

BRIEFLY

Dangerous arsenic levels found in California wine

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Dozens of bottles of low-priced California wines sold under such labels as Franzia, Mogen David and Almaden contain dangerously high levels of arsenic, according to a lawsuit filed by four California residents.

The industry group Wine Institute dismissed the lawsuit as “irresponsible,” adding it has not called for any vintner to pull any of the wines named in the complaint from store shelves.

The complaint, which seeks class-action status, was filed Thursday in Los Angeles Superior Court. It lists as defendants 28 California wineries. It also asks for unspecified damages and a halt to production of arsenic-tainted wine.

“We believe this allegation is false and misleading and that all wines being sold in the U.S. marketplace are safe,” the institute, which represents more than 1,000 California vintners and related businesses, said in a statement.

Institute spokeswoman Gladys Horiuchi said Friday that although the United States doesn’t have specific arsenic levels for wine, many other countries do. She added that California vintages have never come close to those levels.

According to the lawsuit, tests by three independent laboratories found that in some cases arsenic levels were 500 percent higher than what’s considered safe. Horiuchi said those comparisons were based on levels considered safe for drinking water, not wine.

FBI asks for patience in black man’s hanging in Mississippi

PORT GIBSON, Miss. (AP) — An FBI agent appealed for patience Friday after a black man was found hanging from a tree in Mississippi, saying 30 federal, state and local agents were working intensively to determine whether he was killed or committed suicide.

The county coroner confirmed that the man found hanging from a white sheet Thursday was Otis Byrd, an ex-convict reported missing by his family more than two weeks ago. Byrd lived just 200 yards from the spot where his body was found, in a wooded area off a dirt road that ran behind his house.

Always said investigators are interviewing Byrd’s family and friends and searching his rental home and a storage unit for clues, and will not reveal any evidence along the way.

Claiborne County Sheriff Marvin Lucas Sr. told The Associated Press earlier Friday that Byrd did not appear to have stepped off of anything in the area where he was found hanging from a tree limb about 12 feet high. His feet were dangling about two feet off the ground, and his hands were not bound.

Bombings in Yemeni mosques kill more than 130

ADEN, Yemen (AP) — Suicide bombers attacked a pair of mosques Friday in the Yemeni capital, unleashing monstrous blasts that ripped through

worshippers and killed 137 people in the deadliest assault yet targeting Shiite rebels who have taken over large parts of the rapidly fragmenting nation. At least 13 children were among the dead.

A purported affiliate of the Islamic State group claimed responsibility for the bombings, which also wounded 357 people — raising the alarming possibility the extremist group has expanded its presence to Yemen after already setting up a branch in Libya. Earlier this week, the group claimed responsibility for a bloody attack on Western tourists in Tunisia that authorities said was carried out by militants trained in Libya.

If the claim is true — and the U.S. expressed skepticism — Friday’s attacks would be the first by the Islamic State group in Yemen, adding a frightening new layer to the country’s turmoil.

Images from the scene showed a number of children among the dead. In footage from the al-Hashoosh mosque, screaming volunteers were seen using bloodied blankets to carry away victims as a small child lay among the dead on the mosque floor.

The mosques were targeted by two suicide bombers each during midday prayers, when large crowds turn out to attend weekly sermons. The state news agency SABA put the toll at 137 dead and 357 wounded.

Obama to announce slower Afghanistan withdrawal

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama is meeting next week with Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah and is expected to announce plans to slow down the pace of troop withdrawals between now and the end of 2016 to maintain security in Afghanistan.

Current plans call for a U.S. drawdown to 5,500 troops by year’s end. But the Obama administration has said previously it might keep more troops in Afghanistan next year.

Jeff Eggers of the White House’s National Security Council said Friday the U.S. still intends to pursue its longer-term withdrawal strategy, which calls for a U.S. security cooperation office in Kabul beyond 2016 of about 1,000 U.S. troops, but no major troop presence.

Eggers appeared to leave open the possibility that the U.S. role after 2016 could also be reconsidered. But officials later said that Eggers was alluding to discussions about the breadth of the U.S. relationship with Afghanistan after 2016, and that the size of the U.S. footprint and the troop levels in Afghanistan that Obama called for would not change.

North Korean envoy says country has nuclear missiles

LONDON (AP) — A North Korean envoy says his country has developed nuclear missiles and is prepared to use them at any time.

North Korean Ambassador to Britain Hyun Hak Bong said in a recent interview with British broadcaster Sky News that his government would use the missiles in response to a nuclear attack by the United States.

Poll: Spend more, tax less, legalize pot

By EMILY SWANSON
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Americans want lower taxes and more government spending both at once, although their support for spending more tax dollars on health care has dropped dramatically. They’re likelier than ever to not feel connected to any particular religion, but no less likely to believe in God. And for the first time, most want to legalize marijuana.

Those are among findings from the 2014 General Social Survey, which has been measuring trends in American opinion and behavior since 1972.

The survey, which is conducted by the independent research organization NORC at the University of Chicago, puts wide-ranging and long-running questions about a large array of issues to the public. Data from the 2014 survey was released earlier this month, and an analysis of its findings was conducted by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and the General Social Survey.

Five things to know about the survey’s findings:

Lower taxes, more spending

It’s no wonder Washington is tied in knots trying to please the people. The people want more spent on many government programs, yet lower taxes for themselves.

