

Carolina Review

FLAP OVER....The flap of two weeks ago about five N.C. Department of Administration officials drawing big pay checks and not doing anything for the money is over. At the time, properly outraged legislative supporters of the governor fast disputed all accusations of the anonymous letter written cooperatively by five disgruntled clerical employees in Sec. Jane Patterson's department.

The tipsters did not step forward to back up their unsigned letter, so by last week.....well, not a creature was stirring.

No doubt clerical workers for the state (or anywhere else) ought not be able to jot down a nasty-maybe jealous-letter and automatically set the wheels of legislative inquiry to rolling. But there was something fishy about this episode. Few people in Raleigh, lawmakers, state workers, even people close to the governor, felt the scribbled sarcasm was totally untrue.

Most lawmakers accepted the facts in the letter as "facts of life."

"That's the way love goes," said one senator, implying that it was just "the way the political game is played."

Is it?

The unfortunate truth seems to be that state government has a lot of hard-working middle and lower level people doing the best they can with whatever they got. These busy, little "worker bees" though, are carrying a lot of dead weight-some people who would like to be "queen bee," and some who are just unintelligent but happen to know someone. Some higher level jobs are merely political payoffs with high-sounding titles (people in these jobs attend conferences in resort areas and write directives for the worker bees to buzz about).

All of the talk about "riffed" (laid-off) employees the past two years is true, but the "riffs" were the worker bees and not the dead weight. That, according to a Department of Transportation employee who has seen his engineering division cut from 28 to 3 while the P.R. office has rolled merrily along.

Let's be more specific, going back to the Dept. of Administration and Miriam Dorsey, a Democratic party activist and one of the people cited by the anonymous letter. The letter called Dorsey's recent appointment as the policy adviser for women's affairs as the "latest charade."

I called the N.C. Office of Policy and Planning and spoke with Dorsey's boss, Margaret Riddle. Ms. Riddle was real nice and tried to help me. I wanted to know who held Dorsey's job before Dorsey.

"Ted Parrish," said Riddle, "He's now with the Dept. of Human Resources."

"You mean a man previously held the position as a policy adviser for women?" I was a little surprised.

Apparently not. Riddle was patient enough to explain that Parrish's long-ago leaving had left a "vacant slot," which was eventually filled by creating the Dorsey spot.

According to Riddle, Parrish's duties were "absorbed."

"There are a lot of changes going on in the block grant process (federal funding)," Ms. Riddle said, "Jane (Sec. Patterson) wanted someone to look at the impact of those changes on women."

I tried to be objective. I really did, but Ms. Riddle was unable to convince me that Dorsey's job was necessary.

This doesn't have to be an indictment of Gov. Hunt, or even his political appointments. Frankly, we should expect--and appreciate--political appointments and patronage in our political system. What has happened in state government over the past several years could happen to any governor. It only becomes an indictment of Gov. Hunt if he ignores the current state of worker morale and the ludicrous job descriptions that seem to have surfaced of late.



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