

Tobacco plan may bring millions

Owners of quotas in state would be beneficiaries

By MARY ORNDORFF
News Washington correspondent

WASHINGTON — A multibillion-dollar buyout for tobacco growers pending in Congress would send about \$10.3 million to 731 people and estates in Alabama.

The plan would end a Depression-era federal program that has supported tobacco prices by limiting production. It would compensate more than 436,000 people in 50 states who own those production quotas, which have been bought, sold, rented and inherited over the years.

The buyout, lauded as a way for the federal government to get out of the tobacco business, was added to a corporate tax bill that passed the U.S. House last week and now rests with the Senate.

A database compiled by the Environmental Working Group from records at the U.S. Department of Agriculture details how \$9.6 billion would be dished out over five years. The environmental nonprofit opposes the buyout.

"The House buyout plan is an incredible rip-off of the taxpayer, mostly to benefit a handful of large tobacco interests and tobacco companies," EWG President Ken Cook said in a written statement.

Alabama, though not a major tobacco-producing state, is ranked 14th in the amount of payments, behind industry leaders North Carolina, Kentucky and Tennessee. While a few of the Alabama names on the list are for Alabama-based growing quotas, many are residents who own quotas based in other states.

Earl Bozeman of Georgiana, who grew tobacco in Butler County for 45 years before re-

tiring three years ago, owns 25,000 pounds of quota and could receive up to \$481,400 under the House-approved plan. That's the second-largest payment in Alabama.

"That sounds awful good but I don't expect to get that much," Bozeman said Tuesday. "I look for a lot of cutting to be done before it gets through."

He supports the end of the tobacco quotas because growers who rent quotas are unable to sell at competitive prices. If a grower has to pay 50 cents per pound to rent quotas, for example, the production costs are too high to compete on the world market, Bozeman said.

"It was good program but I think it's about worn out," he said. He now rents his quota to a neighbor.

About 431,600 pounds of tobacco were harvested in Alabama in 2002 on 199 acres across eight farms, according to the latest census figures from USDA.

The database on the buyout shows that 48 percent of the payments in Alabama would be between \$1,000 and \$5,000. Fourteen percent would be less than \$1,000. The average payment per recipient in the state would be \$13,998.

The top 1 percent of recipients in Alabama, which is seven people or estates, would receive 32 percent of the money, \$3.3 million. The top 20 percent, consisting of 148 people, would get 81 percent of the money, \$8.3 million.

All seven members of Alabama's House delegation voted for the corporate tax bill that contained the tobacco buyout. Spokesmen for Alabama Sens. Richard Shelby and Jeff Sessions said they are reviewing the proposal and are undecided about whether to support it.

Some senators have suggested pairing the buyout with a provision to give the Food and Drug Administration the power to regulate tobacco.

BIRMINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

Kincaid joins officials saluting three slain officers

By BARNETT WRIGHT
News staff writer

Birmingham city officials on Tuesday spoke emotionally, passionately and tearfully about three police officers slain last week.

Mayor Bernard Kincaid, in his first expansive public remarks outside those he delivered at funerals for the officers, said the past five days have been his most painful as mayor.

"I hope you understand how difficult this has been, but the way the community has come together has been inspiring," Kincaid told a somber City Council. "I know that this city, while it is mourning, is very grateful to these officers."

Councilman Joel Montgomery, chairman of the public safety committee, read proclamations honoring the officers to start an hour-long dedication ceremony.

It ended with a minute of silence followed by the blaring of a siren from a patrol car outside City Hall.

Councilman Roderick Royal, a former police officer, said his family lived with the anguish of knowing that he might not come home after leaving for the precinct. "Each day a police of-

ficer goes on his or her beat they are reminded of a particular class at the academy that talks about the risks and the dangers of being a police officer," he said. "When I was on the crime scene a lot of those things came back to my mind."

Councilman Elias Hendricks said the city needs to study ways to prevent any similar tragedy.

"I would like to know the kind of weaponry that was used and if there is anything we can do as lawmakers to ban it or if there is anything we can do to eliminate ways for people to get these type of weapons and artillery," he said.

