



■ Fifteen apply for Russian elections

Moscow (AP) — Fifteen people have applied to run next month for Russia's presidency, including acting President Vladimir Putin and Communist Party chief Gennady Zyuganov, the head of the election commission said Sunday, the final day for applying.

Putin is the clear favorite for the March 26 ballot, according to recent opinion polls that show more than 50 percent of respondents supporting him. His nearest challenger, Zyuganov, has about 20 percent of respondents' support.

Others who applied for the race — submitting property and income declarations and the signatures of at least 500,000 supporters — were Grigory Yavlinsky, leader of the reformist Yabloko party, and nationalist firebrand Vladimir Zhirinovskiy.

The applications of Zyuganov and Alexei Podberozkin, of the small leftist Spiritual Heritage group, have already been approved. The rest are to be examined over the next eight days.

Election commission head Alexander Veshnyakov said on NTV television that he did not expect all the applications to be approved, but did not elaborate.

Putin's strong performance in opinion polls appears to reflect wide approval of his tough stance on the war in Chechnya and his law-and-order image. But his position on many of the issues troubling Russia remains unclear. With just six weeks to go before the election, he still has not released an economic platform.

■ Commuter train hits barrier at airport

LINTHICUM, Md. (AP) — A light rail commuter train arriving at Baltimore-Washington International Airport hit a safety barrier at the end of the line and derailed Sunday, injuring the train's conductor and most of its 30 passengers, a transit official said.

Maryland Mass Transit Authority spokesman Frank Fulton said the injured were transported to several area hospitals. Their conditions were not immediately available.

The one-car train originated at Baltimore's Penn Station and normally would have been traveling about 13 miles per hour as it neared the end of its trip about 2:45 p.m., Fulton said. Investigators were trying to determine how fast it was moving when it hit the barrier.

Witnesses said they heard the train's brakes screeching just before the crash.

■ After long flirtation, Trump decides not to run for president

WASHINGTON (AP) — New York tycoon Donald Trump has decided against running for president, ending a lengthy flirtation with the notion that he could tap his political fortune to capture the White House as a third-party candidate, The Associated Press has learned.

Sources connected with New York's Independence Party movement, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Trump has told associates he will announce Monday that he is not mounting a presidential bid.

After months of speculation about a possible Reform Party campaign, Trump decided recently that the party is too fractured to support a credible presidential candidate, the officials said. The Reform Party operates in New York under the Independence Party banner.

He met over the weekend with advisers to consider a second option, running as an Independence Party candidate, but determined there is not enough time to get on state ballots. Trump considered that option out of respect for Minnesota Gov. Jesse Ventura, who had been the Reform Party's highest elected official before leaving the "dysfunctional" party last week to reinvigorate his state's Independence Party.

■ State's largest papers endorse Bush

Republican presidential candidate George W. Bush has been endorsed by South Carolina's two largest newspapers.

The *(Columbia) State* and *The Greenville News* both endorsed the Texas governor in Sunday's editions. The state's presidential primary is Saturday.

The headline on The State's endorsement said "Between two good men, we choose Gov. Bush."

Hodges to propose moving flag to Wade Hampton monument

BY JIM DAVENPORT
ASSOCIATED PRESS

Gov. Jim Hodges wants to take the Confederate flag from the Statehouse dome and allow it to fly next to Confederate Gen. Wade Hampton's memorial.

On Monday, Hodges will stand near the monument on the Southeast side of the Statehouse along with lawmakers and business leaders to announce his proposal.

Sen. Greg Gregory, R-Lancaster, plans to be there. Gregory said Hodges' plan involves a single flag pole at the statue of Wade Hampton on horseback. The plan includes elements of the 1994 Heritage Act, which protects Confederate names on roads and buildings and Confederate monuments.

Hodges won't talk about the plan before Monday, spokeswoman Nina Brook said. "He feels offering a solution is the right thing to do at this time," Brook said.

The plan appears to have enough support to pass the Senate, but even without that, Gregory said, lawmakers have to move forward on the issue.

