

Republicans seek a last-ditch strategy to stop Trump

WASHINGTON (AP) — Staring down the prospect of nominating Donald Trump for president, Republicans spiraled into a chaotic, last-ditch search Wednesday for a way to save the GOP from hitching its fortunes to an unpredictable celebrity candidate without alienating his throng of followers.

Sensing a window closing fast, GOP leaders and elder statesmen toggled through a menu of scenarios but landed on none. Some amplified calls to rally around a Trump alternative, even if that alternative is Ted Cruz, a prickly conservative with few friends in the party.

Others laid out still-hazy plans for a brokered national convention, an option likely to smack of the backroom dealing Trump fans despise. Some floated more extreme measures, talking of breaking from the party and starting anew.

"It's all a play to stall it or try to deny him the nomination," said Neil Newhouse, a GOP pollster. "And the problem with that is no one has the best scenario for how to do that."

The scrambling came as the billionaire candidate racked up commanding victories in seven of eleven Super



Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump, accompanied by New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, left, speaks during a news conference on Super Tuesday primary election night in the White and Gold Ballroom at The Mar-A-Lago Club in Palm Beach, Fla., Tuesday.

Tuesday primary contests, and the path to victory for his rivals narrowed. Trump's strength — which stretched from the Deep South to New England — exposed the depths of the divisions within the party, no matter who becomes the nominee in this election.

As Republicans surveyed the wreckage from Trump's surge, some argued there was still a chance to stop him. He was not yet on track to claim the nomination before the party's national gathering in July, according to an Associated Press delegate count.

He has won 46 percent of the delegates awarded so far, and he would have to increase that to 51 percent in the remaining primaries.

"Trump had a good night, but he left the door open," said David Winston, a Republican pollster.

The GOP mayhem contrasted sharply with a clearer picture on the Democratic side, where Hillary Clinton on Tuesday locked down solid victories in seven states and was on the path to regaining her status as the inevitable nominee. Rival Sen. Bernie Sanders

vowed to keep up the fight, campaigning in Maine on Wednesday.

Sanders, a fierce opponent of big money in politics, quoted director and screenwriter Adam McKay, winner of this year's Oscar for "The Big Short" adapted screenplay, who warned about candidates who take major contributions from "weirdo billionaires."

Republicans, meanwhile, looked for a wise man to calm the jitters and point the way.

Mitt Romney, their nominee four years ago, suggested he might try to fill that role. The former Massachusetts governor announced plans to speak on the "state of the 2016 presidential race" Thursday in Utah. Romney has moved aggressively to take on Trump in recent days, saying the billionaire's unreleased tax returns might contain "bombshells." But he was not expected to endorse a candidate or announce a late entry into the race himself.

Some Republican officials have said they would not support a Trump nomination, including Massachusetts Gov. Charlie Baker and South Carolina Rep. Mark Sanford, but neither offered another alternative.



Pro-abortion rights protesters rally outside the Supreme Court in Washington on Wednesday.

Split Supreme Court wrestles with abortion case

WASHINGTON (AP) — A Supreme Court deeply split over abortion wrestled Wednesday with widely replicated Texas regulations that could drastically cut the number of abortion clinics in the state. As ever, Justice Anthony Kennedy appeared to hold the outcome in his hands on a court operating with eight justices since the death of Justice Antonin Scalia.

The court's most significant abortion case since the early 1990s crackled with intensity during 85 minutes of pointed questions from liberal and conservative justices that suggested little common ground in resolving the clinics' claim that the regulations are medically unnecessary and unconstitutionally limit a woman's right to an abortion.

Texas says it is trying to protect women's health in rules that require doctors who perform abortions to have admitting privileges at nearby hospitals and force clinics to meet hospital-like standards for outpatient surgery. The rules would cut the number of abortion clinics in the state by three-fourths, abortion providers say.

The three women justices and Justice Stephen Breyer repeatedly questioned why Texas needed to enact the 2013 law. "But what is the legitimate interest in protecting their health? What evidence is there that under the prior law, the prior law was not sufficiently protective of the women's health?" Ruth Bader Ginsburg asked Texas Solicitor General Scott Keller.

More than 210 women are hospitalized annually as a result of complications from abortions, Keller said. Pressed by Ginsburg, Keller acknowledged that was a relatively small complication rate but said the state still could act to make abortion safer. With

about 70,000 abortions a year in Texas, that works out to a rate of less than one-half of 1 percent.

Justices Elena Kagan, Sonia Sotomayor and Breyer all pointed out that other procedures, including liposuctions, colonoscopies and dental surgeries, have higher complication rates and yet can be performed in facilities that do not meet the stringent standards.

The clinics, backed by the Obama administration, argue that the regulations already have closed half the roughly 40 clinics that existed before the law was enacted and that only about 10 clinics would remain if it is allowed to take full effect.

The high court, again divided between liberals and conservatives, has blocked the surgical center requirement from taking effect.

Solicitor General Donald Verrilli Jr. urged the court to offer a new endorsement of the abortion right it last affirmed in 1992. "If that right still does retain real substance, then this law cannot stand. The burdens it imposes, the obstacles, are far beyond anything that this Court has countenanced. And the justification for it is far weaker than anything that this Court has countenanced," Verrilli said.

Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Samuel Alito pressed the lawyer for the clinics, Stephanie Toti, to cite evidence showing that the regulations have had the drastic effect she claimed. Both Alito and Roberts questioned whether some clinics closed for reasons independent of the regulations.