Police Chief Annetta Nunn said she hopes city officials will study a system that would allow the department to share intelligence on suspects with other law enforcement agencies to better track criminals.

"One of our needs is to share information and a system that unites all of our jail records, dispatch records, investigation records," she said. "If you're looking at an individual you'll know that they were in court yesterday or they will be in court tomorrow or if there is something else that is going on with that person."

Safety cited in delay of taxi rate changes

The Birmingham City Council on Tuesday delayed for four weeks a resolution that eliminates a 50-cents-a-ride gasoline surcharge for taxis and incorporates that into the meter rate for the first quarter-mile.

Councilwoman Carol Reynolds, chair of the transportation and communications committee, asked for the delay so

safety issues can be weighed.

Birmingham cab driver Eldridge Knighton, who said he lost an eye during an attempted robbery in his cab June 7, said the council needs to consider requiring protective glass in all cabs.

Barnett Wright

METRO BRIEFS

Troopers OK after helicopter crash

Two Alabama State troopers searching for marijuana in north Jefferson County crashed their helicopter Tuesday morning but were unharmed.

Sgt. Tim Sartain said the Bell Jet Ranger helicopter crashed at 10 a.m. on a hillside on Linn's Crossing Road in Linn's Crossing in unincorporated Jefferson County, about three miles from U.S. 78.

Both pilot and passenger were taken to a nearby hospital but were unharmed and were released, Sartain said.

The helicopter was severely damaged, he said. The Federal Aviation Administration and state are investigating the crash, Sartain said.

Vivi Abrams

Animal control issue postponed

Jefferson County has agreed to wait another week for Birmingham to decide if it wants to continue jointly operating the

BJC was the lower of two bidders earlier this year. The county was poised to award the contract despite a recommendation by its own citizens advisory committee to negotiate with the other bidder, Dan Bugg of Arkansas, and the city's misgivings about BJC's performance since it took over the shelter in 1997.

BJC's bid for a joint operation was a little more than \$1 million, about what his current contract pays. Bugg's bid was about \$600,000 higher.

Eric Velasco

Scout leader hit by car is recovering

A Vestavia Hills Boy Scout leader continues to recover from injuries he sustained after being struck by a car on U.S. 31 two weeks ago.

Conway William "Bill" Brooks has been through several surgeries, and will require more, family and friends said. Doctors at UAB Hospital are weaning him off a ventilator.

Brooks, 55, was training for a backpacking trip with the Scouts

Kerry fund-raiser postponed in city

Sen. John Kerry's presidential campaign postponed a fund-raising event in Birmingham Tuesday night because the featured attraction at the event, Sen. John Edwards, was kept in Washington by Senate business.

Ted Hosp, Kerry's state campaign director, said the campaign hopes to reschedule Edwards' visit in July.

CRIME REPORT

These crimes were reported to Birmingham and Hoover police:

Robbery

► Two armed men approached a porchful of men on the 7700 block of First Avenue South at 4:20 p.m. Sunday and stole \$1,000 from Roberto Garcia Tapia and \$90 from Jose Trinidad Tapia.

► Two armed men held Benjamin Jaimes Morales' brother-in-law at gunpoint while they called Morales and demanded he meet them at the Citicenter

paycheck on the 4100 block of Fifth Avenue South. They also robbed his friend Selestino Rios of \$240.

► A stranger who asked Billy G. Bourne for help on his car picked Bourne up on the 8500 block of First Avenue North Friday at 12:30 a.m. and then put a gun to his head and robbed him of \$270.

► Three gunmen approached Salvador Romero, 35, on the 700 block of Springville Road Friday at 10:20 p.m., pointed a gun in his face, shot in the air and demanded money. They stole \$1,000 and Romero's green card and drivers license.

► Two men with guns jumped out of a vehicle and robbed Jose Rodriguez-Villeneuve, 21, and Ruben Guzman-Sanchez, 38, both of Hoover, at 11:55 p.m. Friday in front of the 3416 building at Hoover's Hartwood Apartments. The gunmen took a wallet with \$178 cash from Rodriguez-Villeneuve and a wallet with \$60 and cash and jewelry valued at \$270 from Guzman-Sanchez.

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