



Displaced Residents
Wire photo

Iraqi residents of Tal Afar return to their homes Monday after fleeing the fighting between insurgents and Iraqi army supported by U.S. forces last week. Mopping-up operations continued Sunday with the Iraqi military reporting a total of 157 insurgents killed and 440 captured during the 10-day offensive.

Missouri considers adding health initiatives to Medicaid

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. (AP) — America is flush with rewards. People with good credit get lower interest rates on loans. Frequent flyers get rewarded with free trips. Some parents even reward their children with cash for good grades.

Now some are proposing rewarding poor people for good health.

Among the multitude of suggestions presented to a legislative committee looking at ways to overhaul Missouri's Medicaid program for the poor is one that would provide extra benefits to people who are trying to improve their health.

It could work something like this: Try to lose weight and be rewarded with expanded health care benefits. Or turn in biweekly reports about diet and exercise and get paid in cash.

The concept is that a little motivation could cause people to live healthier, thus lowering their need for medical care and ultimately saving money for the taxpayer-funded Medicaid program.

The organization was founded by

former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, leader of the 1994 Republican takeover of the House. A step ahead of Missouri, Florida already has applied for a federal Medicaid waiver that among other things would allow the state to deposit money into "enhanced benefit accounts" for Medicaid recipients who try to remain healthy.

Florida parents could earn money for taking their children to regular dental, vision and doctor's check-ups. More cash could be awarded for participating in anti-smoking and weight-loss programs, regardless of results. The elderly and the disabled even could earn money for mall walking.

Recipients could use the money in their special accounts for health services not covered by Medicaid — things like vitamins, routine dental checkups for adults or over-the-counter medicines such as aspirin. The banked money would remain available to recipients even if they leave the Medicaid program.

Health incentives could be especially important in Missouri because under a newly enacted law, fewer low-income parents are eligible for Medicaid, and those who remain no longer receive such things as routine dental coverage or eyeglasses.

Frogue calls incentives for healthy behavior an "absolutely critical part" of what his organization describes as "21st-century intelligent Medicaid system."

"There's only one way to truly transform Medicaid, and that's to change behavior at the patient level," Frogue told the Legislature's Medicaid Reform Commission last week.

Among the cost-saving solutions he called mere "window dressing" were cuts to Medicaid eligibility, something Missouri already has done. About 90,000 of the state's 1 million Medicaid recipients are losing their coverage as a result of tighter eligibility standards.

Missouri Medicaid Director Mike Ditmore said he would be "extremely excited" if the state were able to adopt

a program similar to what Gingrich's organization was suggesting.

But Ditmore didn't seem too optimistic about the prospects of doing so.

Fresh in his mind is a federal court challenge to Missouri's decision to cut coverage of medical equipment such as wheelchair batteries and bedsores-preventing cushions, to most adult Medicaid recipients. The lawsuit contends the cuts amount to illegal discrimination based on diagnosis because children, the blind and pregnant woman still qualify for the benefits.

Ditmore said he fears the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services wouldn't look too kindly on an incentive plan that provides more benefits to some Medicaid recipients than to others.

"One of the things CMS is heavy on is comparability, so you're not giving to one categorical group something you're giving to another," Ditmore said, and that could be "even more so on a person-by-person basis."

Illinois State filmmakers aim to exonerate inmate

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — John McHale is continuing a tradition that helped spur public debate culminating in Joseph Amrine's release after 17 years in prison for a murder he didn't commit.

McHale now is an assistant professor of communication at Illinois State University in Normal, Idaho, and now guides students in their own efforts to dig up cases of the wrongfully accused.

Their current effort focuses on Missouri inmate Dale Helmig, convicted in 1996 and sentenced to life in prison without parole for killing his mother three years earlier in Osage County. Her body was found in the Osage River tied to a concrete block.

"A Matter of Innocence: The Dale Helmig Story" debuted last week in Columbia, and McHale plans to show the film on college campuses across the state in an effort to ultimately win Helmig, 48, a new trial.

"This is an opportunity for citizens to amplify their voices," McHale said. "Sometimes it's easy to go along with what government officials say without scrutiny. Questioning your government officials can make a difference."

McHale and student filmmakers Kris Racine and Jeff Blackburn, who both graduated from Illinois State in May, said Helmig's initial trial was compromised by a shoddy defense, selective presentation of evidence and an opportunistic special prosecutor from Boone County, Kenny Hulshof, who used Helmig as an example of his tough-on-crime credentials in the midst of a campaign for Congress. Hulshof represents Kirksville in the U.S. House of Representatives.

