

## **Candidates Debate At Crucial Moment; Romney's Biggest Misconception; Lacrosse Player Murder Trial; FDA Panel Backs Diet**

The Associated Press

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<Show: EARLY START WITH ASHLEIGH BANFIELD AND ZORAIDA SAMBOLIN>

<Date: February 23, 2012>

<Time: 05:00>

<Tran: 022302CN.V34>

<Type: SHOW>

<Head: Candidates Debate At Crucial Moment; Romney's Biggest

Misconception; Lacrosse Player Murder Trial; FDA Panel Backs Diet

Pill; Home Prices Lowest in 10 Years; Candidates Debate at Crucial

Moment; Bobbi Kristina's "Out of Control"; UC Davis Students Sue Over

Pepper Spraying; Utah Senate Passes Tanning Bill - Part 1>

<Sect: News; International>

<Time: 06:00>

<End: 07:00>

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

ASHLEIGH BANFIELD, CNN ANCHOR: And a very good morning to you. It is a very EARLY START. I'm Ashleigh Banfield.

ZORAIDA SAMBOLIN, CNN ANCHOR: I'm Zoraida Sambolin. We're bringing you the news from A to Z. It is 6 a.m. in the east so let's get started for you.

Five days until the Arizona and Michigan primaries. Mitt Romney on the attack in last night's debate here on CNN against the latest challenger sitting at the top Rick Santorum trying to end his losing streak.

BANFIELD: Jury finally came to a decision, but it really didn't take long. This young man, college lacrosse player, George Huguely, officially now a murderer, a second degree murderer, after the killing of his ex-girlfriend in a drunken jealous rage.

The jury has recommended against a maximum sentence, but wait until you hear how long they think he should be behind bars.

SAMBOLIN: There's a lot of talk about this new magic diet pill that is getting the nod now. Still there are some safety concerns out there particularly for women who want to become pregnant and also concern for the safety for your heart, as well.

BANFIELD: Baby you can drive my car. You just have to fill it up because I'm not going to pay for your gas at 6 bucks a gallon in some places. Believe it or not.

It is a reality. Don't worry, though. It's not going to be fixed necessarily where you are. But it is up another 3 cents just as you slept overnight. Can anyone stop the spike in the price at the pump? We'll tell you how much it is across the country.

SAMBOLIN: If they could, I'm sure they would.

But up first, the dual in the desert. Big debate held here on CNN last night with John King. Just five days until Arizona and Michigan, the primaries there. Rick Santorum getting his turn at the top. Will

he stay there is the big question, right?

BANFIELD: I'm not so sure he pulled it off and a lot of the critics aren't so sure either. In fact, a lot of people were saying it was a big fizzle, depends, though. Depends on how you feel what they were talking about.

In Mitt Romney's home state, Michigan, of course, they were watching like hawks because he has been talking about the auto bailout there. He's been pushing on the earmarks issue. Both of these guys were going after each other on their records with people's money and of course, their votes in Congress and while they were governor, et cetera.

Sometimes the crowd was applauding and cheering and sometimes the crowd was actually booing. So, if you missed it, we have the highlights for you. Have a look.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

MITT ROMNEY (R), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: While I was fighting to save the Olympics, you were fighting to save the bridge to nowhere.

RICK SANTORUM (R), PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE: You're entitled to your opinions, Mitt.

ROMNEY: I heard that line before.

SANTORUM: You're misrepresenting the facts and you're misrepresenting the facts. You don't know what you're talking about.

Yes, Governor, you balanced the budget for four years. You have a constitutional requirement to balance the budget for four years. No

great shapes. I'm all for -- I'd like to see it federally.

But don't go around bragging about something you have to do. Michael

Dukakis balanced the budget for 10 years. Does that make him

qualified to be president of the United States? I don't think so.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

BANFIELD: Did you see them sitting beside each other and not standing

at podiums? This is something kind of new. The "New York Times"

actually characterized it that they seem like squirmy school children

crunched into classroom desks.

