

## Court overturns prayer ruling

MONTGOMERY, Ala. (AP) — A federal appeals court Tuesday threw out a judge's ruling that restricted the right of students to pray and lead prayers in Alabama schools.

The 11th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in Atlanta ruled 3-0 that a federal judge wrongly restricted student instigated prayer at DeKalb County schools.

But the court did not throw out the judge's restrictions against school officials leading prayers or other religious activities.

"The suppression of student-initiated religious speech is neither necessary to, nor does it achieve, constitutional neutrality towards

religion," the appeals court said.

The case was brought by Michael Chandler, a former vice principal at Valley Head High School in DeKalb County.

He claimed the schools unconstitutionally promoted Christianity with pre-game prayers at athletic events, teacher-led devotionals and distribution of Bibles at school by Gideons International.

U.S. District Judge Ira DeMent agreed, and in 1997 issued an injunction against the schools.

The American Civil Liberties Union joined in the suit, and said it may appeal the latest ruling. But the ACLU said the ruling vindicat-

ed much of their position.

"School teachers still can't grab students and ask them to pray in a class, which is what they were doing in DeKalb County," Pamela Summers, an attorney for the ACLU, said.

Alabama Attorney General Bill Pryor said he was pleased with the decision.

"This is a victory for all the school children in the public schools of our state, that they do not surrender their constitutional rights when they attend a public school in Alabama," he said. "They do not surrender their religious faith and their religious beliefs."

## Senate rejects plan to give doctors final say on coverage

WASHINGTON (AP) — Casting the opening votes on patient rights, the Senate defeated a Democratic effort Tuesday to make insurance companies pay for any treatments that doctors say are medically necessary.

In a string of votes, Republicans also opted to restrict many of their provisions to the 48 million Americans whose health plans fall exclusively under federal regulation. They also rejected Democratic amendments on women's health and emergency room care.

"All in all, I think we had a pretty productive day," Sen. Don Nickles, R-Okla., said.

Despite the defeats, Democrats believe they scored points in a political debate that has become as much about next year's elections as policy. Neither side has been willing to compromise, and President Clinton has signaled he will veto the GOP bill.

At every turn, Democrats are trying to expand HMO protections, while Republicans prefer a more modest approach.

Nothing illustrated that better than who would be covered.

On a 53-47 vote, the Senate opted to apply many of the new rights only to the 48 million Americans in health plans that are now exempt from state regulations.

This includes patient protections involving emergency room care, access to obstetricians-gynecologists and the right to keep a doctor during a course of treatment.

Democrats want to cover another 113 million others who live in states that may or may not have approved the protections on their own.

"This is about denying millions of Americans the right to protection," Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle, D-S.D., said.

But Republicans argued that the federal govern-

## House votes to revive state parks program

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House voted Tuesday to revive a moribund program that has states purchase parkland, handing a symbolic victory to pro-environment lawmakers.

By 213-202, lawmakers voted to spend \$1 billion next year from the land and water conservation fund for grants to all 50 states. Under the program, states receiving the federal grants must provide an equal amount of money.

The language was included in a \$14.1 billion measure financing the Interior Department and other programs for the upcoming fiscal year.

The lands provision was supported 157-55 by Democrats and opposed 157-55 by Republicans.

Democrats should not interfere with health plans already subject to state regulation.

Democrats' effort to make HMOs pay for treatments they do not now cover — one of the contentious issues in the debate over HMOs — on a 52-48 vote.

The Democratic bill would have made health insurance companies pay for care consistent with generally accepted principles of medical practice.

But Republicans argued that sometimes the common practices are not the best. They rejected the Democratic medical necessity provision and their own system allowing patients to appeal is denied.

## Albright promises more U.S. peace efforts in Africa

NEW YORK (AP) — Sensitive to criticism that the United States does more to end conflicts in Europe than in Africa, U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright pledged a greater U.S. effort to support peace efforts in Sudan and other war-torn countries.

Alluding to the NATO-led campaign to end repression in Kosovo, Albright said the United States has done more to promote peace in Europe because it has allies to share the risks and costs of responding to crises.

"In Africa," she said, "such resources are scarce. But that is no excuse for disengaging or giving up." She promised to use the lessons of Kosovo to respond more assertively to Africa's crises.

Albright spoke Tuesday to more than 2,000 delegates attending the annual convention of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

After the speech, NAACP President Kweisi Mfume, a critic of U.S.

policy in Africa, said he was glad Albright addressed concerns about the relative neglect of Africa and felt she was sensitive to the views of black Americans. But he said he still had concerns.

"In Africa, such resources [as allies] are scarce. But that is no excuse for disengaging or giving up."



MADELEINE ALBRIGHT

"The situation between Rwanda and Kosovo is just the latest example of the problem mind-set," Mfume said. "The problem is not her. It is the permanent foreign policy mind-set that we see situations in terms of the East and the

West. African nations are treated differently."

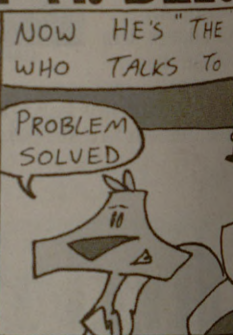
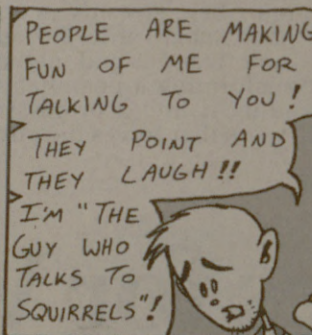
Other analysts rejected such analyses as too simplistic, recalling that when the Bush administration faced simultaneous humanitarian crises in Somalia and Bosnia in 1992, it sent troops to Somalia but not to Bosnia.

In her speech, Albright acknowledged the United States, along with the rest of the world, did not do enough in 1994 to stop the slaughter in Rwanda, where more than 500,000 people, mostly Tutsis, were killed.

She also suggested the United States has not responded with indifference to Africa's crises, noting it has played a major role in trying to energize a regional peace process to settle the 16-year-old civil war in Sudan.

She added that President Clinton will soon appoint a special envoy to try to help reduce human rights abuses in that country, including slavery and the use of child soldiers.

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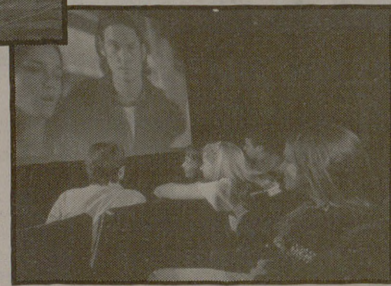
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