In an interview last week with the Columbia Missourian, Hulshof rejected any link between his congressional campaign and the trial. He also denied accusations of jury tampering raised by Helmig's defense attorney, Sean O'Brien.

"We proved that Dale Helmig was the guilty, culpable party," Hulshof said. Racine, the film's director, is less certain than Hulshof. With the help of law students at the University of Missouri - Kansas City and his own alma mater's Innocence Project, he raised several questions about the Helmig investigation and the subsequent trial, including a reliance on a disputed \$200 phone bill as the sole motivation for Helmig to kill his 55-year-old mother, Norma.

"No person can be 100 percent certain," Racine said. "That's between Dale and God. But there's a reasonable doubt."

The efforts by Racine and Blackburn are not without precedent — particularly in Illinois. A series of investigations by Northwestern University journalism students showed that 13 men were wrongly sentenced to death in the state.

Michigan test-drives new blueberry-flavored beer

GRAND RAPIDS, Mich. (AP) — Flavored beer is adding a new fruity twist to the selections at some West Michigan bars and liquor stores.

Anheuser-Busch is test-marketing a blueberry beer called Wild Blue in western Michigan, an area known for its ties to blueberry farming. But the violet-hued brew is getting mixed reviews from drinkers.

Joe Rizqallah, owner of Grapevine Wine & Deli in Grand Rapids, said he likes the fruity beer, although he's hesitant to admit it.

"You wouldn't want to be caught by your buddies drinking it," Rizqallah said. "If I go out fishing, I can tell you I'm not taking that. You'd probably get thrown out of the boat."

Grapevine is among several area retailers to sell the beer in 16-ounce four-packs. The beer also is available in some restaurants and bars.

The blueberry beer is part of Anheuser-Busch's efforts to add new and interesting products to its beverage lineup, said Mic Zavarella, director of innovation for the St. Louis-based company.

"We're interested in new and unique flavor combinations — something that we don't see every day," Zavarella said. "What we are trying to do with this brand and other brands is provide more variety to consumers."

And if blueberry isn't bizarre enough, Anheuser-Busch is testing beer flavored with lime, cactus, pomegranate and blood orange.

Matt Messing, a 21-year-old Aquinas College student from Allendale, tried a Wild Blue that his roommate brought home.

"I thought a blueberry beer would taste disgusting," he said. "But it was good when I was sipping on it."

West Michigan blueberry growers are cautiously optimistic the public will take a liking to the beer.

"I think there have been studies that show beer or alcohol in limited quantity is a health benefit," said Bob Carini, owner of Carini Farms in Port Sheldon Township. "I don't think adding blueberries to beer is a bad thing for blueberry industry."

Steve Paul, who farms 120 acres of blueberries in Fruitport, said health issues have blueberry growers riding a nice wave of popularity. Adding them to beer will help even more, he said.

French Film Festival

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-A.O. Scott, The New York Times

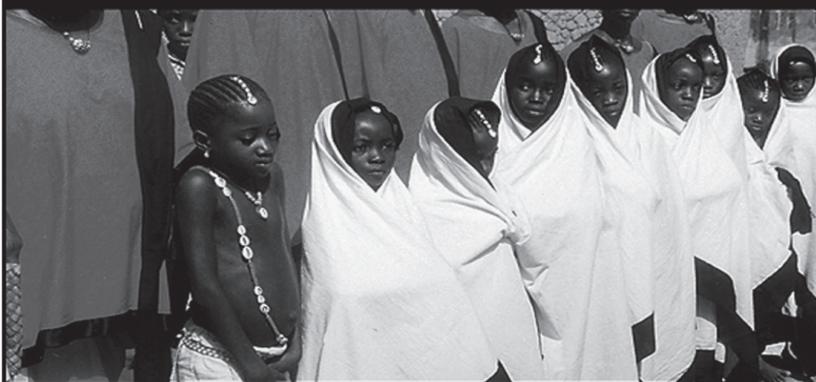
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Who's Who

Among Students in American Universities & Colleges



Eligibility

Seniors graduating in December, May, or August
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Active in campus or community activities

2.75 cumulative GPA

Evaluation Criteria

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Applications are due Oct. 21

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