

Gingrich Lands Newspaper Endorsement

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican presidential hopeful Newt Gingrich landed the endorsement of New Hampshire's largest newspaper on Sunday while rival Mitt Romney earned a dismissive wave, potentially resetting the race in the state with the first-in-the-nation primary.

For Gingrich, the former House speaker, the backing builds on his recent rise in the polls and quick work to build a campaign after a disastrous start in the summer. Romney, the former Massachusetts governor who has a vacation home in the state and has been called a "nearly native son of New Hampshire," absorbed the blow heading into the Jan. 10 vote that's vital to his campaign strategy.

"We are in critical need of the innovative, forward-looking strategy and positive leadership that Gingrich has shown he is capable of providing," The *New Hampshire Union Leader* said in its front-page editorial, which was as much a promotion of Gingrich as a discreet rebuke of Romney.

"We don't back candidates based on popularity polls or big-shot backers. We look for conservatives of courage and conviction who are independent-minded, grounded in their core beliefs about this nation and its people, and best equipped for the job," the endorsement said.

The *Union Leader's* editorial telegraphed conservatives' concerns about Romney's shifts on crucial issues of abortion and gay rights were unlikely to fade. Those worries have led Romney to keep Iowa's Jan. 3 caucuses — where conservatives hold great sway — at arm's length.

Student Thought He Was Headed To Safety

NEW YORK (AP) — An American student arrested with two others during protests in Cairo said they were threatened with guns, hit and forced to lay for hours in a near fetal position in the dark with their hands behind their backs.

"They said if we moved at all, even an inch, they would shoot us. They were behind us with guns," said Derrick Sweeney, a 19-year-old Georgetown University student from Jefferson City, Mo.

The students flew home Saturday after an Egyptian court ordered their release two days earlier. The three had been spending the semester studying abroad at American University in Cairo, which is near Tahrir Square, where a new wave of protests began more than a week ago.

Protesters have been calling for the nation's military leaders to hand power back to a civilian government before the landmark parliamentary elections scheduled to start Monday. At least 43 protesters have been killed since Nov. 19 and 2,000 wounded, most of them in Cairo.

Sweeney spoke to The Associated Press by telephone after family greeted him at the airport in St. Louis and then again Sunday by Skype.

Occupy L.A. Faces Relationship Test With City

LOS ANGELES (AP) — With the clock winding down on a midnight deadline to abandon their weeks-old Occupy Los Angeles protest, hundreds of demonstrators weren't going anywhere Sunday, as they made plans instead to hold an "eviction block party."

Although city officials have told protesters they must leave and take their nearly 500 tents with them by 12:01 a.m. Monday, just a handful were seen packing up Sunday.

Instead, some passed out fliers containing the city seal and the words: "By order of Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, this notice terminates your tenancy and requires you to attend the Occupy L.A. Eviction Block Party," which the fliers' said was scheduled for 12:01 a.m.

Others attended teach-ins on resistance tactics, including how to stay safe should police begin firing rubber bullets or breaking out tear gas canisters and pepper spray.

"Their plan is to resist the closure of this encampment and if that means getting arrested so be it," said Will Picard, one of the protesters. "I think they just want to make the police tear it down rather than tear it down themselves."

Ohio Puts 200-Pound 3rd Grader In Foster Care

CLEVELAND (AP) — An Ohio third-grader who weighs more than 200 pounds has been taken from his family and placed into foster care after county social workers said his mother wasn't doing enough to control his weight.

The *Plain Dealer* reports that the Cleveland 8-year-old is considered severely obese and at risk for such diseases as diabetes and hypertension.

The case is the first state officials can recall of a child being put in foster care strictly for a weight-related issue.

Lawyers for the mother say the county overreached when authorities took the boy last week. They say the medical problems he is at risk for do not yet pose an imminent danger.

A spokeswoman says the county removed the child because caseworkers saw his mother's inability to reduce his weight as medical neglect.

Arab League Sanctions Syria

BY ELIZABETH A. KENNEDY
AND MAAMOUN YOUSSEF
Associated Press

BEIRUT — In an unprecedented move against an Arab nation, the Arab League on Sunday approved economic sanctions on Syria to pressure Damascus to end its deadly suppression of an 8-month-old uprising against President Bashar Assad.

But even as world leaders abandon Assad, the regime has refused to ease a military assault on dissent that already has killed more than 3,500 people. On Sunday, Damascus slammed the sanctions as a betrayal of Arab solidarity and insisted a foreign conspiracy was behind the revolt, all but assuring more bloodshed will follow.

The sanctions are among the clearest signs yet of the isolation Syria is suffering because of the crackdown. Damascus has long boasted of being a powerhouse of Arab nationalism, but Assad has been abandoned by some of his closest allies and now his Arab neighbors. The growing movement against his regime could transform some of the most enduring alliances in the Middle East and beyond.

At a news conference in Cairo, Qatari Foreign Minister Hamad bin Jassim said 19 of the League's 22 member nations approved a series of tough punishments that include cutting off transactions with the Syrian central bank, halting Arab government funding for projects in Syria and freezing government assets. Those sanctions are to take effect immediately.

Other steps, including halting flights and imposing travel bans on some, as-yet unnamed Syrian officials, will come later after a committee reviews them.

"The Syrian people are being killed but we don't want this. Every Syrian official should not accept killing even one person," bin Jassim said. "Power is worth nothing while you

stand as an enemy to your people."

He added that the League aims to "to avoid any suffering for the Syrian people."

Iraq and Lebanon — important trading partners for Syria — abstained from the vote, which came after Damascus missed an Arab League deadline to agree to allow hundreds of observers into the country as part of a peace deal Syria agreed to early this month to end the crisis.

