

Space Shuttle Continues Trip To Museum

LOS ANGELES (AP) — It's a surreal sight residents won't soon forget: A hulking space shuttle strutting down city streets, pausing every so often to get its bearings as it creeps toward retirement. Endeavour's terrestrial journey began before dawn Friday when it departed from the Los Angeles International Airport, rolling on a 160-wheeled carrier past diamond-shaped "Shuttle Xing" signs. Hundreds of camera-toting spectators, some with pajama-clad children in tow, gaped as the 170,000-pound Endeavour inched by with its tail towering over streetlights and its wings spanning the roadway. Over two days, it will trundle 12 miles at a top speed of 2 mph to its final destination — the California Science Center where it will be the centerpiece of a new exhibit. After an initial bumpy ride and a brief delay, the shuttle pulled off a massive feat of parallel parking by backing into a shopping center parking lot for a layover as crowds cheered on.

Doctors In Syria Deal With Wounded Victims

ALEPPO, Syria (AP) — The injured arrive at the hospital in taxis or in the back of pickup trucks, to the blare of car horns and shouts of "Help!" Sometimes, they are battle-hardened rebels with gaping wounds. Sometimes, they are children, peppered with shrapnel and screaming in pain. Those who die are left on the sidewalk outside, to be claimed hours later by relatives. An Associated Press team spent 24 hours at Dar al-Shifa hospital in Aleppo and witnessed the frantic work by overtaxed doctors and nurses to save those wounded in the battle for control of Syria's largest city. The AP first visited the hospital last month and returned this week to get a fuller impression of how its staff is coping amid Syria's civil war. The routine is as simple as it is brutal: A barrage of shelling echoes over the city, and about 15 minutes later, the wounded flow in.

US Budget Deficit Tops \$1 Trillion Again

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States has now spent \$1 trillion more than it's taken in for four straight years. The Treasury Department confirmed Friday what was widely expected: The deficit for the just-ended 2012 budget year — the gap between the government's tax revenue and its spending — totaled \$1.1 trillion. It wasn't quite as ugly as last year. Thanks to a slightly healthier economy, revenue rose 6.4 percent from 2011. And government spending fell 1.7 percent to \$3.5 trillion. That reflected, in part, less defense spending as U.S. military involvement in Iraq was winding down and less spending on Medicaid. As a result, the deficit shrank 16 percent, or \$207 billion.

European Union Wins Nobel Peace Prize

BRUSSELS (AP) — The European Commission president had no reason to expect anything but another bad day. Then, out of the blue, after three years of back-biting and seemingly daily financial crisis, the European Union won the Nobel Peace Prize for fostering peace on a continent long ravaged by war. It was a badly needed morale boost for a 60-year-old union in the midst of a midlife crisis. Even as it announced the award Friday, the Norwegian prize jury warned that the financial crisis challenging the 27-nation bloc's unity could lead to a return to "extremism and nationalism." It urged Europeans to remember the EU's role in building peace and reconciliation among enemies who fought Europe's bloodiest wars, even as they tackle the economic crisis that threatens its future.

As Election Nears, Romney Crowds Are Surging

BY STEVE PEOPLES
Associated Press

SIDNEY, Ohio — The crowds tell the story. As Election Day nears, Mitt Romney is drawing large and excited throngs. Look to dusty Iowa cornfields, rain-soaked Virginia parks, the muddy fields of the Shelby County Fairgrounds, where a crowd of 9,500 — almost half of this western Ohio town — gathered among the barns and stables on a frigid October evening this week to glimpse the Republican presidential contender.

"Where else would we want to be?" said one of the shivering faithful, Judy Cartwright, a 71-year-old nurse from Sidney. "I want to see the next president of the United States." Romney's debate performance against President Barack Obama last week — and his energetic appearances following it up — have fueled a rise in enthusiasm on the campaign trail. Whether or not it will translate into votes, polls do suggest that Republicans are fired up. It's a welcome development for the Republican businessman, who is hardly a natural politician and has long struggled to match Obama's ability to inspire excitement.

In Virginia, for example, Republican leaning counties appear to be getting the fastest start on absentee voting ahead of Election Day. State Board of Elections data ana-

lyzed by the Virginia Public Access Project, a nonprofit and nonpartisan tracker of money in state politics, shows that of the 25 localities where absentee voting is busiest, 21 voted Republican in the 2008 presidential race. And of the 25 localities where absentee balloting is the slowest so far, 16 supported Obama.

Romney seems to be feeding off the energy pumping through his now-sprawling crowds, even as aides downplay the newfound momentum among the GOP base. "I'm overwhelmed by the number of people here," he exulted while scanning the sea of supporters packed beyond the fairgrounds fences here. "There are even people out there — that's another county over there."

Romney's growing crowds come as new polls suggest he has erased Obama's advantage in voter support nationally. Races have tightened in a handful of battleground states, too.

The president's challenge on the campaign trail this year has been to match the high excitement bar he set in 2008. For Romney, it has been to exceed low expectations.

But recent polling suggests the "enthusiasm gap," long thought to lean toward Obama, has leveled off.

The Pew Research Center poll this week found that 68 percent of registered voters who back Obama support him strongly. Some 67 per-

cent of Romney voters are strongly behind him. That's the first time Pew's poll has found the two candidates even on this measure. And a Washington Post-ABC News poll conducted after the Oct. 3 debate showed the GOP nominee drawing "strongly favorable" reviews from 62 percent of Republicans, the highest level of deeply positive views that poll has found during the campaign. Overall, Romney's favorability among Republicans stands at 87 percent. Obama draws favorable views from 93 percent of Democrats, including 68 percent who hold strongly favorable views.

Obama can still turn out big crowds. As the election draws close, the president is appearing in college settings where he can depend on the enthusiasm of younger supporters. Within the past nine days, he has spoken before 30,000 people at the University of Wisconsin, 15,000 at Ohio State University and 9,200 at the University of Miami.

But in 2008, to note one striking example, he drew an astonishing 100,000 people to a single rally in Denver in late October. And this year's campaign audiences, like Obama himself, seem to vary in their enthusiasm. The students who filled a field at Ohio State on Tuesday were supportive but hardly buzzing when Obama implored them to vote.

One recent night, at a concert hall in San Francisco, Obama

showed he can still whip 6,000 supporters into building cheers. "I still believe in you. I'm asking you to keep believing in me," he declared. "I'm asking for your vote. I'm asking you to knock on doors. I'm asking you to make phone calls. And if you do, we will win this election. We'll finish what we started. And we'll remind the world why the United States of America is the greatest nation on earth."

The level of enthusiasm matters as each side tries to get as many of its supporters to the polls as possible. A big Republican enthusiasm advantage two years ago helped the GOP capture control of the U.S. House of Representatives in addition to making huge gains in statehouses across the nation.

For much of this year, Romney, the sometimes-stiff former businessman, has had a hard time generating the same electricity as Obama.

Indeed, most of the GOP's most passionate voters did not back Romney during the extended Republican primary season. His campaign typically favors made-for-TV invitation-only events where the emphasis is imagery — Navy ships, manufacturing plants, farm equipment — rather than crowd size. Audiences did increase as Romney began campaigning alongside running mate Paul Ryan, a favorite of the tea party, but he has generally struggled to get people excited on his own.



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