I'm sure it was more uncomfortable than even that if you're on the

stage. Our CNN political editor, Paul Steinhauser, has not only

watched it all live in Mesa, Arizona. He's still in Mesa, Arizona

getting up at the crack. Well, it's not even close to dawn in Mesa,

Arizona, but he's joining us now.

PAUL STEINHAUSER, CNN POLITICAL EDITOR: It's not even close.

BANFIELD: It is not even close. You know, in Australia, they say

that there is a tall poppy syndrome. When you start to get to be the

taller poppy, the whacker comes along and takes you down. Is that

really what we see here with Rick Santorum and his performance last

night?

STEINHAUSER: Yes, you know, for the first time in 20 debates, he was

the man in the middle and yes, he did get some whacking, I guess, you

could see from Mitt Romney.

Listen, if this debate at the Mesa Art Center, behind me here, was the

last one in this cycle. It was a good one to go out. We had drama.

We had conflict and yes, it's centered on Santorum and Romney kind of forced Santorum to defend himself of some issues that maybe unpopular with conservatives.

Like Santorum's support of no child left behind, his support of Planned Parenthood funding, his support of earmarks and his support of Arlen Specter back in 2004 and Romney also pointed out this to Rick Santorum. Take a listen.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

ROMNEY: Let's not forget that four years ago, well after Romney care was put in place, four years ago, not only endorsed me, and this is the guy who is really conservative and we can trust him.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

STEINHAUSER: There you go. Take that, Rick Santorum. Listen, I spoke to a top Santorum aide after the debate was over and he said, listen, not my candidate's best debate, but he said, nobody hit a home run, they were not that concerned -- Ashleigh.

BANFIELD: Not only that, Paul, but you had to sort to be a super wonk to sort through all of the big hits last night and while it was a lot of fun to watch and actually a bit of a puzzle, do you think that what they did will actually resonate with the average guy out there? Will they get it? Will Romney be able to sort of say, I really kind of hit it out of the park?

STEINHAUSER: Yes, you know what? Romney did not have his best performance. That is definitely the case, but he didn't have any big

screw ups either and I guess, that was enough.

His job of taking Santorum down was successful enough. That's all he had to do. He didn't have to raise the bar that high. Also he took a page out of Newt Gingrich's playbook. Take a listen to this.

(BEGIN VIDEO CLIP)

ROMNEY: We have to restore America's promise in this country where people know with hard work and education that they're going to be secure and prosperous, and that their kids will have a brighter future than they've had.

For that to happen, we're going to have to have dramatic, fundamental change in Washington, D.C. We're going to have to create more jobs, have less debt and shrink the size of government. I'm the only person in this place --

JOHN KING, HOST, CNN'S "JOHN KING USA": The question is misconception.

ROMNEY: You know, you get to ask the questions you want and I get to give the answers I want.

KING: Fair enough.

(END VIDEO CLIP)

STEINHAUSER: Take that, John King. You know, Newt Gingrich was successful going after the moderators. Mitt Romney did that last night with our John King.

Romney advisors say you can imagine, Ashleigh, were pretty happy after the debate was over saying they are confident now. They're going to win Michigan and Arizona.

And for Gingrich, yes, he was a side show as was Ron Paul. But let's be honest, Newt Gingrich had a pretty good debate. Was it enough to get him back in the game? That's debatable.

BANFIELD: Always a popular strategy to take a hit when you can at the media. So they got that one in there again. And by the way, apart from you being a super wonk, I believe John King trumps all of us in super working us.

STEINHAUSER: Hands down, he sure does.

BANFIELD: Paul Steinhauser, thanks for getting up so early. It's nice to see you.

SAMBOLIN: It is 8 minutes past the hour here.

Former University of Virginia lacrosse player found guilty in the murder of his ex-girlfriend. George Huguely convicted of second degree murder in the death of Yeardeley Love.