Arab League Secretary General Nabil Elaraby said the bloc will reconsider the sanctions if Syria carries out the Arab-brokered plan, which includes pulling tanks from the streets and ending violence against civilians.

The regime, however, has shown no signs of easing its crackdown, and activist groups said more than 30 people were killed Sunday. The death toll was impossible to confirm. Syria has banned most foreign journalists and prevented independent reporting inside the country.

The Local Coordinating Committees, a coalition of Syrian activist groups, praised the sanctions but called for a mechanism to ensure compliance.

"The sanctions leave open the opportunity for the regime to commit fraud and strip the sanctions of any substance, thereby prolonging the suffering of the Syrian people at the hands of an oppressive and brutal regime," the group said.

The Arab League move is the latest in a growing wave of international pressure pushing Damascus to end its crackdown. The European Union and the United States already have imposed sanctions, the League has suspended Syria's membership and world leaders increasingly are calling on Assad to go. But as the crisis drags on, the violence appears to be spiraling out of control as attacks by army defectors increase and some protesters take up arms to protect themselves. Syria has seen the bloodiest crackdown

against the Arab Spring's eruption of protests, and has descended into a deadly grind. Though internationally isolated, Assad appears to have a firm grip on power with the loyalty of most of the armed forces, which in the past months have moved from city to city to put down uprisings. In each place, however, protests have resumed.

The escalating bloodshed has raised fears of civil war — a worst-case scenario in a country that is a geographical and political keystone in the heart of the Middle East.

Syria borders five countries with whom it shares religious and ethnic minorities and, in Israel's case, a fragile truce. Its web of allegiances extends to Lebanon's powerful Hezbollah movement and Iran's Shiite theocracy. Chaos in Syria could send unsettling ripples across the region.

For now, Assad still has a strong bulwark to prevent his meeting the same fate as the leaders of Egypt, Tunisia or Libya anytime soon. His key advantages are the support of Russia and China, fear among many Syrians about a future without Assad, and the near-certainty that foreign militaries will stay away.

But the unrest is eviscerating the economy, threatening the business community and prosperous merchant classes that are key to propping up the regime. An influential bloc, the business leaders have long traded political freedoms for economic privileges.

The opposition has tried to rally these largely silent, but hugely important, sectors of society. But Assad's opponents have failed so far to galvanize support in Damascus and Aleppo — the two economic centers in Syria.

Sunday's sanctions, however, could chip away at their resolve.

Since the revolt began, the regime has blamed the bloodshed on terrorists acting out a foreign conspiracy to divide and undermine Syria. The bloodshed has laid bare Syria's long-simmering sectarian tensions, with disturbing reports of Iraq-style sectarian killings.

Thomas, Kagan Asked To Sit Out Health Care Case

BY MARK SHERMAN
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Conservative interest groups and Republican lawmakers want Justice Elena Kagan off the health care case. Liberals and Democrats in Congress say it's Justice Clarence Thomas who should sit it out.

Neither justice is budging — the right decision, according to many ethicists and legal experts.

None of the parties in the case has asked the justices to excuse themselves. But underlying the calls on both sides is their belief that the conservative Thomas is a sure vote to strike down President Barack Obama's health care law and that the liberal Kagan is certain to uphold the main domestic achievement of the man who appointed her.

The stakes are high in the court's election-year review of a law aimed at extending coverage to more than 30 million people. Both sides have engaged in broad

legal and political maneuvering for the most favorable conditions surrounding the court's consideration of the case.

Taking away just one vote potentially could tip the outcome on the nine-justice court.

Republican lawmakers recently have stepped up their effort against Kagan, complaining that the Justice Department has not fully revealed Kagan's involvement in planning the response to challenges to the law. Kagan was Obama's solicitor general, the administration's top Supreme Court lawyer, until he nominated her to the high court last year.

"The public has a right to know both the full extent of Justice Kagan's involvement with this legislation while she was solicitor general, as well as her previously stated views and opinions about the legislation while she was serving as solicitor general," the House Judiciary Committee chairman, Rep. Lamar Smith, R-Texas, said Tuesday in a letter to Attorney

General Eric Holder.

Democrats have said Thomas has a conflict of interest stemming from the work of his wife, Virginia, with several groups that opposed the health care overhaul.

"From what we have already seen, the line between your impartiality and you and your wife's financial stake in the overturn of health care reform is blurred," 74 Democrats wrote Thomas in February. The lead writer was Anthony Weiner, the New York Democrat who resigned from Congress in June over his use of Twitter to send explicit photos of himself to women.

One lawmaker who signed the letter, Rep. Louise Slaughter, D-N.Y., said she feels even more strongly now that Thomas has a conflict. She wants the Justice Department to investigate Thomas for omitting his wife's employers, including the Heritage Foundation and the tea-party linked Liberty Central, from his annual financial disclosure reports.

The campaigns against the justices are partisan, suggesting to some legal experts that the complaints are less about perceived conflicts than the outcome of the health care case.

"They are not doing it in the dark about how they think the justices will rule," said University of Notre Dame law professor Richard Garnett.

Looking at the claims made against Thomas and Kagan, Garnett said, "I don't think there's really a plausible case that either of these two justices should feel the need to recuse themselves."

Still, interest groups and lawmakers on both sides have sought to paint a picture of a justice who is hopelessly compromised and has no choice but to recuse, the term for a judge stepping out of a case. They also say there is no basis for the justice with whom they agree to step aside — Thomas for the conservatives, Kagan for the liberals.

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