

## Woman Defends Italian Cruise Ship Captain

ROME (AP) — A young Moldovan woman who says she was called to the bridge of the stricken Costa Concordia to help evacuate Russian passengers, defended the embattled captain on Thursday, saying he worked tirelessly and “saved over 3,000 lives.”

Domnica Cemortan, who says she was translating Capt. Francesco Schettino’s orders during the frenzied evacuation, has emerged as a potential new witness in the investigation into the officer’s actions the night the ship ran aground.

Schettino is under house arrest, facing possible charges of manslaughter, abandoning ship and causing a shipwreck after he made an unauthorized detour from the programmed route that caused the vessel to slam into a reef and capsize off the Tuscan island of Giglio. At least 11 people were killed and 21 are missing.

Meanwhile, a new audiotape of the doomed vessel’s first communications with maritime authorities showed the ship’s officers continued to report only an electrical problem for more than 30 minutes after hitting the reef.

Attention has focused on Cemortan amid reports by crew and passengers that Schettino was seen eating dinner with a Russian-speaking woman at the time of the impact. The 25-year-old Cemortan speaks Russian and had worked as a hostess for the Italian cruise operator, although her contract had expired and she was vacationing with friends when she boarded the luxury liner hours before the Jan. 13 disaster.

## Fuel Transferred To Tanks In Iced-In Nome

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — The mission was daunting by every measure: First journey 5,000 miles, struggling at times through thick ocean ice, then pump 1.3 million gallons of fuel from a frozen-in-place ship to an iced-in Alaska city half a mile away, all while braving sub-zero temperatures.

On Thursday, the first-of-its-kind endeavor came to a successful close, to the relief of the residents of Nome, who are experiencing one of their coldest winters on record and had been counting on the diesel fuel and gasoline delivery to get them through the next few months.

The Russian tanker’s ocean journey would have been challenging enough, but the offshore offloading of fuel with ships frozen in place off the coast had never been tried in Alaska before, said Stacey Smith, manager for Vitus Marine LLC, the company that came up with the idea.

“There were new challenges that arose every day if not every minute,” she said Thursday, soon after the tanker’s entire load of fuel had been pumped and was in storage tanks in Nome.

“There were times we actually lost ground,” said Smith, referring to occasions when the 370-foot tanker and a Coast Guard ice-breaker leading the way were stalled and drifting the wrong direction in Bering Sea ice. “When we ran up against those challenges we just had to stop for a moment and think what is preventing us and strategize. I think we knew we had confidence we could make it here.”

## Arab League Considering Mission Extension

BEIRUT (AP) — Syrian government tanks and armored vehicles have pulled back from an embattled mountain town near Damascus, activists and witnesses said Thursday, but at least 16 people were killed by security forces elsewhere as a monthlong Arab League fact-finding mission expired.

The pullback from Zabadani left the town under the control of the opposition, activists said. The besieged town of Zabadani has witnessed heavy exchanges of fire between army troops and anti-government military defectors over the past six days.

The 10-month uprising against Syrian President Bashar Assad has turned increasingly militarized and chaotic as more frustrated regime opponents and army defectors arm themselves and fight back against government forces. The capital has seen three suicide bombings since late December which the government blamed on terrorist extremists.

Arab League foreign ministers will consider extending the League’s observer mission in Syria in a meeting Sunday in Cairo, officials said Thursday.

Although the mission expired Thursday, Adnan al-Khudeir, head of Cairo operations room that handles reports by the monitors, told The Associated Press that observers will remain in Syria until a decision is made on Sunday.

## Iowa GOP Won’t Declare Winner Of Caucuses

WASHINGTON (AP) — It took Iowa Republicans 16 days to decide they couldn’t tell for sure who won the Iowa caucuses, despite their earlier announcement that Mitt Romney had narrowly won. The non-conclusion highlights the potential pitfalls with party-run presidential nominating events.

The final, certified results announced Thursday in Des Moines by Iowa Republican Chairman Matt Strawn had Rick Santorum 34 votes ahead of Mitt Romney. But Strawn said the party cannot declare a winner because the results are incomplete — eight of the state’s 1,774 precincts did not report their certified totals by Wednesday’s 5 p.m. deadline.

Strawn had announced hours after the Jan. 3 caucuses concluded that Romney had won by eight votes. Most news organizations, including The Associated Press, relied on that party announcement, since the results were not officially collected by the state, while waiting final party certification of the vote.

“This is almost an entirely volunteer, grass-roots driven process,” Strawn said. He congratulated Santorum and Romney “on a hard-fought effort during the closest contest in caucus history.”

Presidential nominating events for both Republicans and Democrats are a mix of party-run caucuses and primaries — like those held in Iowa on Jan. 3 and South Carolina on Saturday — and officially sanctioned state primaries — like those in New Hampshire on Jan. 10 and Florida on Jan. 31.