The jury recommended a sentence of 26 years in prison. CNN legal contributor, Paul Callan is here. Paul, second degree murder and facing 26 years in prison, are you surprised by the verdict?

PAUL CALLAN, CNN LEGAL CONTRIBUTOR: No, I'm not surprised by the verdict. It essentially was a compromise by the jury. The prosecutor was seeking murder one, which would have meant life in prison.

The defense was hoping for manslaughter, which could have meant as little as 10 years in prison and the jury found middle ground, but they found, basically, this was an intentional murder. When he struck her and beat her in the room and left her to die that he knew that he

was killing her and that was the ultimate conclusion of the jury here.

SAMBOLIN: You know, when we listen to the details of this murder case, you know, we discuss all the legal issues all the time, but a family here lost a daughter, lost a sister. Do we have any reaction from them?

CALLAN: Well, there has been a reaction and you know, I thought, Ashleigh, the prosecutor, Mr. Chatman said it all yesterday and he said that, you know, there were no winners in this case. There was tragedy on both sides.

It's a tragedy for the Huguely family. It's a horrible, horrible tragedy for the Love family and you know, ultimately Huguely will wind up spending most of the rest of his life in prison and this wonderful daughter that the Love family had is gone. So, you know, this is just a horrible tragedy for all concerned.

SAMBOLIN: And there's some talk from Huguely's lawyer that, you know, they're looking forward to some corrections in what happened here. That's what they're going to be looking for. What legal options does he have?

CALLAN: Well, Huguely's lawyer is hinting, of course, that he is going to take an appeal after the sentence in the case. The judge is going to sentence Huguely in April and he can sentence him up to the amount recommended by the jury, which is 26 years in prison, but later there will be an appeal.

I don't know that there's a lot to reverse this case on. One of the criticisms may have been that the prosecutor got a little too

emotional in his summation. He actually cried in front of the jury.

Something you almost never see a prosecutor do.

I'm sure there will be a claim that he injected too much emotion into the proceedings causing the jury to reach the wrong verdict, but that is a hard road to follow.

There was very, very strong evidence for the prosecution here. There had been a threat to kill by Huguely the day before. Huguely was a trained lacrosse player, a nationally ranked lacrosse player.

A very, very big guy who knows how to be violent and he used that violence against Yeardeley Love. So there's adequate evidence to support this conviction. So I kind of doubt that you're going to see a reversal of this if an appeal is taken.

SAMBOLIN: All right, Paul Callan, CNN legal contributor. Thanks for coming in early for us.

CALLAN: Nice being with you, Zoraida.

SAMBOLIN: Thank you.

BANFIELD: It's 11 minutes now past 6:00. We always talk about the magic pill that will melt of all the pounds. So you can just eat all the pizza you want and still not suffer when you step on the scale, but the pill was rejected once. So, why is it safe now?

SAMBOLIN: That's a good question. We're going to try to find the answer to that. But first, let's get a quick check of your travel forecast. Rob Marciano live for us in Atlanta. Hi.

ROB MARCIANO, AMS METEOROLOGIST: Hi, good morning again, guys. Pretty

active weather pattern shaping up. Tremendous amount of wind

yesterday. Take a look at these numbers, 90 plus in Wyoming and

Colorado. Not just the higher elevations, but some of the low

country, as well.

It's 88-mile-per-hour gusts in boulder and at times, sustained as near

some of these levels a lot of wind damage and roads closed because of

that. That wind energy comes into the plains today and another front

of severe weather across parts of the eastern third.

And also a decent amount of snow forecast for parts of the high plains

and the western great lakes. Some of our computer models predicting

four to six to eight inches of snow just north of Omaha, but Chicago

you could see six to ten inches of snow by this time tomorrow morning.

Temperatures will be cooling there, 41 degrees in Chicago. You'll be

on the warm side in New York. All rain when it gets to you tomorrow

night, 55 degrees for the high temperature in the big apple today.

