

Workers, Easley still at odds over pay

By Steve Hartsoe
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RALEIGH — Sucking on a lollipop as he emerged from a meeting with House Speaker Jim Black, Dana Cope led a group of reporters into a conference room to explain what kind of deal he'd worked out for state employees.

He wanted another \$150 for the workers he represents.

He didn't get it. The reasons may be more than just financial, although that was the explanation cited when Democratic Gov. Mike Easley threatened to veto the state budget if it included a side deal for the extra \$150.

There's a long history of discontent between lawmakers in Raleigh and the State Employees Association of North Carolina, of which Cope is the executive director. And while Cope remains hopeful there's still a better deal to be made this year, the budget was set and legislators moved on to other issues before adjourning this week.

Several years ago, association members referred to legislative leaders as "cockroaches" during a rally. Last year, the association

endorsed Easley's challenger, Republican Patrick Ballantine, who promised them a 5 percent annual raise in each of the following three years if elected.

Easley won the group's endorsement when he first ran for governor in 2000. But four years later, Cope said his group's members were "fed up" with the pay raises that they had received since. Their discontent had been stirred by the governor's 2001 decision to intercept \$130 million headed to the state employees' retirement system, money used instead to help balance the state's budget.

"Now, supporting the wrong person for governor, it was pretty much agreed to most people that Gov. Easley was going to be elected," Black said in an interview. "And (Cope) just spent a half-million dollars trying to beat an incumbent governor."

Three-fourths of the state work force makes less than \$38,000 per year, according to the employees association.

This year, the group initially lobbied for a 5 percent raise. Ultimately, they could only get a raise of 2 percent or \$850, whichever is

greater, and an extra week of vacation.

It appeared last week that the employees association had worked out a deal with legislative leaders to give rank-and-file workers another \$150. But the backslapping quickly dissolved when Easley warned lawmakers he'd veto any budget that included the extra \$150, which would have cost the state about \$22 million. Easley said the money would have busted his self-imposed spending increase limit of 5.6 percent.

Cope said he doesn't believe Easley killed the bonus because of last year's endorsement. He called it "growing pains" as the association develops more clout at the negotiating table, led this year by freshman Rep. Linda Coleman, D-Wake, a former state worker.

"It's hard for me to believe that the governor could be so petty that because of that election endorsement by our rank-and-file members that he would prevent a \$150 pay raise per employee that are already hurting, making real choices between prescription medicine and food on the table," he said.

The North Carolina

Association of Educators, which represents about 70,000 workers, also sought a 5 percent raise, and they appear to fair better than the state employees in the final budget.

Public school teachers got an average 2.24 percent raise, but the budget also includes another \$85 million this year to boost teacher salaries in response to last year's Leandro school funding ruling. The extra money equates to an average 2 per-

cent raise, if given across the board.

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FILE PHOTO

Historically-black Barber-Scotia College will not offer room and board to students during the 2005-06 academic year. The school expects to save \$1 million as a result.

Room, board out at Barber-Scotia

By Herbert L. White
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For the first time ever, Barber-Scotia College will be strictly a commuter school.

The historically-black Concord school will begin classes Sept. 14, but will suspend residential services for students for the 2005-2006 academic year. Prospective and returning students are being notified about this significant change. Students will be refunded their deposits as well as given referral assistance in case they wish to attend another institution. Registration and orientation is Sept. 12-13.

Thomas G. Robinson, chairman of the school's board of trustees, said the school eliminated housing to reduce expenses that would drain academic programs.

"Eliminating this expense will save approximately \$1 million and will allow us to focus our time and resources on strengthening our academic program while we continue to pursue new funding streams and seek restoration of our

accreditation," Robinson said in a statement. "It is important that this 138 year old historically black college remain open to students while at the same time, regain a solid financial footing."

President Gloria Bromell-Tinubu said "the devastating loss of accreditation in June of 2004 set in motion a chain reaction of negative events, including the loss of federal funding and a major reduction in student enrollment. By scaling back, the College plans to continue serving students while exploring new ideas — such as a planned focus on business administration, entrepreneurship, and distance learning — to restore the College's long-term viability."

