

Los Angeles Times

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MANDEL NGAN APP/Getty Images

MAKING HEALTHCARE HISTORY

Democratic lawmakers and young healthcare overhaul advocate Marcelas Owens applaud President Obama's signing of the health-care legislation at an East Room ceremony that was both partisan celebration and recognition of history in the making.

Democrats celebrate their victory

'We . . . mark a new season in America,' President Obama says at the signing ceremony.

PETER NICHOLAS AND CHRISTI PARSONS REPORTING FROM WASHINGTON

With the strokes of 22 pens, a buoyant President Obama on Tuesday signed into law the most far-reaching healthcare overhaul in

two generations, vindicating a yearlong struggle on which he had staked his presidency. In a crowded White House ceremony that was both partisan celebration and recognition of history in the making, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-San Francisco) and Senate Majority

Leader Harry Reid (D-Nevada) raised their arms like victors at a pep rally; Victoria Kennedy, widow of health reform champion Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, blew a kiss; and Vice President Joe Biden — as he embraced Obama — was caught by an open microphone using an obscenity, exclaiming "This

is a big . . . deal." Obama said the moment was proof that a polarized political system could still produce substantial change to help everyday people. "Today, after almost a century of trying; today, after over a year of debate; today, after all the votes have been tallied — health insur-

ance reform becomes law in the United States of America," the president said. "It is fitting that Congress passed this historic legislation this week. For as we mark the turning of spring, we also mark a new season in America." He spoke from a lectern [See Healthcare, A12]

BID TO LEGALIZE POT USE NEARS BALLOT

Voters could weigh in on the initiative this fall. Fiscal crisis may help it pass, some say.

JOHN HOEFFEL

Fourteen years after California decided marijuana could be used as a medicine and ignited a national movement, the state is likely to vote on whether to take another step into the vanguard of drug liberalization: legalizing the controversial weed for fun and profit.

On Wednesday, Los Angeles County elections officials must turn in their count of valid signatures collected in the county on a statewide legalization initiative. The number is virtually certain to be enough to qualify the initiative for the November ballot, according to a tally kept by state election officials.

That will once again make California the focal point of the long-stewing argument over marijuana legalization, a debate likely to be a high-dollar brawl between adversaries who believe it could launch or stifle another national trend.

The campaign will air issues that have changed little over the years. Proponents will cite the financial and social cost of enforcing pot prohibition and argue that marijuana is not as dangerous and addictive as tobacco or alcohol. Opponents will highlight marijuana-linked crimes, rising teenage use and the harm the weed causes some smokers.

But the debate also will play out against a cultural landscape that has changed substantially, with marijuana moving from dark street corners to neon-lit suburban boutiques. In the months since the Obama administration ordered drug agents to lay off dispensaries, hundreds have opened, putting pot within easy reach of most Californians. Whether voters view this de facto legalization with trepidation or equanimity could shape the outcome.

The measure's supporters hope that this dynamic will shift the debate, allowing them to persuade voters to replace prohibition with controlled sales that could be taxed to help California's cities and counties.

"They already accept that it's out there. They want to see a smart strategy," said Chris Lehane, a top strategist for the initiative. [See Marijuana, A14]

Father says he warned of abuse

Relatives say police and L.A. County child welfare officials were told Deandre Green, 2, was being harmed before his death.

TONY BARBOZA AND GARRETT THEROLF

Family members of Deandre Green, a 2-year-old boy who was fatally beaten last week, allegedly by his mother's boyfriend, said they had warned police and Los Angeles County child welfare officials at least twice about possible abuse in the last few months of the child's life.

Deandre's father told The Times in an interview Tuesday that in October, he had taken his son to the Hawthorne Police Department to show officials bruises on the child's chest and stomach. Deandre's cousin said she had called the county Department of Children and Family Services in February to report her concerns.

