

N.C. DOT pushing for end of racial goals

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tractor availability. Also, she said the bill is the recommendation of a recent disparity study that is required by state law every five years.

"The 2003 study recommends that NCDOT follow federal guidelines which requires specific project-based goals for federal projects," she said.

Memory said the annual budget for road construction is approximately \$1 billion, while the department's total budget is about \$3 billion. From Sept. 2004 to May

2005, NC minority businesses received 4.4 percent (\$28 million) of state dollars and 2.4 percent (\$19 million) of federal dollars.

Isaiah Green, president of Equal Treatment Now, has been watching the minority contracting bills in the Legislature closely.

Green was happy to see House Bill 237 die at the Senate this year. The bill set goals for African Americans to win federally funded projects at 10 percent.

"It was a victory for us," Green said. "My contention

is that it should not be just a mere goal. Instead, it should be the law. It should be mandated that they get no less than 10 percent."

Title 6 federal regulations prohibit any form of discrimination in employment where federal funds are being allocated.

"We have been putting pressure on North Carolina to compel them to do the right thing with federal funds," Green added.

Carnell Robinson, chair of the N.C. Black Leadership Caucus, vehemently opposes

Bill 1127. Robinson does not understand why the state attorney general, the governor and DOT officials are not supporting economic inclusion for African Americans.

"The attorney general should be up front and center trying to win this case for minority contractors," said Robinson, who said white general contractors are pushing for the bill.

In 2003, minority businesses received \$35 million in contracts and women-owned businesses \$102 million. In 2004, that amount increased to \$108 million for minorities and \$154 million for women.

Memory said the increase is the result of expanded outreach and training to minority businesses. In 2002, DOT

Secretary Lyndo Tippet formed the Minority Contractor Expansion Council that recently set up a new mentoring program that pairs experienced prime contractors with smaller ones.

Memory added that the agency also reorganized the Office of Civil Rights to allow the division to focus more on business development.

Mexico stamps criticized

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Mexico recently issued a series of five stamps bearing the image of Memin Pinguin, a black boy with thick lips, bug eyes and exaggerated physical features. He appears in a popular comic book that dates back to the 1940s.

In an interview with the Associated Press, Fox said, "Frankly, I don't understand the reaction. Let's hope they inform themselves and later form an opinion."

Jackson, who is working to ease tensions between Latinos and African-Americans, has already formed an opinion.

"It is offensive, and I think the Mexican government should apologize," he said in a statement. "It is harmful to international relations. It is harmful to the African American and Hispanic Coalition we are trying to build in this country."

Congressional Black Caucus Chairman Mel Watt (D-N.C.) also called for the stamps' removal.

"The members of the Congressional Black Caucus find the stamps insensitive, racist and an insult to people everywhere and we call on President Vicente Fox to recall the stamps immediately and to issue an apology to all people of African descent," Watt, a Charlotte Democrat, said in a statement. "The stamps are offensive and perpetuate a negative stereotype of people of the African Diaspora."

Jackson has asked President Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to intervene.

"It is their job to defend America from any foreign insult," Jackson said. "Our government did not defend our honor. If this was Iraq, you would expect our President to defend our honor. This should be an insult to every African American in his administration and those serving in Iraq. Secretary Rice, like the rest of us, is being depicted in a negative manner. A culture is expressed through its art. And this art is a cultural affront to not only black people in the U.S., black people in Mexico, but black people around the world."

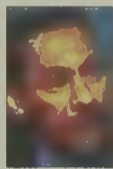
However, President Fox contends the images are not offensive.

"The other minorities or the Afro-Americans or

Latins, I would suggest to them that they first, read the magazine, get the information and then express publicly their opinion," Fox told the Associated Press. "On our

side, we know that all Mexicans love the character and we're going to keep it where it is as a recognition."

Additional reporting by Herbert L. White of The Charlotte Post.



Watt

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