

NNPA pullout

From Page A1

some of us were already out there and hotel reservations had all been made. We didn't want to do it, but we felt compelled to do it."

About 200 people were to have attended the convention in the Holiday Inn Corporate Center.

More than 50 of the publishers had already arrived in Phoenix

and were on hand when Bennett announced the meeting's cancellation at a hastily called press conference.

Dr. Warren H. Stewart Sr., general chairman of Arizonians For A Martin Luther King Jr. State Holiday, praised the NNPA's stance.

"We applaud the NNPA and hope that other agencies and organizations will join the bandwagon...." Stewart said last week.

Meanwhile, Michelle Eckart, general manager of the Holiday Inn Corporate Center, said Mecham's actions have hurt Arizona's image.

"It affects tourism and it affects us and I think that's how we will be seen nationally as opposed to sunshine," she said. "I think it's an ugly mark on (the Phoenix area)."

Eckart said the cancellation cost her hotel between \$25,000 and \$30,000.

Eight of North Carolina's black newspapers are NNPA members, including the *Carolina Peacemaker* in Greensboro, the *Iredell County News* in Statesville, *The Wilmington Journal* and the *Chronicle*.

The organization held its summer convention last June in Winston-Salem at the Hyatt Hotel.

Loss of tourism

From Page A1

million to \$6 million into the economy of the area where it is held.

Another group, which Marks said had asked not to be identified, also has "expressed concern" but has not canceled its convention, scheduled to be held in Phoenix during the early 1990s, he said.

Tourism is Arizona's second-largest industry, accounting for an estimated 200,000 jobs, Marks said. He said 14 million people who visit Arizona each year contribute about \$4 billion to the state's economy.

Convention business contributed about \$300 million to the economy of the Phoenix metropolitan area last year, Marks said.

Victor Teye, professor of leisure studies at Arizona State University, said the King Day rescission creates a potential for long-term damage to the state's tourism industry.

"It depends on how long this goes on," he said. "If it goes on for a long time, it could have a snowballing effect."

Tourism "really depends on image," Teye said. "People only know what they read and hear and are not likely to visit an area that has a negative image in their minds."

Teye and Marks said that Mecham's proposal to let the state's voters instead of the Legislature decide whether Arizona should have a King holiday could be even more damaging -- if the voters reject the idea.

"Should it go to a vote of the people and not pass, it would send out a very negative message," Marks said. "And that could be much more damaging to the image of the state."

During a separate interview, Teye agreed, adding, "Then not only would we be talking about a government policy, but you are putting it in the context of the people of the state, who are known for warmth,

friendliness and hospitality, showing that they are not in the mainstream with most other states that have done this (adopted a King holiday)."

Mecham has said that he rescinded the holiday because it was declared illegally, a view supported by a state attorney general's opinion. Mecham also has questioned whether King deserved a holiday. He refused to comment on the boycott effort.

"I have no comment on anything relating to a King holiday, period ... I just don't want to. I choose not to," Mecham said. "I think it has been beat to death. I've ordered everybody on my staff that there is no comment."

Victor Heller, Mecham's newly appointed state tourism director, said that his boss considers tourism and the King holiday issue as "two separate items on the table."

"His cancellation of the holiday was based on his belief that it was illegal," Heller said. "At the same time, he has made a commitment to substantially strengthen our office."

Heller said his job probably will not be made more difficult by the cancellation.

"Our markets are really more in the leisure traffic market,"

Heller said. "We aren't tied into groups that are trying to bring big conventions to Arizona. We are dealing primarily with individuals."

There is "only one Grand Canyon," Heller said, "and people are still going to want to see it."

Heller said the situation was similar to attempts by women's organizations to boycott states that failed to pass the Equal Rights Amendment.

"I'm not really sure how effective those sorts of actions actually are," he said. "I don't know of a single state that said, 'Boy, that (ERA) boycott really hurt us.'"

He added that it was too soon to tell whether or how much the state's image would suffer as a result of the controversy. But, he said, "We certainly don't want to develop a negative image on anything so far as people's perception of Arizona is concerned."

Teye, the university professor, said that any damage to Arizona's image can be repaired, if something is done soon.

"There has been a lot of milk spilled, and it is time to start mopping up," he said. "The Legislature should act on this very quickly because I don't think Mecham is going to change his mind."

The Winston-Salem Chronicle is published every Thursday by the Winston-Salem Chronicle Publishing Co. Inc., 617 N. Liberty St. Mailing address: Post Office Box 3154, Winston-Salem, N.C. 27102. Phone: 722-8624. Second-class postage paid at Winston-Salem, N.C. 27102. The **Winston-Salem Chronicle** is a charter member of the Newsfinder service of the Associated Press and a member of the Audit Bureau of Circulations, the National Newspaper Publishers Association, the North Carolina Press Association and the North Carolina Black Publishers Association. Subscription: \$18.52 per year, payable in advance (North Carolina sales tax included). Please add \$5.00 for out-of-town delivery. PUBLICATION USPS NO. 067910.

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