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Liquor Store Robber Caught Clerk Identified Armed Crook As A Former Schoolmate

A man who robbed a State Street liquor store at gunpoint at about noon Saturday was arrested later that day after the store clerk, recognizing him as a former schoolmate of hers, told police his name and they tracked him down.

The robbery suspect, Michael Vincent Wooten, 20, 726 Pittman St., took money from the cash register of the store in the 1700 of State Street as well as from the clerk's pocketbook, said Waycross Police Lt. Duane Caswell.

Caswell said Wooten entered the store and produced a gun. "He was known by the clerk as an old schoolmate," Caswell said. Wooten was charged with armed robbery, he said.

Meanwhile, two thieves were able to get away with stolen goods Saturday, one a felony shoplifting case, another a residential theft, and a Ware County woman was arrested for possession of illegal drugs discovered during a traffic stop, said Caswell.

He said an unknown man stole a computer Saturday at a business at 2425 Memorial Drive. "He was challenged by store (see ROBBER, page 14)

SAINTS ARE SUPER!



MIAMI — New Orleans Saints quarterback Drew Brees celebrates with his son, Baylen, and wife, Brittany, after he and the Saints locked down Super Bowl XLIV, defeating the Indianapolis Colts 31-17 Sunday. New Orleans was playing in the

grandest showcase of them all for the first time in team history. Brees out-dueled Colts' quarterback Peyton Manning and was named the Most Valuable Player of the game after completing 32 of 39 passes for 288 yards and two touchdowns. see page 7

Obama Invites GOP Leaders To Health Care Bill Discussions

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Barack Obama says it's time for Republicans who have attacked his health care proposals from the sidelines to step before the cameras and present their own ideas.

In the first major move to revive his health care agenda after his party's loss of a filibuster-proof Senate majority, Obama on Sunday invited GOP and Democratic leaders to discuss possible compromises in a televised gathering later this month.

It comes amid widespread complaints that Democrats' efforts so far have been too partisan and secretive.

The Feb. 25 meeting's prospects for success are far from clear. GOP leaders demanded Sunday that Democrats start from scratch, and White House aides said Obama had no plans to do so.

"If we are to reach a bipartisan consensus, the White House can start by shelving the current health spending bill," said Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky.

But House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md., said his earlier efforts to reach out to Republicans "did not result in any serious follow through to work together in a bipartisan fashion." Obama told CBS's Katie Couric that he and the leaders of both parties will "go through systematically all the best ideas that are out there and move it forward."

Asked if he was willing to start from square one, the president said he wants "to look at the Republican ideas that are out there."

"If we can go step by step through a series of these issues and arrive at some agreements," Obama said, "then procedurally, there's no reason why we can't do it a lot faster than the process took last year."

Democratic and Republican leaders in Congress have differed sharply on most major questions in the long-running health care debate. Only one Republican voted for the health care bill that the House approved in December, and no Republicans voted for a similar Senate version.

White House officials said Sunday that Obama does not intend to restart the health care legislative process from scratch.

Many liberal groups and lawmakers want congressional Democrats to use all the parliamentary muscle they have to enact the measure that the Senate passed on Christmas Eve, employing rules that could bypass GOP filibusters to make changes demanded by House Democrats. (see WHITE, page 3)

Shuttle Endeavour Blasts Off On Program's Last Night Flight

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Endeavour and six astronauts rocketed into orbit early today on what's expected to be the last nighttime launch for the shuttle program, hauling up a new room and observation deck for the International Space Station.

The space shuttle took flight before dawn, igniting the sky with a brilliant flash seen for miles around. The weather cooperated at the last minute: Sunday morning's try was thwarted by thick, low clouds that returned and almost caused another delay.

"Looks like the weather came together tonight," launch director Mike Leinbach told the astronauts right before liftoff. "It's time to go fly."

"We'll see you in a couple weeks," replied commander George Zamka. He repeated: "It's time to go fly."

