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Thousands in N. C. Expected to Protest Possible Budget Cuts This Saturday

By Cash Michaels
Special to the NNPA from the
Wilmington Journal
WILMINGTON (NNPA) - If recent reports are any indication, people suffering from HIV/AIDS, the elderly and children, and even victims of North Carolina's forced sterilization program, will see the short end of the budget stick after Gov. Beverly Perdue and state lawmakers decide how to make up an estimated \$2 billion budget shortfall.

The state NAACP has wasted no time demanding that no matter how bad the deficit, the programs that serve the poor and needy should be protected, not decimated.

"Don't balance the state budget on the backs of the poor," Rev. William Barber II, NC NAACP president, read from a letter addressed to Gov. Perdue, House Speaker Joe Hackney and Senate President Pro tem Marc Basnight at the civil rights group's winter conference in Durham.

"We must say to folks in the state of North Carolina whom we love and have great respect for that you will not ride the coattail of a president of change, and then keep doing business the same old way," Rev. Barber continued, reminding all how Perdue and the Democrats owe their recent election victories to the overwhelming black support President Barack Obama attracted to the polls last November.

Barber believes that it would be a double-cross for those same Democratic leaders to now cut the very educational and social programs the black community supports. The NC NAACP and its 85 coalition partners plan to further make their case during their third "Historic Thousands on Jones Street Rally and March Saturday, Feb. 14 in Raleigh, which is expected to attract an estimated 10,000 supporters.

"We are concerned about the least of these and will they get their fair share of the general funds," Rev. Barber said.

But so far, a week after the General Assembly reconvened for its biannual long session, the NC Legislative Black Caucus, led by Democrat Rep. Alma Adams of Guilford County, has said precious little in defense of the programs that serve a good number of the low-income African-American constituencies in caucus members' districts.

Sources close to the black lawmakers say they're holding their fire, if any is to come at all, until various legislative budget committees get a closer look at what Gov. Perdue is proposing to cut.

Many of Perdue's possible reductions may ultimately include not only programs, but also across the board state agency layoffs. Indeed Perdue directed agency heads this week to begin preparing layoff lists in case she ultimately has to pull that budget reduction trigger.

Beyond layoffs, some of the suggested program cuts - cuts that the governor's spokesperson is quoted as saying may not be deep enough - indeed impact vital services for the poor and communities of color across the state.

"We are going to be hit hard," said N. Camell Robinson, president of the NC Black Leadership Caucus, noting that the worst burden is going to be on those programs that provide direct services to the poor.

Some "reduction options" already forwarded to the governor, according to the Greensboro News & Record newspaper this week, include reducing \$458,850 in funding to the NC Housing Finance Agency, reducing almost a million dollars to the Office of Rural Health; over \$2.6 million to the Division of Aging and Adult Services; over \$25 million to the NC Division of Child Development; over \$2.3 million from the Office of Education Services; over \$13 million from



REV. BARBER

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the state Division of Public Health, which includes cutting funding from such programs as public assistance to maternity clinics, HIV/STD Prevention-AIDS Drug Assistance program, and local aid to counties; cutting over \$16 million from the Division of Social Services; over \$224 million from the Division of Medical Assistance; and almost \$50 million from the Division of Mental Health, among other suggested cuts.

"This is the worst time for the state to transfer the cost of some of these programs to the local governments," Robinson said, noting how Durham Mayor Bill Bell this week warned that unless city employees develop efficiencies, city government may have to also cut services and layoff workers.

Thanks to the global economic downturn, North Carolina is among several states swimming in red ink thanks to lower than expected tax revenue collections.

Things are so tough that the state may have to borrow money from the federal government just to pay out tens of millions of dollars in unemployment benefits to the over 400,000 jobless here.

Gov. Perdue is hoping to get at least \$16 billion from the economic stimulus package President Obama got passed in the US House last week, and hopes will fly through the US Senate next, despite staunch Republican opposition.

One of the measures that couldn't come at a worst time is a bill, finally endorsed by the state House leadership, to pay upwards of \$19 million in damages to the now elderly victims of the state's forced sterilization program.

An estimated 7,600 poor white and black teenage girls, deemed many times to be erroneously mentally ill, were sterilized by order of the state between 1929 and 1974 to prevent them from having more children. The practice, upheld by the US Supreme Court, was part of the racist "eugenics" program of the early 1920's.

Rep. Larry Womble of Winston-Salem has been a staunch advocate for the victims of the program to be compensated at least \$20,000 each by the state for what was done to them, but thus far all he could get was an apology from Gov. Mike Easley in 2003, and state lawmakers to strike the eugenics law from the books thereafter.

There had been stiff resistance to even addressing the reparations issues until Speaker Joe Hackney last year assured Womble that his bill would get fair consideration during a study committee.

House Bill 20, which is now in the House Committee on Rules, Calendar and Operations of the House, would become effective in July if passed.

