

IN WEEKEND: CRAIG CHEWS OVER 'JULIE & JULIA,' LIL WAYNE WORKS HARD AND ... HELLO THERE ... CHEAP TRICK!

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MORE NEWS

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FIVE MARINES KILLED IN AFGHANISTAN

Four died in a single roadside bombing. Meanwhile, the administration consults Vietnam War historian Stanley Karnow. **3A**

BETTER LUCK NEXT TIME FOR ETHICS BILLS

Reforms that gained attention amid controversies surrounding former Gov. Mike Easley will not fly. "We'll do them next year," said Sen. Martin Nesbitt. **1B**

BARNES & NOBLE TRIES A NEW TACK HERE

The bookseller is pushing classroom materials and educational toys and games. The redone Barnes & Noble@School stores are in Cary and Durham. **5B**



AP PHOTO BY MARK LENNIHAN

\$2 BILLION MORE FOR THE CLUNKERS

The Senate passed the extension Thursday evening; the House did so last week. Cash would have run out Friday, officials said. **3A**

IRAQ MOVES TO BAN PUBLIC SMOKING

Curbs announced Thursday suggest that as violence ebbs, authorities can worry about normal quality-of-life issues. The legislation must go before parliament. **17A**

JOHN HUGHES, AUTEUR OF TEEN DRAMA, DIES



The director of "The Breakfast Club" and "Ferris Bueller's Day Off" had a heart attack at 59. **9B**

WALKER THIS WAY: STEVEN TYLER FALLS

The 61-year-old Aerosmith singer toppled off a stage and hurt his head, neck and shoulder. Before the tour, he had pneumonia. **2A**

WEATHER

Today: Partly cloudy. High 90, low 67.

Saturday: It only gets hotter over the weekend. High 97, low 72. **10B**

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When pennies count, tax-free days are gold



Helping Hand Mission Director Sylvia Wiggins, center, helps volunteers Damika Hardy, 20, left, and Jessica Byrd, 17, sort and bag donated school supplies. Wiggins says that Helping Hand's supplies are 'at the bottom of the bucket.'

STAFF PHOTO BY COREY LOWENSTEIN

Sour economy makes North Carolina's annual weekend sales tax break a bittersweet blessing.

By GABE STAROSTA AND SUE STOCK
STAFF WRITERS

North Carolina's annual tax-free weekend has always been an ideal time to buy expensive computers, saving consumers hundreds of dollars.

This year, though, 6.75-percent savings on books, T-shirts and basketballs matter. Every penny counts.

The state is struggling with a recession and double-digit unemployment. Parents are cutting costs after months of being out of work, and charities cannot keep up with demand. For both groups, the tax holiday, which began early this morning and ends Sunday at 11:59 p.m., might be their only chance to stock up on the supplies they badly need.

That's the case for Marcia Olivarez, a single mother in Wendell, who has set a budget of about \$20 for new school items for her 9-year-old daughter.

Armed with the list from her daughter's school, Olivarez said some things teachers have requested, such as napkins and paper plates, likely won't make it into her shopping basket.

"I'm telling the teacher I can't afford to spend that much," Olivarez said.

Nationwide, other shoppers

are saying similar things, said Kathy Grannis, spokeswoman for the National Retail Federation.

"People are comparison shopping like they never have before," she said. "They're also taking a look at extracurricular activities and digging through closets to find notebooks or binders that may not have been used the previous year."

That's what Kelly Lands' family is doing.

Last year, the Lands, who live in Angier, spent about \$700 on back-to-school clothes and supplies for their two children. This

TAX-FREE WEEKEND

What it is: A holiday from state and county sales taxes; it's under way now and ends 11:59 p.m. Sunday.

What's tax-free: Numerous items, including clothing, \$100 or less per item; sports or recreational equipment \$50 or less per item; computers \$3,500 or less.

Visit www.newsobserver.com for a complete list of the items that are tax-exempt.

SEE TAX FREE, PAGE 15A

Dems avoid health forums

They say meetings are GOP set-ups

By ROB CHRISTENSEN AND TIM FUNK
MCLATCHY NEWSPAPERS

The town hall forum, long a hallmark of the August congressional recess, is disappearing this year as the partisan lines harden and tempers flare over the health care debate.

Democratic Rep. Brad Miller of Raleigh received a death threat from a constituent, his staff said.

The caller was angry that Miller wasn't holding a town hall meeting.

INSIDE

Two congressmen, Democrats Heath Shuler of Bryson City and Larry Kissell of Biscoe, are

phoning it in, holding a town hall meeting from the safe distance of a teleconference. Most other U.S. House members aren't even going that far.

Conservative critics of President Barack Obama's plan for health care reform are demanding town hall forums across the country, because they want to give members of Congress — particularly Democrats who support the president — an earful of why they think it is a bad idea. Several town halls in other states have become instant YouTube classics, with shouting, angry mobs humiliating congressmen. For the Democrats, it smells like a set-up by conservative advocacy groups such as Americans for Prosperity and FreedomWorks. Democrats say these groups are trying to torpedo meaningful health care reform.

"They were not interested in having a discussion," said Democratic Rep. Mel Watt of Charlotte, referring to what he called orchestrated efforts to push for a town hall meeting. "They were interested in having a town meeting they're going to disrupt."

SEE MEETINGS, PAGE 15A

A new justice, a new perspective



Supreme Court Justice designate Sonia Sotomayor is to be sworn in Saturday.

AP PHOTO BY MARY ALTAFFER

Ethnicity is far from only factor

By DAVID G. SAVAGE
CHICAGO TRIBUNE

WASHINGTON — Justice Sonia Sotomayor will bring something new and different to the Supreme Court, and far beyond the fact that she will be its first Latina.

Her background and experiences undoubtedly will affect her thinking and influence her decisions, but they are likely to do so in ways that were hardly mentioned during the Senate fight over her confirmation.

She will be the only justice whose first language was not English. She spoke Spanish at home as a child, and she will join a court that enforces a federal law that calls for equal opportunity in schools for children who do not speak English.

She has been diabetic since childhood, a medical condition that is classified as a disability under the federal law that forbids discrimination against people with physical or mental impairments.

Disability-rights advocates have suffered some big defeats in the court in the past decade, and they have high hopes for her. "We're very excited. We

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GRAND JURY CALLS RIELLE HUNTER



Rielle Hunter, John Edwards' former mistress, holds her daughter as she is escorted into the Terry Sanford Federal Building in Raleigh. A grand jury is investigating Edwards' use of campaign funds during his failed presidential bid. Story, Page 3B.

STAFF PHOTO BY TED RICHARDSON

Credit checks trap the jobless

By JONATHAN D. GLATER
THE NEW YORK TIMES

Digging out of debt keeps getting harder for the unemployed as more companies use detailed credit checks to screen job prospects.

Out of work since December, Juan Ochoa was delighted when a staffing firm recently responded to his posting on Hotjobs.com with an opening for a data entry clerk. Before he could do much more, though, the firm checked his credit history.

BY THE NUMBERS

More than 40 percent: Employers who used credit checks at least sometimes in 2004

25 percent: The percentage using them in 1998

The interest vanished. There were too many collections claims against him, the firm said.

"I never knew that nowadays they were going to start pulling credit checks on you even before

you go for an interview," said Ochoa, 46, who lost his job in December tracking inventory at a mining company in Santa Fe Springs, Calif. "Why would they need to pull a credit report? They'd need something like that if you were applying at a bank."

Once reserved for government jobs or payroll positions that could involve significant sums of money, credit checks are now fast, cheap and used for

SEE CREDIT, PAGE 14A