Santorum, Paul and Gingrich had a different campaign in mind, their own race for the Republican nomination and the right to oppose Obama in the fall.

After a brief lull, the campaign calendar calls for 13 primaries and caucuses between next Tuesday, when Arizona and Michigan have primaries, and March 6, a 10-state Super Tuesday. The Washington state caucuses are March 3.

Romney is campaigning confidently in Arizona, so much so that his campaign has not aired any television ads.

But the former Massachusetts governor faces an unexpectedly strong challenge in his home state of Michigan, where Santorum is hoping to spring an upset. Santorum’s candidacy has rebounded in the two weeks since he won caucuses in Minnesota, Colorado and a non-binding primary in Missouri.

The result is a multimillion-dollar barrage of television commercials in Michigan in which the candidates and their allies swap accusations in hopes of tipping the race.

In all, 518 Republican National Convention delegates are at stake between Feb. 28 and March 6, three times the number awarded in the states that have voted since the beginning of the year. It takes 1,144 to win the nomination.

The dynamic of the campaign — Santorum challenging Romney — made their clashes Wednesday night inevitable.

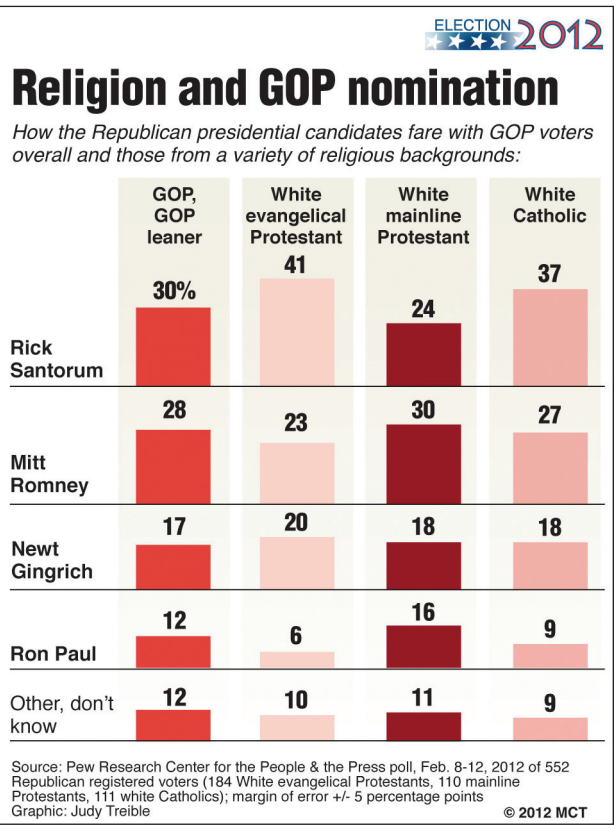
Romney said Santorum voted five times while in Congress to raise the government’s ability to borrow, supported retention of a law that favors construction unions and supported increased spending for Planned Parenthood. He said federal spending had risen 78 percent overall while the former Pennsylvania senator was in Congress.

Santorum retorted that government spending declined as a percentage of the economy when he was in the Senate, and he noted that when Romney was asked last year if he would support a then-pending debt-limit increase, “he said yes.”

There was a clash over federal spending earmarks, as well, and Gingrich sought to intervene as if serving as a referee instead of a debate participant.

He said he supported the earmarks that Romney had sought for the Olympics in Salt Lake City in 2002, but then he accused Romney of observing a double standard by running television ads attacking Santorum for having voted for different earmarks.

In the hours leading to Wednesday night’s debate, Romney called for a 20 percent across-the-board cut in personal income taxes as part of a program he said would revitalize the economy and help create jobs. The top tax rate would drop from 35 percent to 28 percent, and some popular breaks would be scaled back for upper-income taxpayers. However, aides provided scant details.



National Meth Lab Busts Up In 2011

BY JIM SALTER
Associated Press

ST. LOUIS — Methamphetamine lab seizures rose nationally again in 2011, further evidence the powerfully addictive and dangerous drug is maintaining a tight grip on the nation’s heartland, according to an Associated Press survey of the nation’s top meth-producing states.

Missouri regained the top national spot for lab seizures in 2011 with 2,096, the AP confirmed through the survey that also found Tennessee was second with 1,687, followed by Indiana with 1,437, Kentucky with 1,188 and Oklahoma with 902.

The total for Missouri lines up with numbers AP obtained this week from the Drug Enforcement Administration, whose data appeared to show meth lab seizures remained about even during the past two years. But the totals for each of the other states surveyed by AP are higher than the federal data.

Combined, the numbers indicate nationwide meth lab seizures rose at least 8.3 percent in 2011 compared to 2010.

The AP polled the states after obtaining the DEA breakdown of meth lab seizures by state for 2011 and finding that several had not yet reported full-year data.

Missouri had been the nation’s No. 1 meth-producing state every year from 2003 until 2009 until falling behind Tennessee for one year. In 2011, a single Missouri county had more busts than Texas, Florida and California combined. Jefferson County, which is near St. Louis, tallied 253 seizures; the three other states had 219.

Indeed, Missouri and Kentucky are among a handful of high-meth states that developed their own programs to train local police to better handle meth cleanup and take the hazardous waste to container sites placed around the state.

The programs helped those states continue with busts after millions of dollars in federal funding set aside for cleanup suddenly was cut in February 2011. Many local police agencies in states without their own programs all but stopped seeking out meth labs because the local governments couldn’t afford the cleanup cost.

An AP analysis in August found that the number of labs seized had plummeted by at least a third in several key meth-producing states within six months. The federal money then was restored late last year.

The pause in funding could make Missouri’s reappearance as the No. 1 state for seizures somewhat misleading because busts in some states all but stopped for several months in 2011, meaning the figures don’t reflect the depth of the problem, experts said.

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