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Day of the Armadillo

By **GAIL COLLINS**

Important News You May Have Missed Dept.: While you and I have been spending the fall worrying about the secret talks of the Congressional supercommittee or trying to determine whether it would be a fun idea to dress as Rick Santorum for Halloween, other even more fascinating news events have been occurring.

I am thinking in particular of a recent story out of Dallas: "Man Allegedly Beat Woman With Frozen Armadillo."

Here's a test. Would you rather hear some details about the Congressional supercommittee or more about the armadillo? I thought so.

"According to investigators, the altercation occurred when the suspect was selling the carcass to the victim, who planned to eat the animal," said a report from Lynn Kawano of Fox 4 News. "The pair apparently began arguing over the price of the item when the man twice threw the armadillo at the woman."

Another report said the victim knew her attacker and had, in fact, been storing his armadillo in her freezer. But everyone agrees on the salient armadillo-as-weapon point. And we are left with several questions.

Is frozen armadillo illegal? Or is it a sort of sidewalk-vendor novelty item, like frozen custard? Are armadillos tasty? Are they endangered?

No to the last one. "They're not in any short numbers," said Scott Vaca, the assistant chief of wildlife enforcement at the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department. He added that it was illegal to sell a live armadillo, but not a dead one.

This seemed a little strange. I'm sure the armadillo, for one, would prefer the live route. But Vaca was really not interested in debating the matter.

"I'm telling you the law," he said. "It's illegal to sell a living armadillo. By statute. Dead armadillos you can sell parts of them. Make a curio of a little armadillo on his back drinking a bottle of beer."

O.K.

I have been working on a project involving Texas, and my friends have been sending me lots of local headlines. (Thanks to Elizabeth Drew for the armadillo tip.) I also got an article titled "Police: Angry Taco Bell Customer Fires at Officers," which contained the memorable exposition: "Brian Tillerson, a manager at the Taco Bell/KFC restaurant, told The San Antonio Express-News that the man was angry the Beefy Crunch Burrito had gone from 99 cents to \$1.49 each."

These stories have something in common: They're conversation-starters without having any actual point. Sure, you could argue that the Taco Bell incident is an argument for gun control, but in Texas entire communities could be gunned down without anyone in authority suggesting that it might be a good idea to have fewer loaded weapons around. So, really, we're talking about two items from Texas police reports involving edibles. The frozen one of which, I've learned, is either a tasty addition to chili or roadkill, depending on whom you're asking.

Much of the political news of the last few months has been in the frozen-armadillo category — lively discussion topics devoid of actual meaning. For instance, members of the British Commonwealth voted to change its succession laws to give women equal rights to the throne. Big deal. Being the monarch of Britain is, at this point, a story without meaning all by itself. Plus, you apparently have to wait until you're about 70 to get a crack at the job.

Also in the frozen armadillo category: Anything about Herman Cain. Does he want to feed illegal immigrants to alligators or electrocute them? Did he sexually harass women when he was chief of the National Restaurant Association? Did he ever notice that being chief of the National Restaurant Association was just a highfalutin way of saying "lobbyist?"

The one thing we've learned for sure is that Herman Cain's staff has no idea what Herman Cain has been up to. Really, by now they're probably so numb, you could come up to them and say: "Is it true your candidate was once a pirate?" and they'd just

promise to look into it.

Sexual harassment is a serious subject. But Herman Cain isn't. Honestly, I tried. I read his book. I watched the debate. Had many interesting conversations. But I can't go there anymore. I do not believe that under any circumstances the Republicans are going to vote for a motivational speaker who seems to regard running for president of the United States as an expanded book tour.

A Herman Cain presidency is much less likely than the chances you'll be thunked by an armor-plated piece of chili meat while shopping for dinner. So, really, I think I'm done.

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