

Budget changes affect thousands of children

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"We're hopeful that things will do well, but if they don't, we would try to avoid a cut in doctor's reimbursement rates," he said. "We wouldn't want to create a situation where we have fewer doctors to see the kids."

Durham County Health Director Brian Letournou is also concerned that the number of providers will be scaled back.

"If the number of providers is cut, and I think a 15 percent reduction is being proposed, that's a bad idea," he said. "It puts more of a burden on the other providers who, by nature of what they do, only have so many slots. There will end up being even fewer spots available, a longer waiting time and overall less access to care. We're basically on a downward spiral from there."

But the downside is that physicians could be paid less, and providers could be scaled back later on to cover the cost of the kids moving to Medicaid.

"If that's the price we pay for being able to serve more children, then it's worth it," Dalton said.

Schmidt said the government would keep reimbursement levels for doctors at the same level for a year, giving them time to weigh their options.

Former N.C. DOT employee sues for racial discrimination

By Sommer Brokaw
THE TRIANGLE TRIBUNE

RALEIGH — After a recent case involving a noose hanging in a North Carolina Department of Transportation maintenance shop, the agency is about to face new charges.

Isaiah Green Jr., a former NCDOT first lieutenant, recently filed an employment discrimination suit against the agency. He alleges harassment and retaliation for breach of contract in several employment cases in which he says the DOT failed to honor a good faith settlement contract entered with him in November 1999.

"I'm filing breach of contract for the simple fact that it has not been satisfied," Green said. "We honored our part, but the state didn't honor their part."

The suit will go before the Office of Administrative Hearings on Aug. 22.

Prior to the hearing, opposing counsel reviewed Green's testimony in a deposition. Green listed several race employment discrimination cases against the state dat-

ing back to 1986, including the most recent noose case, which is now before the U.S. Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals.

"We need to eradicate racism in the state workplace," Green said. "We've been able to get in the door but not above the glass ceiling."

As president of Equal Treatment Now, Green represented seven members of the DOT - called the DOT Seven - in the noose case. The court acknowledged that the noose was present but didn't assess blame.

"We are certainly not satisfied with the jury ruling when it came to penalizing the system in terms of monetary law," Green said.

Alan McSurely, attorney for the DOT seven, and an NAACP national award recipient, was present at the deposition. State Attorneys Allison Pluchos and Tracy Curtner were also in attendance.

Pluchos and Curtner asked Green who he gave a copy of the DOT breach of contract settlement to. Green replied that he had given copies to many people and the press.

He said he also carried copies to Washington, D.C., and the Department of Justice.

Green didn't point any fingers, but he said it was basically a systematic problem of hiring based on racial or political preference instead of merit that prevented African-Americans from upward mobility.

"This case involves the violation of constitutional rights through political patronage," Green said.

He told attorneys that his test scores were altered in the process of applying for two top positions: a major and lieutenant colonel. Green filed a complaint with the State Personnel Commission and was given a written warning because he discussed the case with the press. The warning prevented Green from getting a promotion higher than what he was holding which was first lieutenant in the DMV enforcement section.

Green alleges that his first and 14th amendment rights were violated when the department took action against him.

"This was my case and whatever I wanted to make known to the public I had the right to do that," he said. "The DOT can't prohibit me from talking to the press about what concerns me. The state can't make any laws or enforce any laws that deprive me of my immunity and privilege as a citizen of the United States. They can't deprive me of my rights for I have due process of the law."

Convention may focus Democrats on blacks

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Hatcher:

"We have seen an increase in the number of elected officials in the country, but our issues have moved to the back burner," he explains. "So, while we have a greater presence as elected officials, our people are still suffering."

He says next year's agenda will be expanded.

"This one will have more than political power on the table," he explains. "We're certainly going after economic empowerment because that underlies everything. And we're not going to stop at Gary."

Of course, they said that in 1972. The plan was to meet every two years. But that ended in 1976. Both Brown and Hatcher attribute that to an overemphasis on long-range goals.

Hatcher says it is a mistake for Democrats to presume that African-Americans will continue to turn out for them unless they have a clear message of inclusion.

"There is an alternative and I've seen that alternative for the last 20 or 25 years - declining votes," Hatcher states. "If blacks had come out in the numbers that they potentially have, Bush would not be president. From that point of view, that's the alternative."

He quickly adds, "We're not advocating declining participation. There ought to be more participation. But it

ought to be on a quality basis."

And so far, that's lacking, in Hatcher's view.

"The biggest knock on the Democrats is they don't have a message," he says.

"For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thy wounds, saith the Lord." - Jeremiah 30: 17

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