

Times-News



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YEAR IN REVIEW



REGION: Many repeats

Many of the top stories in the region in 1995 were the same ones that headed the list in 1994, including the Republican influence, the planned school merger, the fate of Mark Crofts and natural disasters. In '95, the tragedy of flooding drowned the county and left four dead. **Page D1**

SPORTS: Achievement

Achievement was the catch word for area athletes and teams in 1995. So for them, it was a year to remember their championships and special triumphs, like a solid final college football season. However, the year was also sprinkled with heartbreak. **Page B1**

ACCENT: 'Friends' rally

In the world of entertainment, "Friends" was the big winner on television while "Boyz n the City" made it big in music. **Page C1**

WEATHER

Chance of rain

Today, cloudy with a 50 percent chance of rain. High near 50. Tonight, cloudy with a 70 percent chance of rain. Low in the lower 40s. **Page A2**

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Progress on budget reported

By LARRY MARGASAK
The Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Clinton and congressional leaders reported progress Saturday night after a long day of budget bargaining but the president sent word through his spokesman that "we've got a long ways to go."

All sides said there was good progress, said White House press secretary Mike McCurry as the final ring of the day broke up shortly before 10 p.m.

Another three-hour budget session was set for the Cabinet Room of the White House this morning, but no early agreement was expected and

McCurry said the talks would continue into the new year, beginning anew next Tuesday.

Meanwhile, the federal government remained partially closed in an eye-deepening crisis.

President Clinton was to take a break this afternoon and fly to Hilton Head, S.C., for New Year's Eve celebrations.

McCurry said Clinton encouraged Senate Democrats to break a procedural impasse preventing action on a plan by Dole to return all furloughed workers to their jobs without pay but with a guarantee they would be paid at a later date.

McCurry said Clinton offered this summary of Saturday's meetings: "To

staff members would continue to work on "sharpening the issues."

Possible cuts in Medicare were a focus of Saturday's discussions, McCurry said.

Well before the Saturday night session, House Budget Committee Chairman Kasich, R-Ohio, said: "There has been a lot more explanation and a lot more



Soap spray

B.J. Johnson sprays the soap from a car he washed Friday morning on Hawkins Street. Johnson enjoys the mild weather to wash his cars, glad for the break from the winter weather temperatures.

First victim

Call answered by local news in Florida

...a 911 call was made... the first victim of the... in Florida.

Sex offender law takes effect Monday

By ANDY BARKSDALE
Times-News

Convicted sex offenders released from prison next year will have to register with the sheriff in the county where they live because of a new law that takes effect Monday.

Alamance County Sheriff Richard Frye said he supports the law because it will make it easier for schools and other groups who work with children to check somebody's background.

The change is among several new laws that take effect Monday.

Sex offenders' names, addresses, fingerprints and details of their crime in a register at the sheriff's office public can ask to review, and in copies, of the register.

But some groups doubt the new public.

OTHER LAWS TAKING EFFECT MONDAY

Other laws that take effect statewide on Monday include:
 • taxpayers with children will get an additional \$50 credit for each child on tax returns they file this spring. People meeting certain income guidelines can take the deductions from the taxes.

new battery for each new tenant that moves into a rented apartment or house.
 • judges can order a substance abuse assessment and counseling if special training for anyone convicted of driving while impaired, and

governor will be eligible for public financing if he has received donations from tax last eight years. The law to candidates' party's nomination elections.

The incident occurred about 3 p.m. as four Humvee all-terrain vehicles patrolled a snow-covered side road near Bixler, a town about two miles south of Dufur. A vehicle carrying three soldiers was hit as it ran over an outblow into.

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Alamance County Sheriff Richard Frye said he supports the law because it will make it easier for schools and other groups who work with children to check somebody's background.

The change is among several new North Carolina laws that take effect Monday.

Sex offenders' names, addresses, photographs, fingerprints and details of their conviction will be kept in a register at the sheriff's office. Anyone from the public can ask to review, and in some cases get copies, of the register.

But some groups doubt the new law will help the public.

OTHER LAWS TAKING EFFECT MONDAY

Other laws that take effect statewide on Monday include:

- taxpayers with children will get an additional \$60 credit for each child on tax returns they file this spring. People meeting certain income guidelines can take the deductions from the taxes they owe, said Chan Chandler, a certified public accountant with Thomas, Stout, Stuart, Core and Stuart in Burlington;

- any new rental agreements signed after Monday will require that the landlord provide working smoke detectors. Tenants will be responsible for replacing the batteries under the new law. Landlords, however, must install a

new battery for each new tenant that moves into a rented apartment or house;

- judges can order a substance abuse assessment and completion of special training for anyone convicted of driving while impaired; and

- candidates for governor will be eligible to share in a publicly financed campaign fund, which has received about \$200,000 in donations from taxpayers during the last eight years. The fund is available only to candidates who have won their party's nomination in the May primary elections.

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Law

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Deborah Ross, executive / legal director of the American Civil Liberties Union of North Carolina, said about 90 percent of all sex offenses are committed by friends and relatives, not strangers who move in next door.

"Just because you know somebody in your neighborhood is a sex offender does not make you safer," she said. "It means you avoid that person. It also makes it more difficult for people who have paid their debt to society to reintegrate into society."

In the legal profession, a law takes effect Monday that limits the punitive damages that can be awarded in a lawsuit to \$250,000, or three times the actual damages awarded.

Robert J. Wishart, a Burlington lawyer, said juries sometimes award punitive damages — money beyond paying for hospital bills or lost work — to

punish defendants.

"I think it's healthy," he said of the new limit. "The punitive damages are something that nobody is entitled to. They are literally a gift."

But Bob Martin, a lawyer who practices in Elon College, said the law will do more harm than good. There have been highly publicized cases in past decades, he said, in which a major company found it cheaper to settle a few lawsuits out of court than to change to a more expensive, yet safer, way of doing business. The new law will encourage some companies to settle out of court, he said.

Proponents argued the law would make doctors' insurance premiums drop. But Martin said he disagreed because few North Carolina cases involve punitive damages. He predicted consumers won't see cheaper medical costs.

In a related law change, ex-

pert witnesses who testify in medical malpractice lawsuits filed after Monday will have to show the court that they work in the same specialty as the doctors accused of malpractice, and that most of their professional time in the last year has been devoted to practicing that medical specialty or teaching it in a medical school.

Martin said the change will make the plaintiff's cases more expensive because lawyers will have to hire better qualified experts to testify. Wishart said the law will help reduce frivolous medical malpractice suits.

"It's a real effort to eliminate the 'hired gun syndrome,' where you literally go out and hire an expert to say anything you want him to say," Wishart said.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.