That Confederate flag has flown above the South Carolina Statehouse since 1962. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People started a boycott of the state on Jan. 1 to force its removal from the dome. Only the Legislature has the power to take the flag down.

Hodges' proposal is not likely to win the support of the NAACP, state official Lonnie Randolph

said Friday night.

Randolph said the civil rights organization will not participate in Monday's news conference and will "stick by our guns" that the flag should be moved to the Confederate Relic Room on Sumter Street across from the Statehouse, or be displayed under glass inside the Statehouse.

The Assembly of African American Leaders, meeting at Benedict College in Columbia on Saturday, agreed that the new proposal won't fly.

"I personally believe that if the flag is relocated to the monument, it becomes an in-your-face insult that could possibly contribute to civil unrest, as opposed to the flag at its current position, which can only be seen by lifting your head," said J.T. McLawhorn, president of the Columbia Urban League.

The assembly said it would continue to support the NAACP's economic sanctions of the state and would organize a campaign complete with advertising and grass-roots support to get the flag removed from the Statehouse grounds.

Gregory said the glare of national media focusing on the issue without understanding the intimate relationship of the flag to the state's heritage was a factor in his decision to support the plan.

"We come out looking terrible," Gregory said. "How we want the state presented is being washed asunder by this flag issue."

The announcement will come as the national media is focusing on the state in advance of the Republican Party's Feb. 19 presidential primary.

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The three remaining candidates in that race have all said the Confederate flag is a South Carolina issue that the state has to resolve on its own.

Hodges' announcement also comes as Sen. Glenn McConnell, a Charleston Republican who is the flag's staunchest defender, and Sen. Darrell Jackson, a Columbia Democrat who has said the flag shouldn't fly anywhere on the Statehouse grounds, are said to be close to brokering a compromise.

McConnell calls that part of the Statehouse grounds "the gully" and said he will fight efforts to put the flag there. "I've got nobody that's in favor of that," McConnell said. He said he wants a Confederate flag and a Union army flag from the period to fly by the Confederate Soldiers monument near the Statehouse's north side.

Wade Hampton was a South Carolina governor from 1876 to 1879 and was the state's first post-Reconstruction chief executive. He commanded the Hampton Legion in nearly a dozen battles, including First Manassas and Gettysburg.

A year after he took office, lawmakers approved

new election laws that made it more difficult for the state's blacks to win elected office, according to Walter Edgar's "South Carolina: A History."

McConnell said the Hampton monument honors a governor. The battle flag needs to be a monument that honors soldiers, he said.

Hodges previously has said he would not back a plan unless it has the votes needed for passage.

Sen. John Land, D-Manning, will lead Senate efforts in supporting the plan. He says the bill that outlines the plan will be introduced on Tuesday. "I live in the world of the vote. We can get enough votes to pass this. I believe we can enough votes to stop filibuster," Land said.

McConnell says he doesn't see how Hodges can muster the 29 votes needed to stop a filibuster on the plan, even if he does piece together a 24-vote majority. Even if Hodges has both, flag supporters are prepared to prevent the flag bill from passing, said McConnell, who many regard as the master of the Senate's intricate debate rules.

Reform Party meeting dissolves into chaos

BY LAURIE KELLMAN
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NASHVILLE, TENN. — Ross Perot's Reform Party ousted party chairman Jack Gargan, an ally of dissident Jesse Ventura, during a Saturday showdown that exploded almost immediately with raw hostility and scuffling. At one point, local police threatened to shut down the proceedings, organizers said.

The committee, by a 109-31 vote, ousted Gargan on a motion that said "he has failed to faithfully perform and execute the duties of his office." One person abstained. They picked Pat Choate, who was Perot's running mate in 1996, to be the new chairman, by a 101-29 margin.

The motion said Gargan's failures and violations of the party's constitution "have resulted in substantial harm to the public image of the party, and in a breakdown of the proper administration, operation and governance of the party."

