



NAACP BOYCOTT OF THE FLAG

Hodges: businesses want dialogue

BY LEIGH STROPE
ASSOCIATED PRESS

COLUMBIA — Democratic Gov. Jim Hodges, who had remained on the sidelines of Confederate flag debate, said Thursday business leaders who want the banner removed from the Statehouse dome prompted him to call a series of meetings to discuss the issue.

The governor invited about 20 lawmakers, business leaders and officials from the state's two largest universities to meet with him privately Friday. But no invitation was extended to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, which has called for a tourism boycott of South Carolina

until the flag is removed.

Hodges promised in last year's election he would not actively try to bring down the flag, but would sign a compromise agreed on by the Legislature.

Hodges until now has not publicly pushed the issue — triggering criticism by the NAACP.

"I think it's a good time here, a month or a month and a half before the session, to bring the legislative leaders together — who do control the ultimate resolution of this issue — with these business leaders and let them hear directly some of the concerns they've raised," Hodges said.

Republicans question Hodges' timing in light of last week's poll that gave the governor mediocre marks for job performance. Seven percent of re-

spondents thought the governor has done an excellent job, 40 percent thought he has done a good job and 37 percent thought he has done a fair job.

"He's clearly in campaign mode," said Luke Byars, spokesman for Republican Lt. Gov. Bob Peeler, a flag supporter.

"That's simply not true," Hodges said. "The poll numbers actually are good. It has nothing to do with that. I'm calling the meeting because I think that's what a responsible leader should do."

But Hodges until this week has shirked criticism by maintaining that a resolution rests with the Legislature, which has the sole authority to remove the flag. He has said lawmakers lack the political will to tackle the issue again after several failed at-

tempts in the past few years.

Former Republican Gov. David Beasley's campaign to take it down has been cited as one reason he lost his re-election bid to Hodges in November.

Flag supporters who backed Hodges in last year's election based on his promise have said they feel betrayed. The Council of Conservative Citizens has called a news conference an hour before Hodges' meeting today to discuss the flag.

"I don't see anything wrong with calling legislators together with business leaders to talk about this issue," Hodges said. "I see nothing inconsistent with anything I've said in the past."

WORLD BRIEFS

■ Contaminated hot dogs found in N.Y.

NEW YORK — Health officials are investigating two deaths and six cases of illness to determine whether they were caused by contaminated hot dogs from a New York City plant, the federal Centers for Disease Control said Thursday.

Hot dogs made at the Bronx factory and distributed nationally were recalled after listeria, a food-borne bacteria, was found. The plant makes hot dogs sold under the brands Sabrett's and Western Beef.

Listeria found in an unopened package of Sabrett's hot dogs appeared to be similar to a strain of bacteria found in eight patients in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Georgia and Rhode Island, CDC spokesman Tom Skinner said. Two of the eight have died.

Skinner said the CDC hadn't confirmed that hot dogs caused the illnesses.

Marathon Enterprises Inc., which operates the plant, shut it and recalled about 52,000 pounds of hot dogs Oct. 13. It expanded the recall Tuesday to 2.1 million pounds of frankfurters bearing the code EST 8854 inside the USDA seal of inspection.

■ Dan Rather issued subpoena in dragging death case

JASPER, TEXAS — Prosecutors have begun the process of subpoenaing CBS anchorman Dan Rather to testify at the murder trial of the third white man charged in the dragging death of a black man.

Prosecutors want to ask Rather about an interview he did last month with the defendant, Shawn Berry. The interview aired on "60 Minutes II" on Sept. 28. In it, Berry said that he tried to stop the attack but that he backed off when one of his alleged accomplices, John W. King, threatened him.

State District Judge Bob Golden approved the subpoena Tuesday, ruling that Rather is a "material and necessary witness." The judge ordered the newsman's presence for about two weeks, starting Nov. 9.

The subpoena must be approved by a judge in New York.

Graphic photos depict executions

BY JACKIE HALLIFAX
ASSOCIATED PRESS

TALLAHASSEE — Hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of people around the world have logged onto the Florida Supreme Court's Web site to look at grisly color photos of the last killer executed in the state's electric chair.

The photos depict the bloody body and contorted face of Allen Lee "Tiny" Davis, who was put to death in July. The pictures were posted by the high court because they figured in a case in which the justices upheld the use of the electric chair.

Some of those who have gone online for a look, particularly Europeans, were appalled. A Frenchman sent a one-word piece of e-mail: "Barbarians."

"When Europeans think of Florida, they think of Disney World, beaches and fiery electrocutions," said Michael Radelet, a sociologist at the University of Florida who has researched capital punishment and opposes it.

But many Americans seemed to approve of both the execution and the posting of the pictures.

"The photos on this website are WONDERFUL!" a woman from North Redington Beach, Fla., e-mailed the court.

Davis, who weighed about 350 pounds, was executed for the 1982 murders of a pregnant woman and her two young daughters. He suffered a nosebleed just before the current was applied, and blood poured from behind the

mask over his face, soaking his white shirt.

A judge ruled that the chair operated correctly, and the state Supreme Court upheld that decision, 4-3. But Justice Leander Shaw wrote a blistering dissent, charging that Davis was "brutally tortured to death." He also attached the three photos.

Like all decisions by the state Supreme Court, the Sept. 24 opinion was posted on the court's Web site, at www.firm.edu/supct/deathwarrants.

"It seemed to explode into an international news story, and it seems to re-explode every couple of weeks," court spokesman Craig Waters said Thursday.

The photos were also sent to the U.S. Supreme Court, which on Tuesday agreed to consider the constitutionality of electrocution and suspended use of the electric chair. It is the first review of the electric chair by the nation's high court in more than a century.

The public can access the Web page through two servers. The smaller server has crashed several times and sometimes creeps along. The number of hits destroyed the program that counts visitors to the site.

"It probably is in the millions, but there simply is no way of knowing," Waters said.

Howard Simon, executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Florida, which opposes the death penalty, approved of the release of the pictures.

British court legitimizes 'spousal' gay relationships

STAFF REPORTS
ASSOCIATED PRESS

LONDON — In a landmark judgment for same-sex couples, Britain's highest court ruled Thursday that a gay man is entitled to remain in the state-subsidized apartment leased by his dead partner — a right restricted by law to spouses or "family" members.

In a 3-2 ruling, a House of Lords judicial panel said that Martin Fitzpatrick, who lived with John Thompson for more than 20 years in a monogamous relationship, was entitled to take over the lease of an apartment which was in Thompson's name.

Giving the majority judgment, Lord Justice Donald Nicholls said a man and woman living together in a stable and permanent sexual relationship, but not married, can be regarded as a "family" under Britain's Rent Act.

"There can be no rational or other basis on which the like conclusion can be withheld from a similarly stable and permanent sexual relationship between two men or between two women," the judge

said.

Fitzpatrick, a former member of the Royal Navy, and Thompson, a silversmith, met in 1969 and in 1976 moved into the apartment. Thompson suffered brain damage in 1985 and was cared for by Fitzpatrick. He died in 1994.

The Court of Appeal ruled in 1997 that Fitzpatrick couldn't take over the lease because the Rent Act didn't apply to same-sex couples. Fitzpatrick's lawyers argued that he had the right to stay either as a "spouse" or a "family member."

Stonewall, a group which campaigns for gay and lesbian equality, said the ruling was the first time that lesbian and gay relationships have been defined as a family in Britain. "All over the world, governments and courts are coming to similar conclusions. This country has lagged behind the developments," Stonewall executive director Angela Mason said.

The two law Lords who dissented said Parliament should first change the Rent Act.

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