

Great gators

Florida topples UCLA to win its first men's basketball title. C1



Mini muppets

Big Bird and company woo the diaper crowd with new videos. A2



The Standard-Times

SERVING THE SOUTH COAST COMMUNITY

TUESDAY, April 4, 2006

New Bedford, Mass.

SouthCoastToday.com

Newsstand: 50 cents

Beacon Hill lawmakers reach health care deal

By DAVID KIBBE
Standard-Times staff writer

BOSTON — Nearly all of the state's 500,000 uninsured residents would have health-care coverage within three years under a groundbreaking agreement announced by Massachusetts legislative leaders yesterday.

The plan would require individuals to purchase health insurance by July 1, 2007, either through government, subsidized or private plans. The bill would impose a \$295-per-employee surcharge on businesses that have more than 10 employees and do not offer insurance coverage.

The contribution would be pro-rated for businesses with seasonal and part-time employees. And businesses would have to reimburse the state if their employees repeatedly use the state's free-care pool because they don't have health insurance through their jobs.

The plan would allow insurers to offer low-cost insurance plans, and it would offer partial subsidies, based on income, to people making up to 300 percent of the federal poverty level, or \$60,000 a year for a family of four. Low-income adults making less than the federal poverty level, \$9,800

for an individual, would pay no deductibles or premiums.

"It's the first state in the nation, the first of our generation, to change health care as we know it," said Sen. Therese Murray, D-Plymouth, who served on the six-member conference committee that negotiated the legislation through the winter. "Obviously, it's taken us a great deal of time because it's so complicated, but we finally did it. Even up to this morning, there were a couple of things hanging out there."

Gov. Mitt Romney, who proposed the personal insurance

See HEALTH CARE A7

HEALTH HIGHLIGHTS

The health care bill would:

- Insure up to 95 percent of the more than 500,000 uninsured Massachusetts residents in the next three years.
- Mandate businesses that don't offer insurance to pay an annual \$295 per-employee assessment.
- Require that everyone obtain health insurance either through their employer or privately.
- Impose increasing tax penalties on individuals who can afford to get health insurance but refuse.
- Establish a Commonwealth Care Health Insurance program to help low-income families and adults purchase health care with no annual deductible.
- Encourage private insurers to create new affordable health care insurance plans.
- Create a "health insurance connector" to help individuals and businesses find affordable private coverage.

Voters clean house

Incumbents ousted; Lakeville rejects CPA

STAFF REPORT

Yesterday was a bad day to be an incumbent in SouthCoast, as voters in Acushnet, Dartmouth and Fairhaven did their fair share of political housecleaning.

Candidates seeking re-election to various boards went down to defeat in three of the four towns where elections were held.

Meanwhile, in Lakeville, voters soundly rejected the Community Preservation Act aimed at protecting open space.

Voter turnouts were disappointing to both candidates and town officials. No more than a quarter of eligible voters turned out in any of the four towns.

One of the biggest surprises of the day was in Acushnet where three-term Selectman Robert St. Jean lost his board seat to Michael Cioper, an 18-year veteran of the Board of Assessors.

Mr. Cioper's victory was decisive — by a margin of 1,133 to 784 — and he promised to follow through on his campaign platform.

"I want to bring the community together," Mr. Cioper said. "There are a bunch of different people in town, and all their ideas are welcome. Everybody gets a fair shot."

In the town's only other contested race, newcomer Leslie Dakin also scored an impressive win as he toppled 15-year assessor George Perry, See ELECTION A11

KEY RACES

ACUSHNET

SELECTMAN

Michael J. Cioper, 1,133*
Robert St. Jean (I), 784

ASSESSOR

Leslie Dakin Jr., 1,056*
George Perry (I), 768

DARTMOUTH

SELECT BOARD

Diane M. Gilbert, 2,343*
Jreck P. Leduc (I), 1,945
Edward M. Pacheco, 538

SELECT BOARD

Robert W. Carney (I), 1,855*
Gregory A. Tougas, 1,539
David L. Vincent, 1,374

FAIRHAVEN

BOARD OF PUBLIC WORKS

Robert D. Hobson, 1,018*
Christopher McDonald, 1,009*

Richard C. Brodeur (I), 745
Robert Roderiques (I), 612

PLANNING BOARD

Timothy D. Cox, 1,527*
Albert Borges Jr. (I), 724*
Jeffrey Lucas (I), 719

LAKEVILLE

SELECTMAN

Charles Evis, 862*
Derek Maksy, 553
Stephen Flood, 280

CPA QUESTION

No — 1,225*
Yes — 420

Complete election coverage: Pages A9-11

* Elected

A SWEET RETURN



LM OTERO/The Associated Press

Red Sox right fielder Trot Nixon slides safely into home to score in the fourth inning against the Texas Rangers in their season opener, a 7-3 win, yesterday. Complete coverage on C1.