But even though Gov. Perdue had expressed support for helping the sterilization victims during her run for office in January 2008, given the current budget crunch, will she and the General Assembly follow through, or will those victims, many of whom are elderly women now, continue to die off without the state ever making amends?

Editor's note - The NCNAACP's Third Annual "HK on J" rally and march is scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 14 starting at 9:30 a.m. with a rally at Chavis Park in Raleigh, and then at 10:30 a.m. a march to the



ECNS sophomore Justin Reid joined NCCU Chancellor Charlie Nelms at the podium to offer thanks to AT&T - North Carolina for underwriting the Virtual High School Program. See story and pictures on page 2.

On 100th Anniversary, NAACP Challenges First Black President

By Hazel Trice Edney
NNPA Columnist

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Upon its 100th anniversary this week, the NAACP under the leadership of Benjamin Todd Jealous, set aside euphoria over the historic inauguration of the first black president and challenged the Obama administration on where he stands on human and civil rights issues as they pertain to people of color.

"We're not simply interested in a bail out for Main Street, it's a good goal. It's a good starting point. But, we want a fix for back street," says Jealous in a telephone press conference leading up to Feb. 12, the 100th birthday of the nation's oldest civil rights organization. "At the end of the day, we are not an organization who's here merely to celebrate any milestone too much. On Jan. 20, we celebrated Obama as the nation's first black president and first president of color. On Jan. 21, we were well aware that he simply became the 44th president of the United States and all pressures that have worked the agenda of the presidents before him came to bear on him."

He continues, "So, now, we're out there with everybody else trying to make sure that his agenda is our agenda, that his agenda is one of civil rights and inclusion and opportunity for all. And right now there are two things that we're concerned are not getting sufficient attention."

The first issue that he listed was the need for federal enforcement of black participation in jobs and contracts coming out of the \$827 billion economic stimulus act, that has passed the House and is being negotiated in the U. S. Senate this week.

"White unemployment [stats], since they've been calculated since 1940, have never gotten into double digits. Yet somehow this country finds it tolerable and somewhat normal to have black unemployment in the double digits," Jealous says.

The second issue is the need for law enforcement accountability - federal oversight and enforcement of police profiling and misconduct, which former President Bush promised, but never delivered in 2001.

"We're lifting this up and placing it squarely in front of the administration and we'll be pushing harder now now that we know who the attorney general is," Jealous says, referring to Eric Holder, also black. "We have a decade of repressed aspirations since 1999 when candidate Bush promised to end racial profiling and driving while black and it hasn't happened yet. But, we also need to see the Law Enforcement Trust and Integrity Act passed. We also need to see real reforms in police officer use of force and training."

Referring to protests in the wake of the in-the-back police shooting of a restrained unarmed man in an Oakland subway, Jealous said, "We've had a riot in Oakland in the winter. We've had a riot in an American city in the winter because of the BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit) police killing."

Jealous said the NAACP has local affiliates dealing with high profile police killings in at least a half dozen states.

Jealous said he would release specific policy proposals in a "White Paper" on Wednesday this week, the day before the 100th Anniversary celebration of the organization founded in 1909. A White Paper is an authoritative report or guide that outlines problems and suggests ways to solve them from expert perspective.

Jealous said proposals in the White Paper would include:

* That the Department of Labor beef up staffing in their solicitors office that handle discrimination. Also that they beef up staffing in the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs so that as the stimulus dollars flow through, there won't be the same tattered infrastructure left by the Bush administration "and we won't see a repeat of the sloppiness that we saw in Iraq and that we saw in New Orleans."

* That the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division be rebuilt to enforce a wide spectrum of civil rights laws.

* That every stimulus-created job that is awarded to a general contractor or to sub-contractors be contracted through the federal employment service so that federal authorities will monitor who gets the jobs. "We need to send a clear message that tax payer dollars should create jobs for everybody. We don't want people discriminated against based on age, gender, race or anything else," Jealous said.

* Greater oversight for banks, brokers and a major investment in public education "because we're tired of black people with good credit and assets being fleeced. We want them protected."

The White Paper will include the NAACP's Agenda pertaining to the Obama Administration for the first year. He said the Goals of the NAACP for the next 25 years of the 21st century will be released at its 100th Annual Convention in July in New York.

Issuing the White Paper to the Obama Administration is only one major action taken by the civil rights organization amidst the economic havoc in the black community.

The organization is moving ahead with a federal lawsuit to force 15 major financial institutions to cease alleged racial discrimination and rogue sub-prime home mortgage lending.

A federal Judge last month denied a joint motion filed by the institutions to stop the NAACP from moving ahead with the suit. The lenders are now required to release information and documents regarding their mortgage policies and practices, according to an NAACP news release.

The Mortgage lenders named in the lawsuit include: Accredited Home Lenders, Inc.; Ameriquest Mortgage Co.; Bear Sterns Residential Mortgage Corp.; Encore Credit; Chase Bank USA; Citimortgage; First Franklin

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