

STATE

Medicaid changes might save money

COLUMBIA (AP) — The state could save about \$23 million if the Health and Human Services Department made changes in its Medicaid program, including charging an enrollment fee and improving debt collection, according to an audit released Tuesday.

Members of the General Assembly asked the Legislative Audit Council to review the joint state-federal program, which pays for medical services for the state's neediest residents, because of concerns about the growth of Medicaid expenditures and number of recipients.

In South Carolina, Medicaid is a \$3.6 billion program. In fiscal year 2002, HHS paid about \$480 million in state funds on Medicaid. From 1999 to 2002, Medicaid expenditures increased 25 percent, while the state's general fund revenues decreased 1.53 percent.

Lawmakers are looking for ways to reduce the cost of the program without cutting services.

N.C. senator voices support for boycott

COLUMBIA (AP) — North Carolina Sen. John Edwards says he supports the NAACP's boycott of South Carolina to

protest the display of the Confederate flag on State House grounds.

Edwards, who was in Columbia on Monday for a Martin Luther King Jr. event, is the third Democratic presidential candidate to oppose the banner.

He said he stayed at people's homes instead of hotels to honor the civil rights group's economic sanctions.

The Confederate flag was removed from atop the State House dome and legislative chambers in 2000 after the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People called for an economic boycott of the state.

A similar flag was raised at a Confederate monument on the State House grounds, so the boycott remains.

The organization wants the flag "removed from all positions of sovereignty," according to its resolution on the issue.

The NAACP has called on entertainers, athletes, sports events organizers and businesses to avoid spending money in the state.

NATION

Internet providers must trace pirates

WASHINGTON (AP) — Internet providers must agree to requests by the music industry to track down computer users who illegally download music, a federal judge ruled Tuesday in a case that could dramatically increase online pirates' risk of being caught.

The decision by U.S. District Judge John D. Bates upheld the recording industry's power under a 1998 law to compel Internet providers to identify customers that illegally trade music or movies online.

Bates acknowledged that the case was an important test of subpoena powers Congress granted to copyright holders under the Digital Millennium Copyright Act.

The judge said that controversial law, which was enacted to uphold copyrights online, permits music companies to force Internet providers to turn over the name of a suspected pirate upon subpoena from any U.S. District Court clerk's office, without a judge's order.

Thousands of activists on both sides of the abortion debate are rallying to mark today's 30th anniversary of the Supreme Court's Roe v. Wade decision legalizing abortion.

This year's anniversary falls as Republicans control the House, Senate and White House. Abortion-rights supporters and critics also are weighing the impact of a potential Supreme Court retirement: The high court now is split 5-4 in favor of abortion rights.

Kim Gandy, president of the National Organization for Women, said her organization's focus will be on maintaining the current Supreme Court balance and ensuring that "we will not be the generation that both won and lost reproductive rights in our lifetime."

"With George Bush looking at potential justices who are not only very conservative, but very young — high 30s, young 40s — we're talking about a justice who would be carrying out that philosophy for another 35 to 40 years, which is literally generations," Gandy said Tuesday. "It's the entire reproductive life of my 9-year-old daughter."

Activists to mark landmark case

WASHINGTON (AP) —

WORLD

Carter proposes plan for elections

CARACAS, VENEZUELA (AP) — Nobel Peace Prize laureate Jimmy Carter proposed a plan Tuesday to lead Venezuela to elections and end a 51-day-old strike against President Hugo Chavez, which has dramatically cut production in the No. 5 oil-exporting country.

Carter's ideas were the first concrete proposals to emerge from more than two months of talks between the government and Venezuela's opposition, which called the strike to demand early elections or Chavez's resignation.

Both Chavez and opposition leaders reacted cautiously, saying they merited study.

Carter said the first plan would amend Venezuela's constitution to shorten presidential and legislative terms of office and stage early general elections.

It calls for Venezuela's opposition to end the strike and for the government, which has a congressional majority, to move quickly on changing the constitution. Amending the constitution requires the approval of congress and a popular referendum.

Israeli forces ruin Palestinian shops

NABLUS, WEST BANK (AP) —

Israeli forces staged the biggest demolition in the West Bank in years on Tuesday, destroying 62 shops in a Palestinian village.

Also Tuesday, Israel's Supreme Court relaxed a ban on soldiers using Palestinians as "human shields" or ordering Palestinians to knock on doors of Islamic militants' houses. Human rights advocates denounced the decision.

In Gaza, Palestinians fired rockets at two Jewish settlements, damaging buildings but causing no casualties, settlers and the military said.

In the village of Nazlat Issa, next to the West Bank border with Israel, seven bulldozers guarded by 300 soldiers destroyed shops and market stalls.

Dozens of protesters threw stones at troops, who fired tear gas and rubber-coated steel pellets. Other demonstrators chanted "Down with the occupation."

Israeli troops have demolished hundreds of Palestinian homes, many in the Gaza Strip, in the past 28 months of fighting. In Gaza alone, more than 5,700 Palestinians have been made homeless, according to Palestinian officials. Many of the buildings were razed in military offensives, with Israel saying the structures provided cover for Palestinian gunmen.

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