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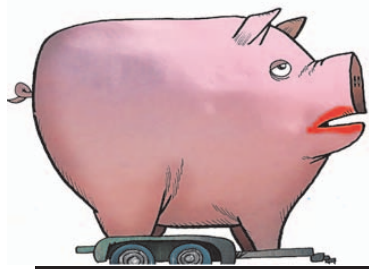
Detroit Free Press

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It's try, try again on budget

MIKE THOMPSON'S SKETCHBOOK
Our cartoonist takes on Lansing



After checking out the budget stalemate, editorial cartoonist Mike Thompson presents his sketchbook of the scene, from giant pig statues to ... er, turkeys. PAGE 6A
Go to freep.com for updates.



House Democrats push late vote on tax boost to fix deficit

By CHRIS CHRISTOFF
FREE PRESS LANSING BUREAU CHIEF

LANSING — The state House began voting late Thursday night to raise the state income tax from 3.9% to 4.6%, as a linchpin in a potential agreement to resolve the state's \$1.75-billion deficit and

avoid an Oct. 1 partial shutdown of state government.

House Democrats pushed the vote in hopes of convincing a handful of Republicans to go along with the tax increase in return for unspecified spending reductions in state government. But at 11 p.m., an hour after voting began, the measure

still was 14 votes short of passage.

Unlike attempts to pass a similar bill last weekend, the bill called for making the income tax rate 4.2% on Oct. 1, 2011. It also earmarked about \$90 million more for the state's lowest-spending public school districts, including the Detroit

Public Schools, and \$45 million for the Game and Fish Protection Fund to offset planned increases in fishing and hunting license fees and possibly even reduce license costs.

Earlier, House Speaker Andy Dillon, D-Redford Township,

See CRISIS, 10A

DETROITERS JOIN FIGHT FOR JUSTICE



FRANK FRANKLIN II/Associated Press

Protesters march up First Street in Jena, La., on Thursday. Thousands of demonstrators filled the streets in support of six black teenagers — known nationally as the Jena Six — who initially were charged with attempted murder in the beating of a white classmate.

'We're a part of history'

Thousands fill La. streets in protest, support

By NAOMI R. PATTON
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

JENA, La. — The riders on the bus were buoyant as they began to head back to Detroit on Thursday afternoon from the small Louisiana town of Jena where they spent several hours among thousands on hand for a rally for the Jena Six. "This morning I was crying ...when we drove into Jena," said Nadonya Muslim, 40, of Detroit. "I was thinking, we're a part of history."

Organized by the Rev. Al Sharpton and the NAACP, the rally was held to support six

"I thought it was beautiful that we could all come together on one accord."

IMARI BARKSALE, 37, of Detroit about the rally in Jena, La.

black students expelled from Jena High School — one who could face a prison sentence of 15 to 22 years — in a racially motivated school fight in which a white student was severely beaten in December 2006. The

fight followed an incident at the school in which nooses were hung from a tree by white students who later were suspended.

Less than half an hour after leaving the Jena city limits Thursday, those aboard the Detroit-bound bus saw two Confederate flags flying boldly at a home on Highway 165 North. The sight was met with silence.

But it didn't change the fact that many riding on the two buses felt they made history by showing up in Jena for one of

See JENA, 8A

200 gather to rally in Detroit

Councilwoman Brenda Jones, below, and others unite for Jena Six. 8A

Conyers plans hearings into the La. case. 8A



At freep.com: Photo galleries and Naomi R. Patton's blog.



AMY LEANG/Detroit Free Press

Pressure on GM goes up for every day talks drag on

So, after days and days of going round and round about how to get a \$50-billion commitment for future retiree health care off General Motors Corp.'s balance sheet and into a union-run trust fund, the UAW and GM have punted this vexing issue off to the side while they discuss other matters.

For now. There are potential benefits for UAW President Ron Gettelfinger and Vice President Cal Rapson in extending these negotiations well beyond the Sept. 14 contract expiration date:

■ First, they appear tough and determined to save every possible nickel's worth of the UAW membership's hard-won health benefits by not caving in to GM's demands



TOM WALSH

Both sides tread carefully. 5A

quickly. Remember, the UAW rank-and-file members must ultimately vote to ratify the next contract.

■ And if GM's stock price sputters as Wall Street gets jittery, that puts more pressure on GM to get a deal done, even if it means tossing a few more dollars into the pot for a voluntary employee beneficiary association trust fund to handle retiree health

See WALSH, 5A

Agency says sorry, we like buying American cars too

By TODD SPANGLER
FREE PRESS WASHINGTON STAFF

WASHINGTON — A federal official expressed regret Thursday over a newsletter sent to his agency's 67,000 workers, suggesting they consider owning one of 12 cars — all made by foreign-based companies — to cut their energy use.

