

AP News in Brief at 5:58 a.m. EDT

The Associated Press

Romney ready to claim GOP presidential nomination after Texans go to polls Tuesday

CRAIG, Colo. (AP) — Mitt Romney is poised to clinch the Republican presidential nomination after Tuesday's Texas GOP primary, a largely uncontested election that will formalize the former Massachusetts governor's status as President Barack Obama's general election challenger.

While Romney's nomination has been virtually assured for a month, the day marks the culmination of several years of work, dating back to his unsuccessful 2008 effort, and perhaps far earlier.

"It'll be a big day tomorrow," Romney told reporters aboard his campaign plane Monday evening. "I'm looking forward to the good news."

But Romney's focus Tuesday will be hundreds of miles north of Texas, where he's scheduled to court voters and donors in Colorado and Nevada during a two-state swing punctuated by a Las Vegas fundraiser with conservative businessman Donald Trump.

The evening event, set for the Trump International Hotel, comes amidst fresh criticism from Republicans and Democrats over Trump's continued questioning of Obama's citizenship. Romney hasn't condemned Trump's false claims, offering a fresh example of the presidential contender's reluctance to confront his party's more extreme elements. There have been other examples in recent weeks that underscore Romney's delicate push to win over skeptical conservatives while appealing to moderates and independents who generally deliver general election victories.

Italian news reports say 8 dead in new 5.8 magnitude quake that rocked area hit May 20

MILAN (AP) — Italian media say eight people are dead in a magnitude 5.8 earthquake that has shaken northern Italy in the same northern region that was hit by another fatal quake May 20.

The United States Geological Survey said the quake on Tuesday, which struck at 9:00 a.m. local time (0700 GMT), was centered 40 kilometers (25 miles) northwest of the city of Bologna. It hit the area where a 6.0 temblor killed seven people earlier this month.

The news agency ANSA reported that eight people have died and the news agency LaPresse said others were buried under the rubble of collapsed homes and factories.

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SPIN METER: They're throwing granny off the cliff! Political ads scare up health care horrors

WASHINGTON (AP) — They're throwing granny off a cliff!

That's the not-so-subtle message Republicans and Democrats appear to be converging on for political ads on health care this year, featuring heavy doses of what each party alleges the other one plans to do to wreck Medicare.

From cost controls in President Barack Obama's health care law to GOP Rep. Paul Ryan's privatization plan for future Medicare recipients, there's something about health care that makes it a breeding ground for the wildest allegations.

Families feel vulnerable to the catastrophic costs of serious illness, and few understand the labyrinth of private and government insurance, allowing partisans to play to their worst fears. Add to that the belief among political pros that health care worries can drive the votes of seniors.

"It is easy to deceive on the issue because the knowledge base of the electorate when it comes to the complexities of health care is relatively low," said Kathleen Hall Jamieson, an expert on political communication at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg Center.

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Scientists, doctors use snake robots for surgery, rescues, and exploration

PITTSBURGH (AP) — Imagine a tiny snake robot crawling through your body, helping a surgeon identify diseases and perform operations.

It's not science fiction. Scientists and doctors are using the creeping metallic tools to perform surgery on hearts, prostate cancer, and other diseased organs. The snakebots carry tiny cameras, scissors and forceps, and even more advanced sensors are in the works. For now, they're powered by tethers that humans control. But experts say the day is coming when some robots will roam the body on their own.

"It won't be very long before we have robots that are nanobots, meaning they will actually be inside the body without tethers," said Dr. Michael Argenziano, the Chief of Adult Cardiac Surgery at New York-Presbyterian Hospital and Columbia University Medical Center in New York.

Argenziano was involved with some of the first U.S. Food and Drug Administration

clinical trials on robotic heart surgery more than 10 years ago. Now he says snake robots have become a commonly used tool that gives surgeons a whole new perspective.

"It's like the ability to have little hands inside the patients, as if the surgeon had been shrunk, and was working on the heart valve," he said.

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UN rights office says most of 108 killed in Syria massacre were executed

BEIRUT (AP) — The U.N. said Tuesday that entire families were shot in their homes during a massacre in Syria last week that killed more than 100 people, including children. Most of the victims were shot at close range, the U.N. said.

Rupert Colville, a spokesman for the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, said the conclusions were based on accounts gathered by U.N. monitors and corroborated by other sources. He said U.N. monitors found that fewer than 20 of the 108 people killed in the west-central area of Houla were killed by artillery fire.

"Most of the rest of the victims were summarily executed in two separate incidents," Colville told reporters in Geneva. "At this point it looks like entire families were shot in their houses."

He said witnesses blamed pro-government thugs known as shabiha for the attacks, noting that they sometimes operate "in concert" with government forces.

The killings in a collection of villages called Houla near the central Syrian city of Homs last week have drawn fresh attention to the Syrian conflict, in part because of the brutality of the massacre. Activists posted amateur videos online showing shells exploding in the village, dismembered bodies lying in the streets, then rows of dozens of dead laid out before being buried in a mass grave.

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Russian firm: Iran victim of powerful new cyberattack

JERUSALEM (AP) — A Russian-based internet security firm says a powerful spyware virus with unprecedented data-snatching capabilities has attacked computers in Iran and elsewhere in the Middle East.