"What evidence is there that ties the closures to the requirements?" Roberts asked. Only Justice Clarence Thomas, who broke 10 years of silence at arguments on Monday, did not ask any questions.

Seoul: North Korea fires short-range projectiles into sea

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea fired six short-range projectiles into the sea off its east coast Thursday, Seoul officials said, just hours after the U.N. Security Council approved the toughest sanctions on Pyongyang in two decades for its recent nuclear test and long-range rocket launch.

The North's launches also come shortly after Seoul's parliament passed its first legislation on human rights in North Korea.

Defense spokesman Moon Sang Gyun said the projectiles were fired from the eastern coastal town of Wonsan, adding authorities were trying to determine what exactly North Korea fired. The projectiles could be missiles, artillery or rockets, according to the Defense Ministry.

A South Korean official from the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who did not want to be named, citing office rules, said that North Korea fired six projectiles that flew about 60 to 90 miles before landing in the sea.

North Korea routinely test-fires missiles and rockets, but it often conducts more weapons launches when angered at international condemnation.



A man watches a TV news program showing a file footage of the missile launch conducted by North Korea, at Seoul Railway Station in Seoul, South Korea, Thursday.

Thursday's launch was seen as a "low-level" response to the U.N. sanctions, with Pyongyang unlikely to launch any major provocation until a landmark ruling Workers' Party convention in May, according to Yang Moo-jin, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul.

The U.S. State Department said it had seen reports of the launches and was monitoring the situation.

Pyongyang conducted its fourth nuclear test in January, making the widely disputed claim that it successfully detonated a

hydrogen bomb. Last month, it put a satellite into orbit on a long-range rocket that the United Nations and others see as a cover for a test of banned ballistic missile technology.

The new U.N. sanctions include mandatory inspections of cargo leaving and entering North Korea by land, sea or air; a ban on all sales or transfers of small arms and light weapons to Pyongyang; and expulsion of diplomats from the North who engage in "illicit activities."

South Korea's National Assembly passed the human rights bill shortly before

the U.N. sanctions were unanimously approved. The Cabinet Council endorsed the bill on Thursday. It will become law after it is signed by President Park Geun-hye.

North Korea has warned that enactment of the law would result in "miserable ruin." It views any criticism of its rights situation as part of a U.S.-led plot to overthrow its government, a reason why it says it needs nuclear weapons.

The bill would establish a center in South Korea's Unification Ministry tasked with collecting, archiving and publishing information about human rights in North Korea. It is required to transfer that information to the Justice Ministry, a step parliamentary officials say would provide legal grounds to punish rights violators in North Korea when the two Koreas eventually reunify.

In 2014, a U.N. commission of inquiry on North Korea published a report laying out abuses such as a harsh system of political prison camps holding up to 120,000 people. The commission urged the Security Council to refer North Korea to the International Criminal Court over its human rights record.

BRIEFLY

Ben Carson ends bid for White House

WASHINGTON (AP) — Retired neurosurgeon Ben Carson said he is effectively ending his bid for the White House Wednesday, concluding a roller-coaster campaign that briefly took him to the top of a chaotic GOP field but ended with a Super Tuesday whimper.

"I do not see a political path forward," Carson said in a statement posted on his campaign website, though he added, "I remain deeply committed to my home nation, America" and promised to offer details of his future when he speaks Friday at a conservative conference in Washington.

He did not explicitly say that he's ending his campaign, only noting that he does not plan to take part in Thursday's Fox News debate. But his longtime businessman and friend, Armstrong Williams, confirmed that the soft-spoken candidate would no longer be asking for votes.

"There's only one candidate in this 2016 election on the GOP side, and his name is Trump. That's the reality," Williams said, adding that Sens. Marco Rubio and Ted Cruz also should drop out, as they "also have no path" to the nomination.

U.S. official: Debris from same type of plane as MH370

WASHINGTON (AP) — Debris that washed up in Mozambique has been tentatively identified as a part from the same type of aircraft as the missing Malaysia Airlines Flight 370, a U.S. official said Wednesday.

Photos of the debris discovered over the weekend appear to show the fixed leading edge of the right-hand tail section of a Boeing 777, said the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity. Flight 370, which disappeared two years ago with 239 people aboard, is the only known missing 777.

People who have handled the part, called a horizontal stabilizer, say it appears to be made of fiberglass composite on the outside, with aluminum honeycombing on the inside, the official said.

The Australian Transport Safety Bureau, which is running the search for the plane in remote waters off Australia's west coast, said the part was expected to be transported to Australia for examination.

Malaysian transport minister Liow Tiong Lai also confirmed in tweets about the discovery that it appears the debris may have come from the missing plane.

Lawyer: Mexican drug lord wants extradition

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Drug lord Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman is willing to plead guilty to any charges in the United States if U.S. authorities promise him a short sentence in a medium-security prison, one of his lawyers said Wednesday.

Guzman wants to accelerate the extradition process so he can escape harsh conditions in a Mexican maximum-security prison, where guards will not let his client sleep, lawyer Jose Refugio Rodriguez said. Rodriguez said that he and Guzman's family are reviewing options for a U.S. defense attorney.

"We have talked about a proposal ... to plead guilty to the charges in the United States without questioning their veracity," said Rodriguez, who heads Guzman's legal team.

"That in exchange for a reduction in the applicable sentence like others have done in these situations, but also look for a medium-security prison so that he's not in the conditions that he has here," he said, calling the decision "an act of desperation" because Guzman had "reached his limit."



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