

NAACP stokes South Carolina flag controversy

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — The NAACP, which suggests tourists avoid South Carolina because the Confederate flag still flies over the Statehouse, is prepared to take the fight further.

The civil rights group has amassed campaign records to learn which companies have donated money to lawmakers who want the flag to stay. Supporters say the flag represents South Carolina's heritage and honors its war veterans; The NAACP considers it a symbol of

slavery and racism.

"We're looking at all of them, but especially those who have taken a public position in favor of leaving the Confederate battle flag flying," said Dwight James, executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's South Carolina branch.

James wouldn't reveal how the organization planned to use the information.

South Carolina, the only state with the Confederate battle flag flying above its

Capitol, raised it at the Statehouse in 1962 to commemorate the Civil War's centennial. Several attempts to take it down have failed, including a lawsuit by business leaders.

Former Gov. David Beasley campaigned to remove it and lost in the November election. Democratic Gov. Jim Hodges, who promised not to revive the issue, said the Legislature lacks the political will to tackle it now.

Since the NAACP called for the travel boycott last

month, the National Urban League and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference both have canceled convention plans in the state.

There are no official estimates of the boycott's impact.

NAACP officials this week began reviewing the financial disclosure forms filed by 14 senators and seven House members, most of whom have favored keeping the flag above the Capitol dome.

Among those targeted

were five black lawmakers.

"We're just curious as to who is supporting the people who didn't support our efforts," said Jim Wiggins, the NAACP's state branch manager. He said the group planned to examine all lawmakers' financial disclosure forms. The forms, required by law, list political contributions, income and business connections.

"Apparently they don't think their boycott will work and so now they're looking for some other tactic to resort to," said Sen. Glenn

McConnell, R-Charleston, a flag supporter who owns a Confederate memorabilia gallery.

One of the black lawmakers targeted by the NAACP, state Sen. Robert Ford, suggested the Confederate flag stay and the black liberation flag, designed by black nationalist leader Marcus Garvey, be flown next to it.

A black representative, Brenda Lee, said she could support moving the flag to a memorial on Statehouse grounds.

Clinton promotes 'untapped' markets

HELENA, Ark. (AP) — President Clinton promised Saturday to devote the rest of his presidency to erasing the poverty that clings stubbornly to places like this neglected corner of his home state. "We ought to really make an effort," he said.

Clinton stopped in Helena for a private meeting with 54 local officials, who are organizing a commission to take on the enormous problems of the Mississippi Delta, from education to housing and civic infrastructure.

The visit also was designed to assuage hurt feelings — Clinton opted to stop in nearby Clarksdale, Miss., rather than Helena, during his national poverty tour last month. But here, Clinton noted that Eastern Arkansas has "been very good to me for more than 20 years now," and made an unequivocal promise that he did not make during the earlier tour.

"I want you to know that in the year and a half that I have left on my term, I am going to do everything I can to bring more economic opportunity not only to the delta, but to every place in America that is not a part of what our country as a whole is enjoying today," he said.

The president submitted his so-called "new markets" legislative proposal to Congress last week. It includes a series of tax incentives and lending guarantees for new investment that Clinton said could turn places like Helena into ripe markets.

"We ought to really make an effort," Clinton said. "There's a great feeling in the Congress, and I think in both parties, that we ought to do something for the areas that have still not felt the economic recovery of the country."

Addressing a few hundred people inside an aging hangar at the municipal airport, Clinton noted that unemployment in the delta region was twice the national average, despite 19 million new jobs created in the six years of Clinton's presidency. He said the country could no longer afford to overlook the needs of the Mississippi Delta.

But overlooked seems the best way to describe Helena, a town of 7,491 perched on the banks of the Mississippi River. The hangar where Clinton spoke was rusty, its paint peeling, it's inside dusty and dark. Rep. Marion Berry, D-Ark., jokingly told Clinton that he could smell 100 years' worth of cotton dust inside.

Clinton's motorcade rolled past dozens of squat, crumbling houses. Not one building looked new, and there were no national retail chains along Helena's main roads. A large lumber company sat closed, its sign out front offering it for rent or sale. A few feet away, a huge billboard touted the four fine restaurants at the Lady Luck River casino.

"There's some concern we have not done as much as we could have in the delta," Berry said. He described the private meeting, as "a very frank discussion" of Helena's crying needs. One of the main priorities, he said, was to attract manufacturing and agribusiness investments.



THE GOOD MAN

Las Vegas Mayor Oscar Goodman listens to Venita Smith who was the first person that tried his open door policy during the July town hall meeting. Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

Suit against Nation of Islam tossed

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. (AP) — A lawsuit accusing the Nation of Islam of discrimination for barring women from a public speech by leader Louis Farrakhan was dismissed Monday.

Judge Regina Quinlan in Middlesex Superior Court ruled that the First Amendment guarantees of freedom of religion and freedom of assembly protected the Nation of Islam.

Antiques dealer Marceline Donaldson claimed her civil rights were violated when she was turned away at the door of the Boston's city-owned Strand Theater on March 10, 1994.

Her husband, Robert Bennett, was told he could enter the 1,400-seat theater — where Farrakhan was speaking about black-on-black violence — but a Nation of Islam security guard told Donaldson she could not.

Donaldson, who is black and said she is a former civil rights activist, testified last week that "being turned away at the door by a black man was overwhelming. When he moved me aside, my blood pressure started to go up."

She sought unspecified damages from Farrakhan, the Nation of Islam, and minister Don Muhammad, the head of the Nation of Islam mosque

in Boston, which sponsored the event.

"I feel vindicated," Muhammad said after the decision.

Defense lawyer Wilbur P. Edwards Jr. filed a motion to dismiss the suit after the plaintiffs rested their case. He claimed the defendants had the right to hold a religious meeting.

Quinlan issued her ruling from the bench this morning. During the trial, a 14-

person jury also saw a tape of parts of Farrakhan's speech that night. Farrakhan told the crowd that he merely wanted to talk to a group of black men, but women outside the theater "were very, very disturbed because they wanted to see their brothers."

"All of a sudden, I'm offending some law," he said, his voice building as the crowd roared.

"What law am I offending?"

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