The name of Ventura, the governor of Minnesota who quit the national party Friday, did not come up during the meeting.

Of the action in Nashville, Ventura said Saturday: "It saddens me, but it doesn't surprise me. That's why I made the decision I made yesterday."

Ventura noted that Gargan had won the chairmanship "fair and square" in July at the national convention in Dearborn, Mich. Gargan said after the meeting in Nashville that "the cards were stacked" against him.

"This was not the Reform Party that I know," he said. "This is not the party of honesty and integrity. This was a sham." The subsequent votes were also

taken to remove Gerry Moan, who's the vice chairman and a Perot ally. He overwhelmed survived a challenge, but treasurer Ronn Young, an ally of Gargan, was voted out. They also affirmed by a voice vote that Long Beach, Calif. would be site of their convention this summer.

Gargan vowed to fight back. Earlier Gargan had cried out "it's an illegal meeting!" as the audience chanted that he be turned "out, out out!" from his post.

At one point, a Perot ally who identified herself only as Melanie of San Diego rushed the front of the room and tried to unplug Gargan's microphone because he wouldn't call the meeting to order.

Gargan supporter Sue Harris de Bauche of Virginia slapped and pushed Melanie to the floor, and two police officers separated the two. One escorted Harris de Bauche from the room, as it rang with members telling each other to "shut up" and begin the meeting.

"Democracy can be messy, can't it?" said Donna Donovan, spokeswoman for the Perot faction.

That's one way of describing months of infighting so fierce that members of the party founded by Ross Perot openly speculated about whether it would survive to participate credibly in this year's presidential race.

Over the Internet, in court and in the press, the factions have battled over everything from the location of the party's nominating convention, its philosophical direction, its procedures and even whether certain national committee members were qualified to be present on Saturday. For months, a move has been afoot to oust Gargan, Ventura's hand-picked chairman who took his post in January.



SCOTT GOHLE KRT

Minnesota Governor Jesse Ventura signals that he has gotten zero help from the national Reform Party at a news conference in St. Paul, Minn. Friday.

Certain that enough votes existed to oust Gargan, Ventura fired a preemptive strike at the national party Friday by quitting, branding the organization "dysfunctional" and urging the Minnesota state party to break away.

The same day, treasurer Young filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court for the Western District of Virginia seeking the party's financial records, which he says were never turned over to him by his predecessors, who are loyal to Perot.

On Saturday, Minnesota Reform Party leaders approved a special state convention March 4 to consider the split from the national party.

On eve of last strip, Charles Schulz dies

BY MARY ANN LICKTEIG
ASSOCIATED PRESS

SANTA ROSA, CALIF. — "Peanuts" creator Charles Schulz died at home following a battle with cancer, just as the last original cartoon of his half-century career was being published in newspapers worldwide.

The 77-year-old Schulz was diagnosed with colon cancer in November, and his spirits recently sagged as he battled the disease and pondered retirement, said Monte Schulz, his eldest son.

"I think maybe he decided that his true passion was in the strip, and when that was gone, it was over," Monte Schulz said Sunday. "He had done what he had wanted to do, and that was it for him ..."

The son said that while the cause of death Saturday wasn't known, "it appears he died in his sleep, almost between breaths." His wife, Jeannie, was with him when he died.

On news of his passing, fans and colleagues across the country hailed Schulz as an irreplaceable artist whose work over the years had become infused in American popular culture.

"I think 'Peanuts' has been for most of its existence the best comic strip in history, and nothing's ever approached it," said Mell Lazarus, who draws the "Momma" and "Miss Peach" strips, and knew Schulz for 42 years. "He's going to be missed and will clearly never be replaced."

The famous strip — with its gentle humor spiked with a child's-eye view of human foibles — had one particularly endearing trait: constancy.

Year after year, the long-suffering Charlie Brown faced misfortune with

a mild, "Good grief!" Tart-tongued Lucy handed out advice at a nickel a pop. And Snoopy, Charlie Brown's wise-but-weird beagle, still took the occasional flight of fancy back to the skies of World War I and his rivalry with the Red Baron.