Barber-Scotia is getting help from professional consultants whose costs have been underwritten by the Presbyterian Church USA. An action plan and multi-year timetable for meeting strategic goals is in the works, officials say.

"The board and the administration are optimistic about the future of the college with this plan of action," Robinson said.

"Our constituents are eager for us to return to the prestigious past Barber-Scotia College once had," Tinubu said. "To do so, we must patiently scale down and find other means to become viable."

UN chief brings attention to Niger

Continued from page 1A

rent epidemic of acute malnutrition in Niger, and its response continues to be inadequate."

Annan did not respond directly to the criticism, saying only: "I was very impressed with what MSF is trying to do in Niger."

Marcus Prior, a U.N. official with the World Food Program in Niger, expressed surprise at the group's critique.

"We work very closely with them in our operations here and are surprised these concerns weren't raised in Zinder," he said. "We need to focus on doing what is most important for the people in Niger, which is rolling out free food distribution in the villages as widely and as quickly as possible."

An estimated 3.6 million people are going hungry in Niger alone. The United Nations says at least 1.6 million people in Mali, Burkina Faso and Mauritania are also affected.

Niger's government and the United Nations issued largely ignored appeals for aid starting in November and top U.N. officials criticized donors for their failure to help. Earlier this month, U.N. agencies increased their appeals to a total of \$75 million for Niger.

In its statement, Medecins Sans Frontieres said U.N. food distributions were "not reaching those with the greatest needs, especially children under five years of age in the worst-affected areas."

The group also said the crisis appeared to be worsening in some places. It said one of its emergency feeding centers had admitted 1,053 children Aug. 8-14, compared to 403 for all of July.

Before flying to the capital, Niamey, Annan visited the village of Madara, nine miles north of Zinder. People told Annan they are too poor to buy food, which has become drastically more expensive because of the shortages.

"We're hungry, even if the government doesn't want to hear it," one villager, Abdou Iliassou, told The Associated Press. "We want the international community to keep helping us."

Niger's president drew criticism from opposition leaders after declaring that his people "look well-fed," despite the pictures of malnourished babies that have streamed out of the impoverished nation for weeks.

Tandja acknowledged food shortages, but said they were relatively normal for the nations of the Sahel, a region of arid scrubland that straddles the southern edge of the Sahara Desert.



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CHARLOTTE AREA TRANSIT UNION

On October 3, 2005, CATS will implement a system-wide fare increase. Over the last two years, CATS has created and enhanced neighborhood shuttle routes; expanded service to the towns of Mecklenburg County; begun operation and expansion of the Charlotte Trolley; increased services for disabled customers; and, provided express buses to surrounding counties.

The new fares will aid CATS in keeping pace with costs associated with expanded services and increasing fuel prices. The new fares will affect all of CATS bus services.

TYPE OF SERVICE	CURRENT FARE	10/03/05 NEW FARE	TYPE OF SERVICE	CURRENT FARE	10/03/05 NEW FARE
Local	\$1.50	\$1.20	Children 48 inches tall or less		
Express	\$1.50	\$1.05	accompanied by an adult	\$4.00	\$4.00
Express Plus	\$2.20	\$2.40	Gold Rush		
ST/ADA Service	\$1.00	\$1.00			
Reverse Commute express	\$1.70	\$1.20	PASSES		
Community Shuttle Services			Weekly Pass (unlimited rides)	\$11.00	\$12.00
Village Riders, Neighborhood			Monthly Pass (unlimited rides)	\$44.00	\$48.00
Circulator, Junior, Senior, and Access	\$50	\$50	Express Monthly Pass (unlimited rides)	\$68.00	\$68.00
Charlotte Trolley	\$1.00	\$1.00	Express Plus Pass (unlimited rides)	\$88.00	\$96.00
People 62 years and up with disability, with valid ID or Medicare card			ST/ADA Monthly Pass	\$44.00	\$72.00
Children 12 and under with valid ID			10-Ride Local Pass	\$9.15	\$10.70
accompanied by an adult Local			10-Ride Express Pass	\$13.20	\$14.80
Express and Express Plus	\$40/50/65/80	\$40/50/65/80	10-Ride Express Plus Pass	\$18.70	\$20.40
Students through high school with valid ID (Local service only)	\$54	\$40			

For additional information call 704-338-8062.



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