

News Digest

Nearly 50,000 march in S.C. to protest Confederate flag

1 COLUMBIA, S.C. — Decrying the Confederate flag as a symbol of slavery and racism, nearly 50,000 people marched to South Carolina's Statehouse on Martin Luther King Day to demand the banner be taken down.

They also said the slain civil rights leader should be honored with a permanent state holiday. South Carolina state workers now can take off on the King holiday or another of their choice, including one of several tied to Confederate anniversaries.

"The flag is coming down today," marchers sang as they walked six blocks from a downtown church to the Statehouse. Some carried signs reading, "Your heritage is my slavery."

Across the country, Americans remembered the slain civil rights leader Monday with marches and speeches urging the nation to commit itself to King's principles and fulfill his dream of racial harmony and equality.

This was the first year that the King holiday was observed in some form in all 50 states, and the 15th year it has been celebrated as a national holiday.

The public favors Democrats, GOP polling shows

2 WASHINGTON — Private Republican polling shows Democrats hold an edge on top election-year concerns, and 25 percent of George W. Bush's support "prefers Democrats on the issues by a significant margin."

Democrats were favored, 44 percent to 31 percent, when the survey asked potential voters which party cares more about them, according to the poll shown recently to about 50 GOP members of the House who are trying to hold onto their 10-seat majority.

At the same time, the findings suggested several ways for House Republicans to gain an advantage, including opening a "new issue front" on such subjects as government waste or retiring the national debt.

The GOP leadership has already announced plans to highlight those issues in the congressional session beginning next



week. In particular, Speaker Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., is expected to unveil portions of a national debt retirement plan before the opening gavel falls in the House.

The survey material was presented at a two-day communications meeting this month organized near the Capitol by Rep. J.C. Watts of Oklahoma, who ranks fourth in the House GOP leadership. An estimated 55 Republicans attended the sessions, which also included a workshop conducted by Wade West, a media trainer who specializes in preparing individuals for media interviews.

Merger trend accelerating in pharmaceutical business

3 LONDON — Glaxo Wellcome's planned acquisition of rival drugmaker SmithKline Beecham would do more than create the world's largest pharmaceutical company.

The deal, announced Monday and worth about \$76 billion in stock, is a clear sign that the merger trend now reshaping other industries is accelerating in the still-fragmented drug business.

Just last week, Pfizer emerged as the likely winner in a battle with American Home Products for U.S. drugmaker Warner-Lambert, while Monsanto is in the process of merging with Pharmacia and Upjohn. Industry ana-

lysts predict other blue-chip names, including Eli Lilly, Schering Plough, Novartis, Bristol-Myers Squibb and even merger-averse Merck, won't be far behind.

"I think that eventually about six to 10 companies will own the pharmaceutical market," said Hemant Shah, an independent industry analyst based in Warren, N.J.

That's a far cry from the mosaic of firms currently vying for a few cents of each dollar consumers spend on medicines.

Compared to other industries, the pharmaceutical business still has many competitors. The combined Glaxo and SmithKline would control just 7.3 percent of global sales, although individual companies dominate treatments for several specific conditions such as allergies and high cholesterol.

Analysts say consolidations are gathering momentum because drugmakers are pinched between the ballooning costs of developing new drugs and the demands of investors and shareholders that they deliver double-digit growth in profits.

Pinochet problem back in Britain's court

4 MADRID, Spain — Spain put the Pinochet ball squarely back in Britain's court Monday, sending London a judge's request

for a new medical exam to determine whether the former Chilean dictator is mentally fit to stand trial.

The move came a day before Britain's deadline for opinions on the case.

Last week, Britain's Home Office said doctors believe Gen. Augusto Pinochet, 84, is too ill to be extradited to Spain to face charges. Home Secretary Jack Straw said he was considering canceling the extradition, but he asked for opinions from Spain, France, Belgium and Switzerland.

Soon after, Spanish Foreign Minister Abel Matutes said the Spanish government would not send Britain any more petitions from Judge Baltasar Garzon, the magistrate who wants to try Pinochet in Madrid. Spanish leaders have always been uneasy about their involvement in the case, which has potential implications for their relations with Chile and Britain.

Matutes' office later qualified its statement, saying the petition would be forwarded but only if it contained new material. Then on Monday, Spain decided to forward Garzon's petition after all. Matutes would only say the decision was in line with Spain's stance of not interfering in the legal process.

But others believed the administration led by conservative

Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar had ulterior motives.

"It looks as if Spain realized there was more to be gained by passing on Garzon's argument, in the hope that it won't make any difference to the case anyway, than by blocking it and risking a tirade of criticism back home," said political analyst and columnist Javier Tussell. "At least, if Straw now decides to release Pinochet, Aznar won't look so bad."

American Indians take over Pine Ridge tribal office

5 PINE RIDGE, S.D. — About 100 Oglala Sioux who accuse the tribe of financial mismanagement have taken over tribal headquarters and demanded that the governing council step down.

The protesters said Monday they will remain there until they are satisfied authorities will investigate their allegations.

On Monday afternoon, however, members of the tribal council voted to have the protesters thrown out of the building. They voted to have tribal law officers enforce tribal laws that ban the spread of false propaganda and actions that interfere with the conduct of council business.

Council members said they expect the tribe's public safety director to evict the protesters Monday night or Tuesday.

The group, which is allied with tribal President Harold Dean Salway, took control of the tribal building at the Pine Ridge Reservation on Sunday. About 100 people stayed there Sunday night and Monday.

Members of the unarmed group are calling for an audit and have demanded the immediate resignation of tribal Treasurer Wesley "Chuck" Jacobs and all 17 members of the tribal council. They also have asked the FBI to seize tribal records dealing with law enforcement, housing and other programs.

"The bottom line is, we want accountability and responsibility by our elected officials," said group spokesman Dale Looks Twice.

The Associated Press

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For more information, contact Agatha Schmaedick at 681-9809 or agatha@gladstone