Endeavour's destination — the space station, home to five men — was soaring over Romania at the time of liftoff. The shuttle is set to arrive at the station early Wednesday.

Commander George Zamka and his crew will deliver and install Tranquility, a new room that will eventually house life-support equipment, exercise machines and a toilet, as well as a seven-windowed dome. The lookout has the biggest window ever sent into space: a circle 31 inches across.

It will be the last major construction job at the space station. No more big pieces like that are left to fly. Both the new room and dome — together exceeding \$400 million — were supplied by the European Space Agency.

NASA began fueling Endeavour on Sunday night just as the Super Bowl was kicking off to the south in Miami. The shuttle crew did not watch the game — no one was supposed to in

launch control, either — but it was beamed up to the space station in case anyone there wanted to watch it.

The coin used in the opening toss flew to the space station in November, aboard Atlantis.

Monday morning's countdown ended up being uneventful, except for a last-minute run to the launch pad. Astronaut Stephen Robinson forgot the binder holding all his flight data files, and the emergency red team had to rush it out to him, just before he climbed aboard. The launch team couldn't resist some gentle teasing.

The 13-day shuttle mission comes at one of the most agonizing times for NASA. Exactly one week ago, the space agency finally got its marching orders from President Barack Obama: Ditch the back-to-the-moon Constellation program and its Ares rockets, and (see SHUTTLE, page 3)



The astronauts of space shuttle Endeavour, George Zamka (clockwise from front left), Kay Hire, Nicholas Patrick, Bob Behnken, Steve Robinson and Terry Virts, leave for the launch pad Sunday.

North Korea Threatens South Korea Amid Its Push To Restart Talks

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea warned South Korea that any attempt to bring down the communist country would draw "strong measures" today even as Pyongyang embarked on a flurry of diplomacy with Seoul, Washington and Beijing.

Pyongyang is poised to mobilize troops to defend itself, including a "world-level ultramodern striking force" that has not yet been publicly re-

vealed, North Korea's Ministry of People's Security and the Ministry of State Security said in a statement.

North Korea will take "all-out strong measures to foil the treacherous, anti-reunification and anti-peace moves of the ruffraffs to bring down the dignified socialist system ... and destabilize it," said the statement carried by the official Korean Central News Agency.

The warning, stern but milder than threats made last year, was carefully timed to show tensions could flare if North Korea doesn't get what it wants from the round of diplomacy, said Jeung Young-tae, a North Korea expert at the state-run Korea Institute of National Unification in Seoul.

"They are using it as a negotiating card," he said. The threat was issued as senior

Chinese envoy Wang Jiarui met in Pyongyang with Choe Thae Bok, a high-level official in North Korea's ruling Workers' Party, amid an international push to persuade North Korea to return to stalled nuclear disarmament talks.

Footage broadcast by APTN in Pyongyang showed Wang visiting a modern new apartment and touring a fruit farm.

Wang told Choe that China,

North Korea's longtime ally and benefactor, was ready to work with North Korea to boost bilateral ties, according to the Xinhua News Agency. The report did not mention the nuclear issue.

The envoy was expected to meet with North Korean leader Kim Jong Il later Monday to discuss the nuclear talks, South Korean cable network YTN said, without citing its source. Wang will likely bring Kim a letter

from Chinese President Hu Jintao, the Chosun Ilbo newspaper said in a similar report.

Meanwhile, U.N. political chief B. Lynn Pascoe was due in Pyongyang on Tuesday, reportedly bearing a letter from U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon of South Korea. Pascoe's trip will be the first by a high-level U.N. official since 2004, according to Seoul's Foreign Ministry.

Partly Cloudy
Getting Colder
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Walls Of Marble
The walls of the Ware County Courthouse (today's top of page 1 photo) are made of marble — and that is the signature feature of the building near the corner of Albany and Plant avenues. It is the main location for major trials in this judicial district and the home of many important records.

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