

Group rallies to push for legalizing marijuana

BY JON SERPAS
THE GAMECOCK

The National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws staged a rally in support of legalizing marijuana Saturday on the State House grounds.

The rally, which began at 4:20 p.m., was one of many put on recently by the group.

NORML rallies to educate the public about marijuana.

"Our main goal is to educate the public so that legislatures will speak out about it," said Tracy Wagoner, a member of NORML's Midlands chapter.

NORML members said legalizing marijuana could economically benefit South Carolina's farmers and its industry, which would develop to process the

hemp into fiber and seed products. Furthermore, they said, marijuana has a 6,000-year history of medicinal benefits.

Marijuana is on the banned substances list for the United States, making it illegal to grow or possess the Cannabis sativa L. plant for any purpose.

"Marijuana laws in the United States are based on lies," Wagoner said. "Taking out and raiding head shops promotes the lies that marijuana laws are based on."

Henry Koch, president of the Midlands Chapter of NORML, wrote in a news release that "the prohibition and war against recreational users of marijuana" is "wasting billions of taxpayer dollars and destroying the lives of millions of productive, law-

abiding citizens."

Koch wrote that compared to tobacco, which is responsible for 430,000 deaths per year, and alcohol, with 110,000 deaths per year, "marijuana has never killed anyone."

NORML doesn't advocate the absolute elimination of all marijuana laws. "NORML promotes responsible use of marijuana," Wagoner said.

For instance, Wagoner said, no one should be able to operate a vehicle under the influence of marijuana, just as is the case with alcohol.

"It should definitely be regulated and controlled," Wagoner said.

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Olympics

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

people around the country that have honored housekeepers and custodians in various ways," Farkas said. To recognize local housekeepers and custodians, the Columbia Sertoma club decided to hold the Custodial Olympics, he said.

Farkas thinks the olympics rewards USC custodians for the important role they play on campus, which often goes unnoticed.

"Generally, the custodians and housekeepers receive very little, if any, recognition. They are some of the hardest-working folks on your campus, and the purpose of the Custodial Olympics is to bring a little bit of honor and recognition to these really hard-working folks," Farkas said.

"In today's market and economy, there is a tremendous amount of emphasis placed on cleaning and sanitation," he said. "These guys are the ones that keep this campus clean, and it's a tremendous responsibility."

The two-hour competition featured four main events: the buffer obstacle course, the maid's cart obstacle course, the toilet paper roll stacking contest and the buffer pad toss.

The winning team was decided during the grand finale balloon race, which required the use of a duster and plunger to place a balloon in a garbage can topped with a toilet lid.

Events were designed to mirror the custodians' normal tasks.

"All events are housekeeping skills, and all events are using tools that your custodians use daily in their jobs," Farkas said.

Olympics' participant Bennie Stinson said, "It is a good way to say we get a day off, but we're still on the job. It's a lot of fun."

Representatives from the three branches of USC's custodial services participated. Members from the housekeeping, athletic and custodial services departments made up the four teams. Additional custodial staff members watched from the stands, serving as cheerleaders and fans for their co-workers.

Sally Gownes, a spectator and

housekeeping staff member for 21 years, commented on the camaraderie.

The olympics "is something that lets us know we can interact with each other in any department anytime we have to, and we all work under one umbrella, the University of South Carolina," she said.

Despite the camaraderie, the competitive spirit ensued. Custodial team one earned the first-place distinction and ribbon, followed by Housing team one in second, and Housing team two in third place.

USC custodial winners are now eligible to attend another Sertoma-sponsored Custodial Olympics, which will include other custodial teams from area hospitals.

Farkas, who would like to see the olympics become an annual event, said, "This has been a tremendous success, and I think based on the reaction of the crowd, they had a good time."

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STATE

Youth crashes into Sumter hospital

SUMTER (AP) — A 14-year-old crashed a stolen car into the window at a hospital emergency room here, police say.

None of the 10 people seated in the waiting room was injured in the crash early Saturday morning, and the boy, who was not identified because of his age, was committed to a Columbia hospital after a mental evaluation, investigators said.

The boy has been charged with assault and battery with intent to kill, possession of a stolen vehicle, operating a vehicle without a driver's license and malicious injury to property.

The Geo Prism, which had been reported stolen earlier Saturday morning by the boy's aunt hit a glass wall at the emergency room, according to police reports.

After hitting the window, the boy backed up and circled the hospital in the car for about 10 minutes before stopping in front of the emergency room, security guard John Brabham said.

S.C. Democrats to hold debate

COLUMBIA (AP) — The South Carolina Democratic Party and Young Democrats will hold a presidential debate just days before the state's Feb. 3 primary.

The debate will be at 7 p.m., Jan. 29, two days before the New Hampshire primary and five days before South Carolina's first-in-the-South primary, state Democratic Party Chairman Joe Erwin said Sunday.

Candidates planning to attend include former Vermont Gov. Howard Dean, North Carolina Sen. John Edwards, Florida Sen. Bob Graham, Missouri Rep. Dick Gephardt, Connecticut Sen. Joe Lieberman and former Illinois Sen. Carol Moseley Braun.