## U.S. Prosecutors Shut Down Megaupload

McLEAN, Va. (AP) — One of the world’s largest file-sharing sites was shut down Thursday, and its founder and several company executives were charged with violating piracy laws, federal prosecutors said.

An indictment accuses Megaupload.com of costing copyright holders more than \$500 million in lost revenue from pirated films and other content.

The indictment was unsealed one day after websites including Wikipedia and Craigslist shut down in protest of two congressional proposals intended to thwart online piracy.

The Justice Department said in a statement that Kim Dot-com, formerly known as Kim Schmitz, and three other executives were arrested Thursday in New Zealand at the request of U.S. officials. Two other defendants are at large.

Megaupload was unique not only because of its massive size and the volume of downloaded content, but also because it had high-profile support from celebrities, musicians and other content producers who are most often the victims of copyright infringement and piracy. Before the website was taken down, it contained endorsements from Kim Kardashian, Alicia Keys and Kanye West, among others.

# GOP Campaign Turns Bizarre

## Romney Loses Iowa Win; Perry Out; Gingrich Faces Accusations From Ex-Wife

BY DAVID ESPO

AP Special Correspondent

NORTH CHARLESTON, S.C. — The race for the Republican presidential nomination is veering toward South Carolina surreal.

Mitt Romney was stripped of his Iowa caucus victory Thursday, then was stung by Texas Gov. Rick Perry’s withdrawal and endorsement of Newt Gingrich, the former House speaker who was stunningly accused in turn by an ex-wife of seeking an open marriage so he could keep his mistress.

“Newt’s not perfect, but who among us is,” said Perry, abruptly quitting the race shortly before an evening debate and less than 48 hours before the polls open in Saturday’s first-in-the-South primary.

His decision to end a once-promising candidacy left Romney, Gingrich, former Pennsylvania Sen. Rick Santorum and Texas Rep. Ron Paul the remaining contenders in the race to pick a Republican to challenge Democratic President Barack Obama this fall.

Recent polls, coupled with Perry’s endorsement, suggested Gingrich was the candidate with the momentum and Romney the one struggling to validate his standing as front-runner. Whatever else the impact, the day’s events reduced the number of contenders vying to emerge as Romney’s principal conservative alternative.

The former Massachusetts governor had other challenges in a state where unemployment approaches 10 percent. He adamantly refused to explain why some of his millions were invested in the Cayman Islands, how much was there or whether any other funds were held offshore.

Under pressure from his rivals to release his income tax returns before the weekend — a demand first made by Perry in a debate on Mon-



SARAH WELLIVER/THE ISLAND PACKET/MCT  
**Republican presidential candidate Newt Gingrich speaks at an event sponsored by the Republicans of Sun City Hilton Head, Thursday morning, January 19, 2012 at Magnolia Hall in Bluffton, South Carolina.**

day — he told reporters it wouldn’t happen.

“You’ll hear more about that. April,” he said.

Gingrich grappled with problems of a different, possibly even more crippling sort in a state where more than half the Republican electorate is evangelical.

In an interview scheduled to air on ABC News, Marianne Gingrich said her ex-husband had wanted an “open marriage” so he could have both a wife and a mistress. She said Gingrich conducted an affair with Callista Bistek — his current wife — “in my bedroom in our apartment in Washington” while she was elsewhere.

“He was asking to have an open marriage and I refused. That is not a marriage,” she said in excerpts released by the network in advance of

the program.

Gingrich declined to respond to his ex-wife’s comments, telling reporters his two daughters from the first of his three marriages had sent a letter to ABC “complaining about this as tawdry and inappropriate.”

In fact, the letter made no such accusations. Instead, Kathy Lubbers and Jackie Cushman wrote ABC that anyone who has endured a failed marriage “understands it is a personal tragedy filled with regrets, and sometimes differing memories of events.”

A short while later, R.C. Hammond, a spokesman for the former speaker, said of Gingrich’s ex-wife’s account: “It couldn’t be any more opposite of the truth.”

# Obama Pitches Tourism, Campaign On East Coast

.BY JULIE PACE

Associated Press

NEW YORK — From the Magic Kingdom to the Apollo Theater, President Barack Obama on Thursday made the case for American tourism and his own re-election bid, mingling his political and economic agendas as he tried to stay ahead of the Republicans chasing after his job.

“I hope you know that the values you cherish, what you stand for, what you believe in, are the things I cherish and I believe in and I’m willing to fight for.”

Obama said at Daniel, an exclusive Manhattan restaurant, in the first of four glitzy fundraisers.