"We implied that we endorsed the purchase of cars not made by American companies," Department of Health and Human Services Assistant Secretary Joe Ellis said in a statement.

The apology came after Michigan's members of Congress loudly complained about

the e-mailed newsletter.

The e-mail gave "the impression that HHS was encouraging employees to buy foreign makes of cars," said Ellis. "Nothing could be further from our intent."

Ellis said he understood why U.S. automakers and their employees might be offended. "I commend him," said Jason Vines, Chrysler LLC's vice president for communications.

Rep. Joe Knollenberg, a Bloomfield Township Republican, said he would like to see the federal agency send an e-mail to its employees touting fuel efficient models of U.S. companies.

"I'm saying you could have gone a step further," he said.



SWELTERY
You didn't put away those flip-flops, did you?
Chuck Gaidica's forecast, 6B

86 | 65
HIGH | LOW



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AMY LEANG/Detroit Free Press

Tuewanda Gray, 29, of Detroit protests outside the McNamara Federal Building on Thursday to raise awareness of and provide support to the Jena Six. "I'm here to stand for what's right," Gray says.

JENA | Thousands fill La. streets in protest march

From Page 1A

the largest civil rights rallies and protests since the civil rights era.

Muslim, who took her 12-year-old daughter, Starr-Ambrosia, along on the trip, was one of several hundred who boarded charter buses Wednesday morning sponsored by the Hartford Memorial Baptist Church and the Detroit Branch NAACP.

As thousands filled Jena's streets for the protest, the city's businesses and schools were closed. Residents watched from their porches, stood in doorways or peeked from windows.

Dave Nelson stood on his lawn taking pictures of the human spectacle that passed by. Nelson, a retired Jena High English teacher, lives on Second Street between the school and the LaSalle Parish Courthouse.

"I was surprised to see all the people," he said. "A lot of folks have stopped by, and we've had good conversations."

Nelson insisted that the rural Jena, with a population of about 3,000, was not racist, but a peaceful town "in spite of what the BBC and CNN say."

Civil rights movement reborn?

Before arriving in Jena, Sharpton called the case of the Jena Six "the most blatant example of disparity in the justice system that we've seen." Appearing on CBS's "The Early Show," he said: "You can't have two standards of justice."

"We didn't bring race into it," Sharpton said, noting the Jena protest might spur a 21st-Century civil rights movement. "Those that hung the nooses brought the race into it."

About 12:30 p.m., a crowd surrounded the Rev. Jesse Jackson, who walked behind a Louisiana Branch NAACP banner in step with the interim NAACP President and Chief Executive Officer Dennis C. Hayes. He said the case of the Jena Six "needs federal intervention. This is fundamentally about criminal justice and disparities."

U.S. Rep. John Conyers, D-Detroit, on Thursday announced plans for a congressional hearing into the matter.

Jackson and the large group walked to the courthouse, where Sharpton spoke earlier. Other speakers included New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin and two of the children of civil rights pioneer Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Martin Luther King III and the Rev. Bernice King.

Though there were some veterans from the civil rights era in the crowd, the makeup was decidedly younger people in their 20s and 30s and college students.



ALEX BRANDON/Associated Press

Melissa Bell, left, hugs Bryant Purvis, one of the Jena Six, during a rally in front of the LaSalle Parish Courthouse in Jena, La., on Thursday.

Conyers is to hold hearings in Jena case

WASHINGTON — House Judiciary Committee Chairman Rep. John Conyers said Thursday that he plans to hold hearings in Congress into the case of six black teenagers in Jena, La., who initially were charged with attempted murder in the beating of a schoolmate who is white.

The statement by Conyers, a Detroit Democrat who is African American, came on a day when thousands of people descended on the tiny Louisiana town to protest the charges. A rally also was held in Washington in support of the students, now referred to as the Jena Six.

Conyers said he also would hold a forum on the incident next week. In a statement, he said, "In 2007, there should not even be allegations of unequal justice based on race or any other factors. This case brings to light what could be a national trend, and the Judiciary Committee should explore that."

He said he would hold the forum at 3 p.m. Sept. 28 during the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation's annual legislative conference in Washington.

- TODD SPANGLER

Some, such as Charice Thomas, 26, of Detroit, thought the protest lacked organization. Still, she said, "I made a good choice. ... Everybody had good intentions."

Reed Walters, the LaSalle Parish district attorney prosecuting the teens, on Wednesday denied that racism was involved in the case. He said the defendants were of adult age under Louisiana law and that Mychal Bell was charged as an adult rather than as a juvenile because he had a prior criminal record.