EARLY START coming right back.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

SAMBOLIN: Welcome back. It is 15 minutes past the hour. Here it's

time to check the stories that are making news this morning.

BANFIELD: It was a bit tense, I think you could say, at the final CNN

GOP Debate for Arizona and Michigan Super Tuesday. Contests come

rolling around and Mitt Romney battling with his latest super

challenger, Rick Santorum, over spending and voting and just about

anything else they could come up with. Both the candidates having to

awkwardly sit next to each other are locked in a pretty darn tight

race for the next two states.

Also making news and this one is really intriguing. The U.S. envoy is meeting with North Korean officials today. Not happening there, it's happening in Beijing. But nonetheless, they're going to discuss whether North Korea is willing to suspend its nuclear program.

Officials are also going to be talking about human rights and humanitarian issues. Good luck with that.

Bankruptcy judge is approving some \$370,000 in bonuses. Yes, you're seeing the sign on your screen saying Solyndra. It's for nearly two dozen employees at that controversial company. The solar panel company that got \$500 million loan before it just went ahead and declared bankruptcy, and reports say that some of those same employees who were about to get the bonuses approved by a judge just got pay raises of up to 70 percent. So that should get your blood boiling.

SAMBOLIN: There could soon be a new diet pill on the market. It's the first new diet drug in 13 years and it's called Qnexa. An FDA panel just backed it. So a big question here, could it be the magic pill to control obesity?

We've got an expert to weigh in on this morning. Joining us now, Dr. Louis Aronne, Director of the Comprehensive Weight Control Program at New York's Presbyterian, Weill Cornell Medical Center. That is a mouthful. Thank you so much for joining us this morning. We appreciate it.

DR. LOUIS ARONNE, NY PRESBYTERIAN, WEILL CORNELL MEDICAL CENTER: Good

morning.

SAMBOLIN: Good morning. So first, we want to talk about the results and then we'll talk about the possible side effects here. So there were some clinical trials. What were the results in terms of weight loss?

ARONNE: The studies that were presented to the FDA were in more than 3,000 people and they showed that the average person lost about 10 percent of their body weight. That's a really good result for medical treatment of obesity.

SAMBOLIN: So, this is not the first time that the drug has been up for approval. A company behind it submitted the drug to the FDA back in 2010. Back then it was actually rejected. What has changed since then?

ARONNE: Several things have changed. First of all, it's our attitude towards obesity. We recognize that obesity is a major health problem (ph) on the healthcare system and on individuals who are not making any progress by telling people to eat less and exercise more. And, secondly, the only options we have beyond that are surgical. So, we've got to do something else.

The second thing is there's new data. There's up to two-year data showing on Qnexa showing that it's effective out to two years and that there's a good safety profile.

SAMBOLIN: But there are some risks. You said safety profile, but I was reading risks to women who potentially want to have children and then also something about a risk to the heart.

ARONNE: Well, when we look at the safety in women who could be having a child, that's something where a strong education program and limited distribution can prevent that from happening. Only certain pharmacies will carry Qnexa and those pharmacists will be instructed who can get it and they wouldn't give it to women who could potentially have a problem with it.

Secondly, as far as the heart issues are concerned, Qnexa lowers blood pressure and has many other potentially beneficial effects, but the FDA has recommended that an outcome study where we look at how people do in the long run. Do they have heart attacks, strokes, that will be done once the drug is approved.

SAMBOLIN: But what are the short term results? I thought I read something about heart palpitations.

ARONNE: Those - there are some side effects like that that may be seen. But in general, the overall cardiovascular profile is beneficial. One of the outcomes of the study was looking at do people have more or less heart attacks and strokes?

And actually people who were on the Qnexa group who lost 10 percent more weight than people in the group that got a placebo pill had fewer heart attacks and strokes, about half as many. So it looks pretty good.

SAMBOLIN: All right. I got one last question for you. Because a lot of people are going to want to know it was an FDA advisory panel that approved to this. So it's not on market right away. When do you

think it could make it to market?

