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AP Massachusetts News In Brief

The Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) - A commission appointed by Gov. Mitt Romney has come up with a proposal for a death penalty statute, relying heavily on DNA evidence in murder cases, that is "as infallible as humanly possible," according to news reports.

The 29-page report recommends using science, especially DNA evidence, to corroborate guilt. DNA evidence has often been used to exonerate death row inmates in other states.

The report also calls for the creation of an independent committee to review all scientific evidence in a case.

Romney aides the report, to be unveiled Monday, will be the basis of a bill filed later this spring that will attempt to bring the death penalty back to Massachusetts for the first time in 20 years.

Soldier from Middleboro dies in Iraq

BOSTON (AP) - An Army private from Massachusetts was among eight soldiers killed in a car bombing in Iraq.

Pfc. Norman Darling, 29, of Middleboro was killed Thursday when a vehicle approached his patrol and detonated a bomb just south of Baghdad, according to the Department of Defense.

The Pentagon released the names Sunday night.

Darling and the other men in his unit were assigned to the Army's 4th Battalion, 27th Field Artillery Regiment, 1st Armored Division based in Baumholder, Germany.

The men were dismounted and searching for explosives at the time of the bombing, the department said.

The incident is still under investigation.

As of Friday, 732 U.S. service members have died since the beginning of military operations in Iraq last year, according to the Department of Defense. Of those, 530 died as a result of hostile action and 202 died of non-hostile causes.

Darling is at least the 16th Massachusetts resident to die in the war on Iraq.

Kerry takes a spill from bike

CONCORD, Mass. (AP) - Democratic presidential candidate John F. Kerry took a spill from his bicycle after hitting a patch of sand, but he was uninjured, campaign officials said.

Kerry was riding south on a two-lane road at about 1:00 p.m. Sunday in the direction of Walden Pond State Reservation in Concord, a quiet, suburban town about 18 miles northwest of Boston.

He was approaching a stop light at the intersection with Route 2 and was slowing down when he veered left into the oncoming lane and fell, according to an Associated Press reporter who witnessed him fall. Secret Service agents and local police immediately stopped traffic while Kerry and a handful of bicycling companions moved to the shoulder.

"He's fine. They took the bike into the bike shop, and he went home," said Kerry campaign adviser Michael Meehan.

The Massachusetts senator was riding his custom Serotta bicycle, and was wearing a helmet.

Kerry had returned to Massachusetts, where he has a home in Boston's posh Beacon Hill section, for a break from the campaign trail.

Kerry, 60, rides his bicycle as often as he can get free time on the campaign trail. He even brings it along with him on the campaign plane.

Massachusetts officials reviewing amusement park death

BOSTON (AP) - State safety officials have concluded an onsite inspection of a roller coaster that flung an amusement park enthusiast to his death at Six Flags park, and plan to issue a report shortly on the accident.

Stanley J. Mordarsky, 55, of Bloomfield, Conn., tumbled from the Superman Ride of Steel roller coaster at about 3 p.m. Saturday as the ride neared the end of its run. Mordarsky, who had cerebral palsy, was pronounced dead at a Springfield hospital about 45 minutes later, according to the park.

Christine Cole, spokeswoman for the Executive Office of Public Safety, said state inspectors had finished their work and planned to release a report on their findings in the "very near future."

Cole said inspectors looked at everything about the accident: the ride, the harness Mordarsky was wearing, the operator, and other factors. Cole said the ride would remain closed until the park provided information that state safety officials requested, though she did not specify what that information was.

Mary Ann Burns, a spokeswoman for the park, said Six Flags was cooperating with the investigation.

Thousands walk against hunger

BOSTON (AP) - Warm weather greeted tens of thousands of people who walked through Boston and its suburbs over the weekend to raise money to fight hunger.

About 40,000 people in Sunday's Walk for Hunger met the \$3 million goal for Project Bread, which gives away the money to soup kitchens and food pantries. About \$150,00 was raised on online form pledges that came in from as far away as Hawaii and Florida, organizers said.

Project Bread Executive Director Ellen Parker said four out of five of the 400 programs that get money from the walk saw increases in demand over the last year.

"The people who work in these soup kitchen and pantries are real heroes," she said. "They make do with so little."

The walkers started at the Boston Common, headed down Beacon Street to Newton, and returned via Cambridge to the Common. The entire walk is 20 miles.

Woman in critical condition after fall from mall escalator

PROVIDENCE, R.I. (AP) - A 23-year-old Massachusetts woman was in critical condition after falling from an escalator in the Providence Place shopping center.

Jennifer Canelli, of Norfolk, Mass., sustained head and neck injuries after falling backward over an escalator's handrail Sunday, and plummeting to the mall's first level, police said.

It was not clear how many stories Canelli fell, or how far. The indoor shopping center has three full levels connected by escalators. There is also a fourth half-level with movie theaters and a restaurant, and a basement level with more shops and restaurants.

Sgt. Michael Sweeney said the incident occurred at around 1:20 a.m. Sunday morning.

Security officials at Providence Place refused comment when contacted by The Associated Press.

Police were investigating.

Contractor faces charges for alleged building scams

BLACKSTONE, Mass. (AP) - A Rhode Island contractor sought in five Massachusetts towns for allegedly conning homeowners out of thousands of dollars - including one family whose yard became a parking lot for an abandoned backhoe - faces charges in the Bay State this week.

Gary Letts, 46, of East Providence, R.I., was arrested by Blackstone Police on Friday evening on 11 warrants for larceny-related charges, Blackstone Police Detective Wayne Mowry told the MetroWest Daily News.

Letts was arrested after his release Friday from the Adult Correctional Institutions in Cranston, R.I., after serving time there for several months on similar charges, Mowry said.

Letts allegedly arranged jobs with homeowners in Massachusetts and Rhode Island to do work on their driveways and build additions, but disappeared after taking their money and doing little or no work, according to Mowry.

Police in Blackstone, Bellingham, Plainville, Attleboro, and North Attleboro all had warrants for his arrest. Letts was scheduled to be arraigned in Uxbridge District Court on Monday, according to Mowry.