Out of 22 spending items asked about in the survey, Americans are more likely to want cuts than increased spending on only four of them — welfare, foreign aid, assistance to big cities and the space program.

Education rates as Americans’ highest priority for spending more money, with 70 percent saying the country spends too little. Foreign aid is what most Americans would like to see cut, with 69 percent saying the country spends too much on that.

Majorities of Americans want more spending on Social Security, assistance to the poor, alternative energy sources, crime and drug addiction. But that doesn’t mean they want to pay for that themselves. More than half of them — 57 percent — say their own taxes are too high.

Still believers, not joiners

The portion of Americans saying



AP Photo/Elaine Thompson, File

In this 2014 file photo, Cannabis City clerk John Golby, left, helps customers looking over a display case of marijuana products at the shop in Seattle.

they have no religious preference has increased dramatically since 1972, when only 5 percent of Americans said they didn’t identify with any particular religion. In 2014, 21 percent of Americans said they had no religion — a record high. Younger Americans are especially likely to fall into that group, with 30 percent of those under age 35 saying they have no religion.

But that doesn’t mean Americans are more likely to be atheists than they used to be. Just 3 percent say they don’t believe in God, while 5 percent say they’re agnostic.

Fifty-eight percent say God does exist, and 70 percent believe in life after death.

Up with pot

For the first time since the survey first asked the question in 1975, a majority of Americans supported legal marijuana in 2014. Fifty-two percent of Americans now say marijuana should be legal, while 42 percent think it should be illegal. That’s a big jump in support for legalizing the drug since 2012, when only 43 percent said they were in favor. Twenty-five years ago, in 1990, just 16 percent supported legal marijuana.

Majorities of blacks and whites support legalizing marijuana, the survey finds, but only 38 percent of Hispanics say the same.

The survey finds support for legalizing the drug rose among all age groups in 2014, though the youngest adults — those under age 35 — are most likely to say it should be legal.

Erosion on health care

The percentage of Americans who think the country spends too little on improving and protecting health has dropped dramatically since 75 percent said so in 2008, probably as a result of the 2010 enactment of President Barack Obama’s health care law. But more than half of Americans — 57 percent — still think the country should be spending more.

There’s major partisan division on the issue. The survey finds 67 percent of Democrats and 58 percent of independents, but only 41 percent of Republicans, say the country is spending too little.

Confidence in banks rebounds slightly

Only 15 percent of Americans say they have a great deal of confidence in banks and financial institutions, but that actually marks a rebound from a record low reached during the great recession. In 2010, only 11 percent said they had a lot of confidence.

The survey finds confidence in all three branches of government, and in the media, to be at record lows.

Gowdy asks Clinton to turn over email server

WASHINGTON (AP) — The chairman of a House committee investigating the deadly 2012 attacks in Benghazi formally requested Friday that Hillary Rodham Clinton turn over her email server for an independent review.

Rep. Trey Gowdy, R-S.C., sent a letter requesting that Clinton, a likely Democratic presidential candidate, turn over to the State Department inspector general or other third party the server she used for official business while serving as secretary of state. The aim would be to have a third party determine what records should be made public.

“Though Secretary Clinton alone is responsible for causing this issue, she alone does not get to determine its outcome,” Gowdy said in a statement. His request to turn over the server is “in the interest of transparency for the American people,” Gowdy said.

Clinton has pledged that all her work-related email will be made public but has acknowledged deleting thousands of messages related to personal matters. Clinton has said the server “will remain private.”

A Clinton spokesman said Friday that when all her work emails are released, “it will offer an unprecedented opportunity for the American people

to see for themselves that they are all there and then some.”

Gowdy set an April 3 deadline for Clinton and her lawyers to respond. If she declines to make the server available, “I will inform the speaker of the House of Representatives so that he can use the full powers of the House to take the necessary steps to protect the best interests of the American people,” Gowdy wrote in a letter to Clinton’s attorney, David Kendall.

House Speaker John Boehner has not ruled out a vote in the full House to force Clinton to turn over the server if she declines to make it available.

Clinton is considered the Democratic front-runner if she decides to seek the presidency, and the high-profile Republican investigations are likely to dog her in the run to the 2016 election.

Rep. Elijah Cummings of Maryland, the top Democrat on the Benghazi panel, said Gowdy’s letter seemed “designed to spark a fight with a potential presidential candidate rather than follow the standard practice in congressional investigations.”

When congressional Democrats investigated emails sent by White House staffers under President George W. Bush from accounts at the Republican National Committee, they did not de-

mand access to RNC servers or backup tapes, Cummings said.

“We should follow this responsible approach to resolve any remaining questions” about the Clinton emails, he said.

Meantime, the Justice Department said this week that it shouldn’t be required under the Freedom of Information Act to provide emails from Clinton that were sent from or received by her private account. Government lawyers said in a filing to a federal appeals court late Thursday that the FOIA law “creates no obligation for an agency to search for and produce records that it does not possess and control.”

The Justice Department acted on the State Department’s behalf in a lawsuit by Freedom Watch, a conservative group led by Larry Klayman, who has filed dozens of lawsuits against the Clintons in the past. Klayman says the court also should issue a subpoena for the seizure and production of the computer file server that was used to store and process Clinton’s emails. The Justice Department said the requests should be denied.

Gowdy has set a March 27 deadline for Clinton to respond to a subpoena for emails and documents related to Libya.

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