

# Nation/World

from The Associated Press

## Cuomo wins confirmation as HUD secretary

WASHINGTON — A third Clinton Cabinet choice won easy approval Wednesday, and four others sped toward confirmation. The only bump: Bill Richardson's U.N. hearing, which Sen. Jesse Helms used to accuse President Clinton of trying a backdoor route to paying old dues.

The Senate confirmed Andrew Cuomo's promotion to secretary of housing and urban development — the third 99-0 confirmation in as many votes after last week's approval of Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Defense Secretary William Cohen.

In addition, the Senate Commerce Committee recommended approval of Chicago attorney William M. Daley's nomination to be commerce secretary and held a congenial session with Transportation Secretary-designate Rodney Slater. The Finance Committee also gave Charlene Barshefsky a warm reception in considering her nomination as U.S. trade representative.

Helms, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said he was concerned that the administration may soon seek an emergency appropriation to start paying the United Nations \$912 million in back dues, thus ignoring his recommendation that repayment be tied to U.N. reforms.

# America Online to give refunds to customers, ease cancellation

NEW YORK (AP) — Threatened with lawsuits across the country, America Online agreed Wednesday to give refunds to customers who haven't been able to log on because of the overwhelming demand created by AOL's flat \$19.95-a-month rate.

Customers will be offered either cash or a month of free service. AOL had no immediate estimate of how much the settlement will cost.

The settlement was reached with 36 state attorneys general but applies to all 8 million of AOL's customers nationwide. Several of the states had threatened to sue America Online unless it promised refunds.

The nation's largest online service also agreed to make it easier for dissatisfied customers to cancel and said it will suspend its advertising for a month.

America Online, based in Dulles, Va., previously said it was selectively giving refunds. But it had refused to give blanket reimbursements.

The states had complained that AOL signed up hundreds of thousands of new customers without the means to accommodate the heavy usage. Some computer users trying to get online have gotten busy signals for hours on end.

"Under the consumer fraud laws of this state and many other states, you can't offer something to a subscriber and then not be able to deliver," Illinois Attorney General James Ryan said.

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**JAMES RYAN**  
Illinois attorney general

An America Online spokeswoman had no immediate comment. AOL previously said it plans to spend \$350 million by June on new equipment and staff to handle the demand.

In addition to the busy signals, AOL users have also seen a recent rash of technical glitches such as e-mail "brownouts" that occurred while America Online was trying to upgrade its network to accommodate the new users.

Refunds will be based on how much a customer was able to access AOL during December and January.

Customers will get a full refund for each month in which they connected for less than two hours. Customers who used less than eight hours during the two months will get back 50 percent.

People who connected for more than eight hours but less than 15 will

receive 25 percent refunds. Anyone who used more than 15 hours will not be eligible for a refund.

Instead of a refund, a customer can make a written request for a free month of service.

AOL will suspend advertising during February and add a disclaimer to ads thereafter warning that people may encounter delays logging on.

In addition, the company agreed to make it easier for unhappy online customers to drop out, including adding more phone operators, more lines for faxed cancellations and detailed online instructions.

America Online stock shot up \$1.75 to \$37 on the New York Stock Exchange. Analysts viewed the settlement as a necessary move by America Online to get past a barrage of bad publicity.



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