

BRIEFLY

Two dead, 1 arrest in shootout during Belgium anti-terrorist raid

VERVIERS, Belgium (AP) — Belgian security forces killed two terror suspects with links to Syria in a fierce shootout in the eastern city of Verviers on Thursday and arrested another, foiling a major and imminent attack against police buildings, authorities said.

The raid came amid an international hunt for possible accomplices to attackers who killed 17 people in France last week before being shot dead by police. Those attacks, by men claiming allegiance to the Islamic State group in Syria and al-Qaida in Yemen, have raised fears around Europe of more attacks.

Belgian federal magistrate Eric Van der Sypt said in Brussels that there was no link at this stage between the Paris attacks and the Belgian operation, which he said is the result of an investigation that has been underway for a few weeks.

The suspects immediately opened fire on police when they closed in on them near the city's train station, he said. There was an intense firefight for several minutes on an upper level of a building in Verviers where the raid took place, which appears to be residential.

"These were extremely well-armed men" with automatic weapons, Van der Sypt said. Police buildings were the target of an attack expected within hours or days, he said.

Parents of Ohio terror defendant say they saw a change in him

CINCINNATI (AP) — Christopher Lee Cornell showed little direction in his life, spending hours playing video games in his bedroom in his parents' apartment, rarely going out or working, and voicing distrust of the government and the media. But in recent weeks, his parents say, they noticed a change in him.

They thought it was a change for the better: The 20-year-old suburban Cincinnati man was helping his mother around the house, cooking meals, sitting with his parents to watch movies, and talking about having become a Muslim.

"He said, 'I'm at peace with myself,'" his father, John Cornell, recalled Thursday — a day after his son was arrested in an FBI sting and charged with plotting to attack the U.S. Capitol with pipe bombs and guns and kill government officials.

Mitt Romney casts shade over 2016

CORONADO, Calif. (AP) — Even among Mitt Romney's longtime supporters, one fear about his potential return to presidential politics stands out: the lingering perception the former private equity executive cares only about the fate of wealthy Americans.

Romney knows it, too. In his so-far private conversations about a prospective third run for the White House, he has told would-be backers that improving the lives of poor and middle-class Americans would be at the top of his 2016 agenda.

"What he was most passionate about in our conversation is breaking the cycle of poverty in this country," said Bill Kunkler, one of Romney's past top national fundraisers, who received a call from Romney this week. "That really, really bothers him."

There are concerns among Republicans that Romney is a two-time loser in the race for president whose "turn" has come and gone. But in interviews with several Romney supporters, many pointed to what political professionals describe as his empathy problem. Among voters who wanted a president who "cares about people like me,"

only 18 percent supported Romney in 2012, compared with 81 percent for President Barack Obama, according to exit polls.

Flu vaccine only 23 percent effective

NEW YORK (AP) — As predicted, this year's flu vaccine is doing a pretty crummy job. It's only 23 percent effective, primarily because it doesn't include the bug that is making most people sick, according to a government study released Thursday.

That's one of the worst performances in the last decade, since U.S. health officials started routinely tracking how well vaccines work. In the best flu seasons, the vaccines were 50 to 60 percent effective.

"This is an uncommon year," said Dr. Alicia Fry, a flu vaccine expert at the Atlanta-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, who was involved in the study.

The findings are not surprising. In early December, CDC officials warned the vaccine probably wouldn't work very well because it isn't well matched to a strain that's been spreading widely.

Each year, the flu vaccine is reformulated, based on experts' best guess at which three or four strains will be the biggest problem. Those decisions are usually made in February, months before the flu season, to give companies that make flu shots and nasal spray vaccine enough time to make enough doses.

Google Glass pulled off market

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Google will stop selling its Internet-connected eyewear to consumers until the company can develop a more polished and affordable version that's less likely to be viewed as a freakish device.

The sales moratorium on the nearly 2-year-old "Explorer" edition of Google Glass goes into effect Jan. 19. The decision announced Thursday coincides with

Glass' spin-off from the secretive Google X lab where it was invented.

Glass will now operate in a division steered by veteran marketing executive Ivy Ross, whose past experience includes stints at fashion-conscious companies such as Gap Inc. and Calvin Klein. Ross will report to Tony Fadell, who played an instrumental role in the design of Apple's iPod and now runs the smart-appliance maker Nest Labs that Google Inc. bought for \$3.2 billion last year.

Google will still sell a version of Glass to companies that have found uses for the device in their offices, stores and factories. The Mountain View, California, company still plans to come back with a new consumer model of Glass, but hasn't set a timetable for the next release.

Teacher convicted of showing class violent movie

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — A former substitute teacher who showed a movie featuring graphic sex and violence to a high school class has been convicted of disseminating matter harmful to juveniles.

Sheila Kearns showed the film, "The ABCs of Death," during five periods of a Spanish class at East High School in Columbus in 2013, prosecutors said. The movie consists of 26 chapters, each depicting some form of grisly death and representing a letter of the alphabet, such as "E is for Exterminate," "O is for Orgasm" and "T is for Toilet."

Kearns contended she didn't watch the movie beforehand or while showing it and was unaware of its content, *The Columbus Dispatch* reported. Her attorney said she never would have knowingly showed it.

A jury convicted Kearns of four felony counts that carry possible jail sentences. But Kearns, 58, is expected to get probation when she's sentenced in March.

Arizona passes law requiring students to pass civics test

PHOENIX (AP) — Arizona became the first state in the nation on Thursday to enact a law requiring high school students to pass the U.S. citizenship test on civics before graduation, giving a boost to a growing nationwide effort to boost civics education.

Both the Arizona House and Senate quickly passed the legislation on just the fourth day of the legislative session, and newly elected Republican Gov. Doug Ducey signed it into law Thursday evening.

The swift action in Arizona comes as states around the country take up similar measures. Arizona's law requires high school students to correctly answer 60 of 100 questions on the civics portion of the test new citizens must pass.

The test is being pushed nationally by the Arizona-based Joe Foss Institute, which has set a goal of having all 50 states adopt it by 2017, the 230th anniversary

of the U.S. Constitution. The institute says legislatures in 15 states are expected to consider it this year.

The Foss Institute, whose motto is "Patriotism Matters," has created a civics institute to promote the test to state legislatures as a way to increase the understanding of basic government by students, with the hope they will be better prepared to be engaged citizens.

The North Dakota House of Representatives overwhelming approved the same measure Thursday.

The Arizona law requires students to correctly answer 60 of 100 test questions before they can earn a high school or GED diploma starting in the 2016-2017 school year.

Critics question whether the test, which relies on memorization, is the best way to engage students in civics education.

Ducey had urged the Legislature to make the civics test the first bill to hit his

desk as governor. He said studies show that students don't know enough about basic government to grow into effective citizens.

Former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, an Arizona native, has supported the initiative. She's made civics education a prime focus in recent years.

Republican Arizona Senate Majority Leader Steve Yarbrough, sponsoring the bill in his chamber, said that "requiring that students pass this test is not by any means a silver bullet, but I think is a step, a small step forward."

"And I think we need to encourage the people of America to become more aware of the values of America," Yarbrough said.

A Democratic senator who opposed the bill, David Bradley, said the test would do nothing to make good citizens.

"My point now is tests don't make citizens, citizens are tested by their actions," Bradley said.

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