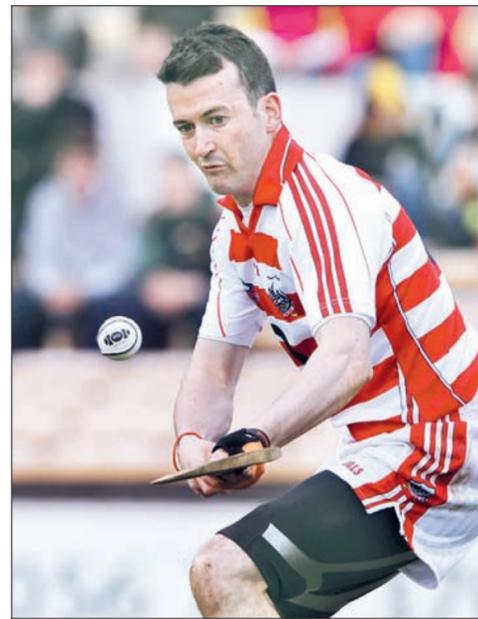
The cousin, Lavetta Jones, and other family members said their calls went unreturned for weeks. At one point, a someone at the county told them the person they needed to talk to was on vacation, the family members said.

"It wasn't as urgent as it should have been," the boy's grandmother, Sharlynn Pinkard, 43, said. "We truly sensed something wasn't right."

County officials declined to comment immediately on Deandre's case.

It remains unclear exactly what steps authorities took after receiving the allegations of abuse regarding Deandre — and whether social workers ultimately confirmed the accusations. Under law, police and social service agencies are required to notify each other of such allegations.

What is clear is that Deandre continued to live [See Child death, A11]



RAY MCMANUS Sportsfile

GOALIE: Hurler Donal Og Cusack, one of Ireland's top athletes, plays in Kilkenny last year.

COLUMN ONE

His revelation rocked a nation

That a star athlete came out reflects the remarkable changes underway in Irish society.

HENRY CHU REPORTING FROM CORK, IRELAND

The handshake says it all: powerful, determined, tight enough to make you wince. It's the grip of a man who stands his ground, and who challenges you for some of yours.

That defiance has served Donal Og Cusack well in his career as one of Ireland's top athletes, a star goalie in the beloved Irish sport of hurling, sort of a hybrid of field hockey and lacrosse, only faster.

But his steeliness is also being put to use these days for a role that he never foresaw as a kid growing up on the village hurling pitch: the most talked-about gay man in Ireland.

Cusack assumed the part in October when he came out in a memoir titled "Come What May." Like the man himself, the revelation was matter-of-fact and unapologetic. But it was a double whammy here in a Roman Catholic country that worships God on Sundays and its sportsmen the rest of the week.

This is, after all, the last country in Western Europe to decriminalize homosexuality, just 17 years ago. And by going public, Cusack, who plays for the storied Cork County hurling team, found himself in extremely select company, a minority within a minority within a minority.

Openly gay male athletes are a scarce enough breed. Even fewer have been competitors in the macho, buddy-buddy world of team sports. Those who have divulged their homosexuality while [See Ireland, A7]

Corporate giants awash in cash as economy picks up

TOM PETRUNO

The brutal recession has left many American families, small businesses and state and local governments in financial ruin or teetering on the brink.

But it's a much different story for the nation's biggest companies. Many have emerged from the economy's harrowing downturn loaded with cash, thanks to deep cost-cutting that helped drive unemployment into double digits.

And although the banking crisis starved countless entrepreneurs for money last year, credit was never scarce for business titans.

Corporate America's robust finances have been a boon for the companies' stocks: On Tuesday, the blue-chip Dow Jones industrial average hit its highest

Obama pay czar slashes salaries

Top executives of five firms that received federal bailouts see their compensation cut 15% on average. BUSINESS, B1

level in nearly 18 months, surging 102.94 points, or 1%, to 10,888.83.

Some experts say the strength of the largest firms will be a key advantage for the nation in the next phase of the economic recovery.

"The good news for America now is that companies are very competitive, flush with cash and ready to expand," said Joseph Carson, an economist at money management firm Alliance Bernstein in New York.

But others worry that the [See Cash, A8]

Upon further review, NFL rethinks OT

Teams will need a touch-down to win a post-season game on the first possession. A field goal gives the other side one possession to meet or beat it. SPORTS, C1

U.S. vows help in border drug war

Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton says the country will share the burden with Mexico. WORLD, A6

An hour a day can keep pounds away

Women can avoid weight gain without dieting but will have to work for it, a study finds. NATION, A9

Dwayne Johnson is back in action

The actor once known as the Rock returns to a hard-edged role in "Faster." CALENDAR, D1



NASA

EARLY ASTRONAUT DIES

Robert M. White, shown in 1961, earned an astronaut rating a year later when he flew the X-15 aircraft nearly 60 miles above Earth. The retired Air Force major general was 85. LATEXTRA

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