ARONNE: Well, the FDA now has to make the final decision and that is going to take at least two months. And after that, it may take a few more months. So, I wouldn't expect it for at least three to six months and then it could be available. But this is not something that you're just going to go to your local pharmacy and get. SAMBOLIN: All right. Thank you very much, Dr. Louis Aronne. Thanks for coming in this morning.

ARONNE: Thank you.

BANFIELD: Still ahead, the hits and the misses from last night's CNN GOP Debate. Did the roller coaster ride take another turn?

And also, some brand-new concerns over Whitney Houston's daughter, Bobbi Kristina. Reports that her drug problems are, quote, "out of control."

You're watching EARLY START.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

SAMBOLIN: Twenty-three minutes past the hour here. Welcome back to EARLY START.

Home prices fell to their lowest point in more than 10 years in January. This is according to a new report from the National Association of Realtors. This report says the average price for a home fell to \$154,700 last month, that's the lowest since November of 2001.

BANFIELD: I don't know that I always believe them. They're not always so accurate.

SAMBOLIN: You know who you do believe, Ms. Christine Romans, right?

BANFIELD: I believe everything Christine Romans says, and you're -  
and especially when you have a data wall to back you up.

CHRISTINE ROMANS, CNN BUSINESS CORRESPONDENT: I know. I know I've  
got a data wall with lots of different sources of data. So we can  
make sure we really cover our bases here.

BANFIELD: So Christine, what's the deal? I mean, look, is it - is it  
a great thing because you can buy a house cheaper? Is it an awful  
thing because you're going to lose money to sell your house?

ROMANS: It depends if you're a buyer or seller, right? And it  
depends on where in the country you live, because all real estate is  
local.

But first I want to show you what it looks like according to the  
National Association of Realtors. You know, you talked about that  
2001 November. Remember, we were all in shock from September 11th. It  
was a decade ago. The whole world was a different place then and  
that's where home prices are now.

You look at this chart, you could see where we've come from the peak  
in prices in 2007 when you had prices that were well over \$200,000 on  
average for a price of a house, and now you're more like \$154,000, so  
that's real money that has really hurt people.

But let's take a look at where things are going now. This is where  
I'm going to bring in Zillow. It's another - another source of data  
on home prices. So, 2011, according to Zillow, the average - the

price - the medium price, home prices down about five percent on average in this country. And they're saying 2012, this year, where are we going? Probably down another almost four percent.

But it depends on where you live. You guys know this. Real estate is so wildly different. So I want to break this down to you and show you according to Zillow where things are still falling, where home prices are still falling. Places like Atlanta, you could see another 8.5 percent drop in the medium price of the home.

Chicago, Zoraida, down about -

SAMBOLIN: I don't want to hear.

ROMANS: I know - about eight percent. Seattle, Cleveland,

Sacramento, St. Louis, Minneapolis, St. Paul, these are parts of the country where home prices are still falling.

So let's take a look at where things appear to be bottoming out.

Places like Dallas Ft. Worth, also San Diego, San Francisco,

Pittsburgh, Miami, Ft. Lauderdale, probably wouldn't lose any more ground.

And then you look at places where prices are rising, where the bottom is probably in and things are getting a little better. How about

Baltimore, Maryland, Riverside, California, Phoenix, which has had a huge crisis there in housing and foreclosure. So there are a few places, Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., as well, where prices are starting to move a little bit higher.

But, again, it's been a very tough road, but many people are saying that with home prices so low and with mortgage rates at rock bottom,

it's a good time to buy if you're in the right position.

SAMBOLIN: All right, Christine Romans, thank you very much.

ROMANS: You're welcome.

BANFIELD: I still wanted to know where New York was on that. Was New York on that gauge?

ROMANS: New York, let me look, New York, New York.

BANFIELD: I always love New York prices.

ROMANS: I know.

BANFIELD: It's just - it's just fun to watch.