Bell, 16 at the time of the fight and the only one of the Jena students to be tried so far, was convicted on an aggravated second-degree battery count that could have sent him to prison for 15 years. But the conviction was overturned last week by a state appeals court that ruled he

Protesters wear black, join voices in national effort

By ZLATI MEYER
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

As hundreds of metro Detroiters arrived in Jena, La., in support of six Jena teenagers Thursday, a few hundred stayed home and held their own rally in downtown Detroit for the same cause.

About 200 people gathered outside the Patrick V. McNamara Federal Building to protest the treatment of six black teenagers accused of assaulting a white student in Jena.

Most of those gathered on the outside plaza wore black, part of a national campaign to show support for the teens, now nationally known as the Jena Six.

Many wanted to travel to Louisiana for the national rally, but jobs, family or other obligations prevented them from making the trip.

"All across the country, there are meetings and gatherings

Metro Detroiters rally in support of Jena Six



AMY LEANG/Detroit Free Press

Helen Moore of Detroit, center, of Keep the Vote No Take Over, prepares to speak to protesters supporting six black students in Jena, La., outside the McNamara Federal Building in Detroit on Thursday.

like this, and that's a beautiful thing," said the Minister Malik Shabazz, one of the noontime organizers. "If you're oppressed, recessed and depressed, what are you going to do? Come together."

"We have to prevent this particular history from repeating itself," said Wanda Akilah Redmond of the New Marcus Gar-

vey Movement.

The next speaker picked up on that theme.

"Injustice to one is injustice to all. Until all of us are free, none of us are free," said activist Helen Moore of Detroit. "We came here not wanting to come here, so we demand justice. ... We are African people and we are at war."

Recap of the Jena, La., school incident

2006

Sept. 1: Students at Jena High School find three nooses hanging from a tree on campus, days after black students asked administrators for permission to sit beneath a shade tree traditionally used only by white students.

Sept. 8: Three white students are suspended for hanging the nooses.

Nov. 30: Arson destroys the main school building.

Dec. 4: School reopens in an undamaged wing. A white student, Justin Barker, is attacked by several other students, rushed to a hospital, treated and released. That evening, he attends a school ceremony.

Dec. 7: Authorities announce charges against six black students arrested in the Dec. 4 case. They include attempted second-degree murder and conspiracy to commit second-degree murder.

Dec. 15: Authorities say one of the students, Mychal Bell, 16, will be charged as an adult. Later, the charges are reduced to aggravated second-degree battery and conspiracy to commit the same.

2007

May 2: Demonstrators in Jena shout "Free the Jena Six!" — the name given to the students charged in the Dec. 4 fight. Two of the six remain jailed.

May 10: Barker is arrested for taking a gun to school. He is expelled.

June 26: An all-white jury is selected to try Bell after only 50 of 150 people called to jury duty show up. None of the prospective jurors are black.

June 27: LaSalle Parish District Attorney Reed Walters calls 17 witnesses to testify. Bell's court-appointed defender, Blane Williams, calls none.

June 28: Bell is convicted of aggravated second-degree battery and conspiracy to commit the same.

Sept. 4: Bell's conviction on conspiracy charges is thrown out. Charges against two other students are reduced.

Sept. 14: An appeals court overturns Bell's conviction. He remains jailed.

- GANNETT NEWS SERVICE

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BEFORE THE MICHIGAN PUBLIC
SERVICE COMMISSION**

**NOTICE OF HEARING
FOR THE CUSTOMERS OF
MICHIGAN CONSOLIDATED
GAS COMPANY
CASE NO. U-15348**

Michigan Consolidated Gas Company, Inc. (MCGC) is a public utility company that provides natural gas service to customers in Michigan. MCGC is a subsidiary of The AES Corporation, a publicly traded company. MCGC is a regulated utility and is subject to the oversight of the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC).

The MPSC is holding a public hearing on the proposed rate of return for MCGC for the year 2007. The hearing will be held on September 21, 2007, at 10:00 a.m. in the Michigan State Capitol Building, Room 1000, Lansing, Michigan. The hearing will be open to the public and anyone interested in the proposed rate of return may wish to attend and provide testimony.

The proposed rate of return for MCGC for the year 2007 is 8.5%. This is a decrease from the proposed rate of return for the year 2006, which was 9.0%. The MPSC is holding this hearing to determine if the proposed rate of return is reasonable and just.

Customers of MCGC are invited to attend the hearing and provide testimony. Testimony should be submitted to the MPSC no later than September 14, 2007. Testimony may be submitted in writing or at the hearing. The MPSC will consider all testimony submitted and will issue a decision on the proposed rate of return.

For more information, please contact the MPSC at (517) 373-3000 or visit the MPSC website at www.mpsc.state.mi.us.

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