State shielded from liability in crash

By STEVE URBON

Standard-Times senior correspondent

NEW BEDFORD — The state cannot be held liable in the deaths of three teenagers whose car plunged off the New Bedford-Fairhaven Bridge in 1999, a state appeals court has ruled.

The court threw out the case brought by the family of the car's driver, 18-year-old Melissa Hartnett of Fall River. She and two companions, Richard MacCord, 17, of Fairhaven and Cassie L. Amaranthes, 16, of Westport, were killed in the Aug. 29, 1999, accident.

A previous summary judgment by a lower court derailed

the Hartnett family's attempt to hold the city of New Bedford liable on the grounds that police on the scene did not jump into the water to try to save the car's occupants, as some civilians did.

In the new decision, the appeals court decided that bridge designers and engineers made legally protected judgment calls when not replacing 1901-vintage iron bridge railings that proved useless.

"We conclude that there was no statute, regulation or established agency practice in existence at the time of the last improvement to

See CRASH A7

Gas prices surging again

By JOSEPH R. LAPLANTE

Standard-Times staff writer

The price of self-serve regular unleaded gasoline in Massachusetts increased by 10 cents in the last seven days, driving a gallon to an average of \$2.51.

And observers don't expect increases to stop until gasoline hits the high \$2.80s, barring hurricanes or international crises, which would push the price beyond \$3 a gallon, said Art Kinsman, director of government affairs for AAA Southern New England.

"We continue to see prices surge with crude oil at \$67 a barrel," Mr. Kinsman said yesterday. "To give you an idea of how fast the price of gasoline is climbing, that same barrel of crude cost about \$60 a couple months ago, and the all-time high is \$68."

Gasoline climbed a penny a gallon the week before, which was minuscule compared to the 16-cent explosion two weeks ago, Mr. Kinsman said.

What is happening? "Middle East tensions, obviously; unrest in Nigeria, where rebels are attacking their oil pipelines; and investors are seeing there is money to be made in oil and they are investing in the commodities market in oil and gasoline, so it keeps climbing," Mr. Kinsman

explained. "It won't start to go down until they think it won't go much higher."

Here is the tale of the pump in the Providence-Fall River-Warwick market, according to AAA's online Daily Fuel Gauge Report:

■ Regular unleaded in this market yesterday sold at an average of \$2.553 a gallon; mid grade, \$2.717; premium, \$2.806; and diesel, \$2.717.

■ A month ago, regular unleaded sold in this market for an average of \$2.205 a gallon; mid grade, \$2.346; premium, \$2.423; and diesel, \$2.650.

■ A year ago, regular unleaded sold in this market for an average of \$2.114 a gallon; mid grade, \$2.249; premium, \$2.323; and diesel, \$2.405.

■ The highest recorded price for regular unleaded was \$3.245 a gallon on Sept. 5, 2005; diesel reached \$3.024 a gallon two days later.

At closing yesterday on the New York Mercantile Exchange, crude oil sold at \$66.46 a gallon, down 28 cents.

Locally yesterday, gasoline prices at two stations were less than the state average, according to Massachusetts-GasPrices.com: at 7:53 a.m. Monday, Cumberland Farms at 757 Ashley Boulevard was selling unleaded regular for \$2.47 a gallon. Later yesterday at 4:11

See GAS A7

AVERAGE FOR SELF-SERVE UNLEADED GAS IN MASS.



Staff graphic

INSIDE TODAY

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Vol. CLVII, No. 47. 30 pages, 3 sections.

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.COM

www.southcoasttoday.com/new



ANDREW T. GALLAGHER/The Standard-Times

Acushnet candidate for assessor Les Dakin Jr. holds one of his signs and lends support to Selectman Robert St. Jean, who was up for re-election. Mr. Dakin was successful in his bid, while Mr. St. Jean was not.