Presidential politics were not far from the surface during events on both ends of the East Coast, as Obama sought a piece of Florida’s political spotlight ahead of a Jan. 31 Republican presidential primary with a high-profile appearance at Walt Disney World. Against the backdrop of



JOE BURBANK/ORLANDO SENTINEL/MCT  
**President Barack Obama takes the stage in front of Cinderella Castle in the Magic Kingdom at Walt Disney World, in Lake Buena Vista, Florida, Thursday, January 19, 2012.**

Disney’s Cinderella castle, Obama announced initiatives aimed at making it easier for citizens of China and Brazil to visit the United States.

“America is open for business,” Obama said under Florida’s picture-perfect blue skies. “We want to welcome you.”

Later, the president told top donors in New York that he had made American foreign policy

stronger during his first term, vowing that U.S. support for Israel’s security is “nonnegotiable.”

He also defended his administration’s approach to Iran, saying even Tehran has acknowledged that U.S. sanctions are having an impact.

The New York itinerary included a \$35,800 per ticket fundraiser at the home of film di-

rector Spike Lee and an event starting at \$100 per ticket at the famed Apollo Theater featuring performances by Al Green and India.Arie. Obama, who raised more than \$220 million for his campaign and the Democratic National Committee through the end of 2011, told supporters that the 2012 campaign would be difficult.

“This is still going to be a tough race, regardless of who they nominate,” he said, but told donors at another event that he was “very confident” of winning re-election.

Obama said the election would be “as stark a choice as we have seen,” noting that he shared similar views with 2008 GOP nominee John McCain on banning torture, climate change and closing the prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. “If you’ve been listening to the Republican debates, they have moved. I’ve stayed here. They’ve gone in a different direction.”

# Food Stamp Families Yearn For Employment

BY JESSE WASHINGTON

AP National Writer

Some have advanced degrees and remember middle-class lives. Some work selling lingerie or building websites. They are white, black and Hispanic, young and old, homeowners and homeless. What they have in common: They’re all on food stamps.

As the food stamp program has become an issue in the Republican presidential primary, with candidates seeking to tie President Barack Obama to the program’s record numbers, The Associated Press interviewed recipients across the country and found many who wished that critics would spend some time in their shoes.

Most said they never expected to need food stamps, but the Great Recession, which wiped out millions of jobs, left them no choice. Some struggled with the idea of taking a handout; others saw it as their due, earned through years of working steady jobs. They yearn to get back to receiving a paycheck that will make food stamps unnecessary.

“I could never have comprehended being on food stamps,” said Christopher Jenks, who became homeless in his hometown of Minneapolis-St. Paul after a successful career in sales and marketing.

He refused to apply for several

years, even panhandling on a freeway exit ramp before finally giving in. A few months ago, while living in his car, he began receiving \$200 per month.

“It’s either that or I die,” said Jenks, who grew up in a white, middle-class family and lost his job in the recession. “I want a job. So do a lot of other Americans that have been caught up in this tragedy.”

In 2011, more than 45 million people — about one in seven Americans — received benefits from the federal Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, the most ever. Fewer than 31 million people collected the benefits about three years earlier.

Forty-nine percent of recipients are white, 26 percent are black and 20 percent are Hispanic, according to Census data.

Food assistance emerged as a campaign issue after statements by GOP candidates Newt Gingrich and Rick Santorum about African-Americans, the poor and Obama, whom Gingrich labeled the “best food stamp president in American history.”

Critics accused Gingrich of seeking votes by invoking racial stereotypes about black welfare recipients with comments like “the African-American community should demand paychecks and not be satisfied with food stamps.” Challenged at a GOP debate this week on whether the rhetoric was insulting, Gingrich insisted it was not and received a standing ova-

tion from the South Carolina audience.

Linda Miles is grateful to have food stamps, although she’s not happy about why she needs them. An Army veteran with a master’s degree, Miles, who is black, was laid off as a substitute teacher in Philadelphia amid deep budget cuts. After facing an empty refrigerator for too long, she recently started receiving \$200 per month in food aid.

“Food stamps are essential, especially with the economy in the shape it’s in,” she said. “I pay

taxes. I don’t steal anything from the government. I paid my dues to society; I’m a veteran. You took something from me by taking away my job. I wouldn’t need food stamps if you hadn’t taken my job.”

Miles started an unpaid internship this week, and also was certified to work in early childhood care while she looks for a permanent job.

“I’m not one of these people who sit on their butt and just collect a check,” Miles said. “I’ve got a resume three pages long.”

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**Beulke-Jones**

Linda Beulke of Yankton and Dave Beulke of Minnesota announce the engagement of their daughter, Jane Beulke to Brandon Jones, son of Roger and Anne Jones of Loveland, CO.

The bride is a nurse for the VA hospital in Palo Alto, CA.

Her fiancé is a cofounder/teacher/coach of a new charter school called Downtown College Prep in San Jose, CA.

The couple is planning a July 28, 2012, wedding.

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