The campaigns of Massachusetts Sen. John Kerry, Ohio Rep. Dennis Kucinich and the Rev. Al Sharpton have not yet confirmed.

NATION

Poll shows Calif. governor race close

LOS ANGELES (AP) — California Lt. Gov. Cruz Bustamante has a significant lead over actor Arnold Schwarzenegger in the race to succeed Gov. Gray Davis, according to a new poll released Saturday night.

Of 801 likely voters surveyed by the Los Angeles Times, 35 percent backed Bustamante, a Democrat, and 22 percent supported Schwarzenegger, a Republican.

Poll data released Friday by the Times showed 50 percent support the effort to oust Davis, while 45 percent oppose it.

The new numbers for Bustamante differ from others released lately. Surveys by the Public Policy Institute of California and Field Poll showed Bustamante and Schwarzenegger within five percentage points of each other.

Texas Democrats flee to fight plan

AUSTIN, TEXAS (AP) — Texas Senate Democrats in self-imposed exile in New Mexico are getting a hand from an Internet-based fund-raising effort that raised \$870,000 in its first four days, supporters said Sunday.

MoveOn.org, a liberal activist group, describes its "Defend Democracy" fund-raiser as a "hard-hitting ad campaign to fight back in Texas."

Its goal is to raise \$1 million to help the 11 Democratic senators who fled to Albuquerque, N.M., on July 28 to fight a Republican-led redistricting plan.

The plan likely would give Republicans a majority in the state's congressional delegation, now dominated 17-15 by Democrats.

The fight over the plan drew national attention in May when 50 House Democrats fled to Oklahoma and successfully thwarted the passage of the plan.

WORLD

Marines leave Liberia's capital

MONROVIA, LIBERIA (AP) — A 150-strong Marine force withdrew to warships off the Liberian capital's coast on Sunday, ending significant U.S. military deployment on the ground after just 11 days and disappointing many Liberians.

The Marines said American troops would be in better position on the warships to respond to any flare-ups in Liberia's week-old peace accord, meant to end 14 years of conflict that has claimed more than 150,000 lives.

The U.S. warships remain off Liberia, appearing in and out of view off a coast lined with black rocks. The United States has not said when they will pull away.

A West African peace force that arrived about three weeks ago has helped stop fighting in Monrovia.

Ethnic fighting spreads in Iraq

BAGHDAD, IRAQ (AP) — Rocket-propelled grenades were fired at statues of two Turkomen heroes as ethnic fighting spread to the northern city of Kirkuk and police tried to maintain order in a nearby town.

Gunfire echoed through Kirkuk Saturday night, and squads of police were stationed at each of the statues after the attacks. There was no indication of who was shooting or any sign of U.S. forces.

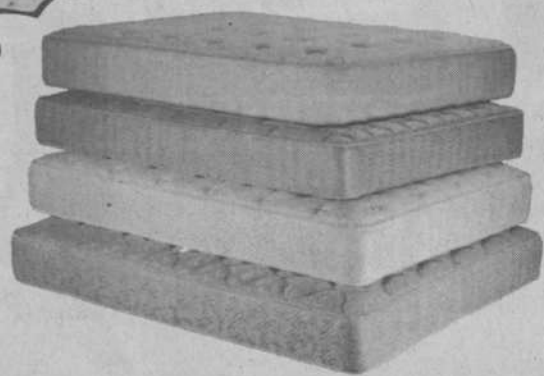
Separately, the American administrator for Iraq said he thinks most of the attacks on coalition troops in the past have been by remnants of Saddam Hussein's regime but international terrorism is an "emerging problem."

L. Paul Bremer told ABC's "This Week" on Sunday that it's hard to tell if there are more terrorists in Iraq now than before the war started.

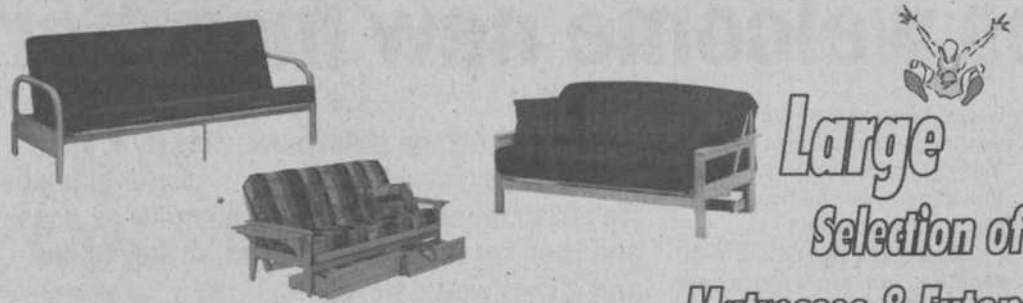
Saturday, Kirkuk Mayor Abdul Rahman Mustafa, Kurd, told the AP two people were killed and several were wounded.

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