ROMANS: There it is, down 1.7 percent.

SAMBOLIN: Oh, wow.

ROMANS: So I would call that on the cusp between bottoming out and still a little bit weak. All right, there you go.

BANFIELD: Thanks for that. You are fast. That's little print. Small print. You don't even wear glasses.

ROMANS: I know Dean (ph) found it actually. He went right to it with the camera and then I follow like a little puppy.

BANFIELD: All right. Since we're talking money, let's talk about money and politics and how they have been battling it out, especially last night. The candidates just hammering each other at the CNN Debate.

Newt Gingrich even going so far to push the president for supporting what he said was legalized and fantasize (ph). Is that fair? We're going to break down the key moments in a moment.

SAMBOLIN: And Michael Jordan suing a Chinese company for identity theft. We're going to get to the bottom of that.

You are watching EARLY START.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)

BANFIELD: Hi, welcome back. It is 6:30 a.m. on the East Coast. Nice to have you here with us. I'm Ashleigh Banfield.

SAMBOLIN: Hi. I'm Zoraida Sambolin.

It is time to check the stories that are making news this morning.

Rick Santorum's spending record as a senator under attack at the final CNN GOP debate before key primaries in Arizona and Michigan. And, of course, all the Super Tuesday states. Mitt Romney leading that attack, hoping to pull ahead, again.

George Huguely is now waiting sentencing for second murder in the death of ex-girlfriend and Yeardley Love. A jury has recommended 26 years in prison. A judge will decide his fate in April.

A Connecticut hospital worker is in custody this morning for allegedly shooting two supervisors. Police say it happened after a disciplinary dispute. The shooting victims are reported in serious, but stable condition.

BANFIELD: Some changes to a controversial Virginia bill requiring women to have ultrasounds prior to undergoing an abortion. The bill still requires that the ultrasounds happen, but at least lawmakers now say they're changing it so only the less intrusive abdominal ultrasounds are used.

Eight more bodies found in the wreckage of that Italian cruise ship

that ran aground, the Costa Concordia. That means now 25 people are confirmed dead, seven people still missing. Italian authorities have now expanded their investigation and, guess what? Seven more ship employees are now suspected of manslaughter, shipwreck and failing to alert authorities -- facing charges.

Michael Jordan, superstar, now suing a Chinese sporting goods company for using his good name to sell shoes -- but not his official shoes.

Along with his number, 23, apparently Jordan says this is not about the money, about principle and protecting his good name and his brand.

SAMBOLIN: It is 32 minutes after the hour, the latest debate before the contest that could change everything. It was right here on CNN.

BANFIELD: You couldn't miss it. It was loud, boisterous, and real, real wonky. Mitt Romney versus Rick Santorum is what the headline really comes out to be.

By the way, if you look at the front page of "New York Times," that's all you get -- the two guys. There were four on stage, but the two guys were really the headlines.

And it really comes at a crucial time for Mitt Romney, as well, because he's just trying to recapture all that mojo that he was getting leading up to all of this. The mojo -- is his mojo rising especially with endorsements?

Let's go to our panel, shall we?

Republican Matt Keelen is joining. Democratic strategist Penny Lee is also with us. And Anna Palmer is a money and politics reporter for

"Politico".

So, first things first, guys, it was just breaking this morning, that we have another endorsement rolling in for Mitt Romney and it's where he needs it, in Michigan, where he was born and grew up.

This one is the "Detroit Free Press" giving him an endorsement, but with reservations, and this follows yesterday's "Detroit News" endorsement.

But, Matt, did the endorsements matter at this point and have they mattered along the way?

MATT KEELEN, REPUBLICAN STRATEGIST: Ashleigh, I don't think endorsements from newspapers are a big deal. Some local politicians, the governor of Michigan is probably a bigger endorsement that Romney has got. And as you said, Romney needs to start getting the momentum back and really needs to start taking the race to the president instead of Santorum and the other Republicans.

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