The strip was an intensely personal effort for Schulz. He had had a clause in his contract dictating the strip had to end with his death — no one could imitate it.

While battling cancer, he opted to retire it, saying he wanted to focus on his health and family without the worry of a daily deadline.

His last daily comic ran in early January, and the final farewell strip appeared in newspapers on Sunday. Old versions of the strip will continue to be published.

The last strip showed Snoopy at his typewriter and other Peanuts regulars along with a "Dear Friends" letter thanking his readers for their support.

"I have been grateful over the years for the loyalty of our editors and the wonderful support and love expressed to me by fans of the comic strip," Schulz wrote. "Charlie Brown, Snoopy, Linus, Lucy ... how can I ever forget them ..."

It ended with his signature. Fans of all ages mourned his passing.

In Santa Rosa, 8-year-old Trevor Jones offered a bouquet of flowers decorated with a drawing of the city's ice skating rink, which Schulz built. The drawing, delivered to the rink, read in a child's scrawl, "I like you."

Bush concerned Democrats might be mobilizing to help McCain

BY JANELLE CARTER
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Gov. George W. Bush expressed concern Sunday that Democrats are mobilizing to support Sen. John McCain in South Carolina's open Republican presidential primary.

But McCain said Bush's allegation that some Democrats believe McCain would be the easier candidate to defeat in the general election in November "flies in the face of the facts."

"The facts are that independents are also flocking in large numbers to my candidacy as well as Republicans," McCain said on CBS' "Face the Nation." "Everybody knows that if you're going to win a general election, you have to have those independents and some De-

mocrats."

He said it was his message that was attracting non-Republicans.

"I'm very proud that Libertarians or vegetarians or anybody would consider supporting me because I have a vision of reform for America that I think is taking hold, not only in South Carolina but all over the country," McCain said.

Still, Bush and his surrogates claimed — without offering proof — that Democrats were trying to skew the results of Saturday's GOP primary, in which non-Republicans may vote.

"The only thing I'm concerned about is that Democrats flock into the Republican primary to decide who the Republican nominee is, and then head back for the Democrats in the general election," Bush said on NBC's "Meet the

Press."

Pat Robertson, founder of the Christian Coalition and a Bush supporter, alleged on CBS that "people who are allied with (Vice President) Al Gore are indeed making telephone calls to try to encourage Democrats to vote in the Republican primary ... I think that they consider him a weaker candidate than Governor Bush."

Gore campaign spokesman Chris Lehane dismissed the claims, saying the Texas governor was "increasingly sounding like a rattled candidate."

"I would suggest that he focus on earning the support of Republicans in his own primary rather than worrying about what Democrats are doing," Lehane said.

Bush's concern, however, has been expressed about other states with open

primaries.

Voting is open to non-Republicans in several upcoming GOP contests, including South Carolina, Michigan, Virginia, North Dakota, Missouri and Georgia. States with so-called closed primaries have reported a flood of inquiries from people hoping to switch their registration to Republican.

McCain defeated Bush by 18 percentage points in the New Hampshire primary by securing a majority of GOP voters and a virtual sweep of the state's large independent bloc.

"We are very concerned about any attempts by liberal Democrats to come into our party for the purpose of creating mischief as opposed to an enduring philosophy," said Bush campaign spokesman Ari Fleischer said. "We wel-

come all voters who will enter the Republican primary who intend to vote Republican now and in November."

A Newsweek poll Saturday showed Bush and McCain in a dead heat in South Carolina, and both candidates are intensifying their efforts as the primary nears.

Some 200,000 people that McCain's campaign has identified as having voting histories that cross back and forth between party primaries are being inundated with telephone calls and mailings.

For his part, Bush has bought the \$45,000 in air time that became available after Steve Forbes quit the Republican contest, boosting the governor's radio and television expenses in South Carolina to \$2.8 million, according to Fleischer.