

Former Sen. Fred Thompson Dies At 73

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (AP) — Fred Thompson, a folksy former Republican U.S. senator from Tennessee who appeared in feature films and television including a role on "Law & Order," died Sunday, his family said.

He was 73.

Thompson, at 6-foot-6 with a booming voice, appeared in at least 20 motion pictures. His credits include "In the Line of Fire," "The Hunt for Red October," "Die Hard II" and "Cape Fear." By the early 1990s, Thompson said he had become bored with his 10-year stint in Hollywood and wanted to go into public service. That's when he headed back to Nashville and launched his Senate campaign. A man of many roles in life and on the screen, he was a lawyer by training and also once served as a chief minority counsel during the Senate Water-gate hearings.

The family statement said Thompson died in Nashville following a recurrence of lymphoma.

"It is with a heavy heart and a deep sense of grief that we share the passing of our brother, father and grandfather who died peacefully in Nashville," it said. "Fred was the same man on the floor of the Senate, the movie studio, or the town square of ... his home."

Obama Health Law Season Challenged

WASHINGTON (AP) — The government's insurance website is faster and easier to use, but as a third sign-up season gets under way, President Barack Obama's health care law is approaching limits.

Enrollment on the federal and state exchanges began Sunday. While the law's expanded coverage has reduced the uninsured rate to a historic low of about 9 percent, the gains will be harder in 2016.

Supporters may feel they're running to stay in place, rather than taking a victory lap during the president's last full year in office.

The reasons have to do with the structure of the complicated law, the effects of a major change introduced by the Supreme Court and political divisions likely to be magnified in an election year.

The fate of the Affordable Care Act — known as "Obamacare" — to its detractors — is very much in the hands of the next president. A weak sign-up season could embolden opponents who are so far unwilling to relent.

Officers Lose Licenses Over Sex Behavior

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP) — Flashing lights pierced the black of night, and the big white letters made clear it was the police. The woman pulled over was a daycare worker in her 50s headed home after playing dominoes with friends. She felt she had nothing to hide, so when the Oklahoma City officer accused her of erratic driving, she did as directed.

She would later tell a judge she was played outside the patrol car for a pat-down, made to lift her shirt to prove she wasn't hiding anything, then to pull down her pants when the officer still wasn't convinced. He shined his flashlight between her legs, she said, then ordered her to sit in the squad car and face him as he towered above. His gun in sight, she said she pleaded "No, sir" as he unzipped his fly and exposed himself with a hurried directive.

"Come on," the woman, identified in police reports as J.L., said she was told before she began giving him oral sex. "I don't have all night."

The accusations are undoubtedly jolting, and yet they reflect a betrayal of the badge that has been repeated time and again across the country.

In a yearlong investigation of sexual misconduct by U.S. law enforcement, The Associated Press uncovered about 1,000 officers who lost their badges in a six-year period for rape, sodomy and other sexual assault; sex crimes that included possession of child pornography; or sexual misconduct such as propositioning citizens or having consensual but prohibited on-duty intercourse.

S. Korea Pulls Plug On Surveillance App

LONDON (AP) — The most widely used child surveillance app in South Korea is being quietly pulled from the market after security specialists raised serious concerns about the program's safety.

Moon Hyun-seok, a senior official at the Korea Communications Commission, told The Associated Press that "Smart Sheriff" has been removed from the Play store, Google's software marketplace, and that existing users are being asked to switch to other programs. Smart Sheriff's maker, an association of South Korean mobile operators called MOIBA, declined comment.

Smart Sheriff's disappearance is awkward news for South Korea's effort to keep closer tabs on the online lives of its youngest citizens.

A law passed in April requires all new smartphones sold to those 18 and under to be equipped with software which parents can use to snoop on their kids' social media activity. Smart Sheriff, the most popular of more than a dozen state-approved apps, was meant to keep children safe from pornography, bullying and other threats, but experts say its abysmal security left the door wide open to hackers and put the personal information of some 380,000 users at risk.

Pulling the plug on Smart Sheriff was "long overdue," said independent researcher Collin Anderson, who worked with Internet watchdog group Citizen Lab and German software auditing firm Cure53 to comb through the app's code. In a pair of reports published in September, Cure53 described the app's security as "catastrophic." Citizen Lab, which is based at the University of Toronto's Munk School of Global Affairs, said the problems could lead to a "mass compromise" of all users.

Islamic Extremists Besiege Hotel, Kill 6

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Five of Somalia's Islamic extremists attacked a leading hotel in the capital at dawn Sunday, killing at least six people and injuring 10, before all the assailants were killed by security forces.

The Somali army and the African Union forces ended the siege by the al-Shabab attackers at the Sahafi Hotel by midday, police commander Ali Ahmed said.

"It's over now. We have killed all the attackers," Ahmed told The Associated Press by telephone. "They came under cover of darkness and attacked the hotel while some of the guards were sleeping."