Iran has not disclosed any damage done by the virus. But a unit of the Iranian communications and information technology ministry said it produced an anti-virus capable of identifying and removing the new malware, dubbed "Flame."

The virus' origin has not been identified, but suspicion immediately fell on Israel, famous for its technological innovation and its tireless campaign against Iran's suspect nuclear program.

Russian digital security provider Kaspersky Lab, which identified the virus, said in a release posted on its website late Monday that "the complexity and functionality of the newly discovered malicious program exceed those of all other cyber menaces known to date."

It said preliminary findings suggest the virus has been active since March 2010, but eluded detection because of its "extreme complexity" and the fact that only selected computers are being targeted. Flame's primary purpose, it said, "appears to be cyber espionage, by stealing information from infected machines" and sending it to servers across the world.

2 reclusive nations pull back their political curtains, but change? That's more complicated

For decades, they have been two of the world's most reclusive nations.

Myanmar, run by a cabal of generals, squelched any attempt at democratic change and kept the country's most popular figure under strict house arrest for years.

North Korea, run by the same family as a Stalinist dictatorship since the 1940s, simply sealed itself off. Outsiders were rarely allowed to visit, tourists were long unknown and the only way ordinary people could escape the country's extreme poverty and political repression was to steal across the border into China.

But in very different ways, the two nations have opened themselves up over the past year or so, allowing the world to peer behind the political curtains they had so laboriously erected.

Both now have foreign journalists arriving in unprecedented numbers (though the visits are tightly restricted in North Korea). Both have had observers predicting momentous changes. Both governments have insisted — repeatedly — that they are working to improve the lives of their citizens.

AP Exclusive: Calif. 9/11 license plate fund, intended for scholarships, raided for deficits

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — After the 2001 terrorist attacks, California lawmakers sought a way to channel the patriotic fervor and use it to help victims' families and law enforcement. Their answer: specialty memorial license plates emblazoned with the words, "We Will Never Forget."

Part of the money raised through the sale of the plates was to fund scholarships for the children of California residents who perished in the attacks, while the majority — 85 percent — was to help fund anti-terrorism efforts.

But an Associated Press review of the \$15 million collected since lawmakers approved the "California Memorial Scholarship Program" shows only a small fraction of the money went to scholarships. While 40 percent has funded anti-terror training programs, \$3 million was raided by Gov. Jerry Brown and his predecessor, Arnold Schwarzenegger, to plug the state's budget deficit.

Millions more have been spent on budget items with little relation to direct threats of terrorism, including livestock diseases and workplace safety.

Moreover, the California Department of Motor Vehicles has been advertising the plates as helping the children of Sept. 11 victims even though the state stopped funding the scholarship program seven years ago. The specialty plate fund continues to take in \$1.5 million a year.

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Pennsylvania, Michigan, Florida — GOP highlights in 2010 now marked by bitter Senate primaries

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — Mutual admiration was the rule for Democratic Sen. Bill Nelson's listening session at the University of South Florida.

School provost Ralph Wilcox introduced the two-term senator as a "steadfast advocate for all Floridians." Nelson, a former astronaut, flattered the more than two dozen students present, saying they had a keen sense about people running for elected office. "You guys can usually smell out folks. You can spot a phony," he said.

Nelson collected their personal stories about the unbearable weight of student loans for a Senate speech days later on the need to keep the interest rate low. At the conclusion of the hour-plus session, he posed for photos with students.

Don't go looking for compliments and congeniality in the Republican primary to decide Nelson's election-year challenger. It's one of the meanest races in the country.

George LeMieux calls rival Connie Mack a congressional no-show, claiming that the four-term House member spends more time in California with his wife, Rep. Mary Bono Mack, than either in Florida or on Capitol Hill. A devastating web video from LeMieux portrays Mack as Hollywood bad boy Charlie Sheen, highlighting years-old bar fights and Mack's previous experience as an events coordinator for Hooters.

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Game 1 to Miami: James and Wade combine for 54 points as Heat run past Celtics in 93-79 win

MIAMI (AP) — Dwyane Wade grabbed a rebound, turned and fired a 90-foot pass to LeBron James to set up one of the easiest scores the Miami Heat had all night.

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Yes, James and Wade are clicking — at the perfect time.

James scored 32 points and grabbed 13 rebounds, Wade scored 10 of his 22 points in the fourth quarter and the Heat beat the Boston Celtics 93-79 on Monday night in Game 1 of the Eastern Conference finals. The stars were stars, and the role players more than did their parts as well, with the Heat enjoying a 48-33 edge in rebounds, blocking 11 shots and never trailing.

"One down. And they still have an opportunity in Game 2 to accomplish what they want to," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said, referring to how Boston can still grab home-court advantage by winning Game 2. "At times it was a strange game. Some good runs, both teams. We felt we could have played better and I'm sure they felt the same thing."

Shane Battier had 10 points and 10 rebounds for the Heat, who wasted an early 11-point first-half lead, then gave up 35 second-quarter points before running away to break a halftime tie — getting going with a 9-2 run early in the third, that Wade-to-James touchdown pass part of the flurry.

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