The attack started at daybreak when a suicide bomber detonated an explosives-laden vehicle at the hotel's entrance gate and then four men, armed with AK-47 rifles, propelled grenades and suicide vests, invaded the premises. Some of them went into rooms to kill residents while others went to the hotel's rooftop to fight off government soldiers who came to battle them, said Capt. Mohamed Hussein, a senior Somali police officer.

A second explosion came from a car bomb outside the hotel, said witnesses.

Russian Jet Broke Up At High Altitude Over Egypt

BY BRIAN ROHAN

Associated Press

SHARM EL-SHEIKH, Egypt — The Russian jetliner that crashed shortly after takeoff from an Egyptian resort city broke up at high altitude, scattering fragments of wreckage over a wide area in the Sinai Peninsula, Russia's top aviation official said Sunday as search teams raced to recover the bodies of the 224 people who died.

Meanwhile in Russia, an outpouring of grief gripped the historic city of St. Petersburg, home of many of the victims. President Vladimir Putin declared a nationwide day of mourning, and flags flew at half-staff.

Aviation experts joined the searchers in a remote part of the Sinai, seeking any clues to what caused the Metrojet Airbus A321-200 to plummet abruptly from 31,000 feet just 23 minutes after it departed from the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh bound for St. Petersburg.

Aviation experts and the search teams were combing an area of 16 square kilometers (more than 6 square miles) to find bodies and pieces of the jet.

By midday, 163 bodies had been recovered, according to the Egyptian government. Some of the dead were expected to be flown to Russia later Sunday.

In St. Petersburg, hundreds of mourners brought flowers, pictures of the victims, stuffed animals and paper planes to the city's airport. Others went to churches and lit candles in memory of the dead.

Elena Vikhareva had no relatives aboard the flight, but she went with her son to lay flowers, saying that pain was "piercing" her heart.

Vladimir Povarov and a friend did the same, explaining that they couldn't "remain indifferent."

The large area over which fragments

were found indicates the jet disintegrated while flying high, said Alexander Neradko, head of Russia's federal aviation agency. He would not comment on any possible reason for the crash, citing the ongoing investigation.

Neradko was in Egypt to inspect the crash site along with Russia's emergency and transport ministers.

Transport Minister Maxim Sokolov thanked Egyptian authorities for their help and said work on analyzing the data and cockpit voice recorders had not yet begun.

An Egyptian ground service official who carried out a preflight inspection of the plane said the aircraft appeared to be in good shape. Speaking on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the media, he said he was a member of a technical inspection team that included two Russians.

"We are all shocked. It was a good plane. Everything checked out in 35 minutes," the official told The Associated Press on Sunday. The closest the plane came to being in trouble, he said, was three months ago when the pilot aborted takeoff halfway through because of a system error. "That's almost routine though," he said.

However, a Russian TV channel late Saturday quoted the wife of the co-pilot as saying her husband had complained about the plane's condition. Natalya Trukhacheva, identified as the wife of Sergei Trukhachev, said a daughter "called him up before he flew out. He complained before the flight that the technical condition of the aircraft left much to be desired."

An Egyptian official had previously said that before the plane lost contact with air traffic controllers, the pilot radioed that the aircraft was experiencing technical problems and that he intended to try to land at the nearest airport.

With Strong Debate Showing, Cruz Hopes To Build Momentum

BY JULIE PACE

AP White House Correspondent

DES MOINES, Iowa — For months, Texas Sen. Ted Cruz has flown under the radar in the Republican presidential race, an unusual position for a politician who has been in the spotlight since arriving in Washington nearly three years ago.

Now, Cruz is trying to ride a standout performance in last week's GOP debate into new momentum for his campaign. He's casting himself as the conservative the party's right flank has been waiting for — someone who's both uncompromising and electable.

"How about this time we nominate as Republicans a candidate as committed to conservative principles as Barack Obama is to liberal principles?" Cruz said Saturday during a Republican forum in Des Moines.

Cruz is running an operation with important advantages.

He ended the last fundraising period with more campaign cash on hand than any other candidate. He has

a well-funded super political action committee that has been spending money to on television advertising. His fights with Republican leaders in Washington have made him a well-known figure among conservatives frustrated with the party establishment.

But even with those assets, Cruz has spent months mired in the middle of the large GOP field. While he positioned himself early to absorb Donald Trump's supporters if the billionaire businessman stumbled, Trump is still a commanding presence in the primary.

Cruz also faces a new challenge with the rise of retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson, who is drawing support from religious conservatives.

The debate provided Cruz with the kind of breakout moment that could jumpstart his White House bid. He slammed the CNBC debate moderators for asking questions in a way that he said "illustrate why the American people don't trust the media" and challenged them to ask "about the substantive issues people care about."

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