

Black farmers say settlement amounts to 'slim pickins'

By DAMON FORD
THE CHRONICLE

March 2, may be the day of reckoning for black farmers. March 2, is the day U.S. District Court Judge Paul Friedman will either approve or disapprove of the dissent decree that will allow black farmers to settle up with the government for almost \$400 million. Two years ago the farmers filed a lawsuit against the department for discriminatory

practices suffered from 1981-1996, but a recent settlement by the two sides has all but eliminated the court case and now the March 2 fairness hearing is the target date. The settlement outlines several options for blacks including a \$50,000 cash payout in conjunction with debt forgiveness on past loans. Farmers also have the opportunity to receive more money if they are able to prove a "preponderance of discrimination."

Which farmers say is a problem. "We're happy that the government has decided to put a settlement on the table, but we are not pleased with the fine print," said Gary Grant, National Black Farmers and Agriculturalist Association president. Grant, a farmer from Tillery says the \$50,000 offered to the thousands of farmers who signed up to be part of the suit, but it's a drop in the bucket

compared to the 10 to 15-year struggle they have had to endure. "(The USDA) can never make up for all they have done, but certainly they can make a valiant effort to help the farmers," he said. The class action suit which was filed by lead plaintiff and Bladen County farmer Tim Pigford was worth \$3 billion but according to Grant, the settlement proposed by the government amounts to a tenth of that

figure. Grant says the disparity could eventually eliminate the black farmer in the coming years since many cannot continue to make a living tilling the land. But not all farmers agree. Sam Taylor, NBFAA executive director who has been in the fight for black farmers since 1990, has a different take on the recent settlement. "I believe in the dissent decree," Taylor said. "The dissent decree while it is not a per-

fect solution, it is a honorable solution." The 41-year-old points out that the package black farmers have is better than what appears on paper. Taylor says when you add the \$50,000 cash payout with the elimination of past loan debts along with the legal fees that are waived the average dollar value for each farmer jumps to \$150,000-\$200,000. Taylor also says a fairness hearing scheduled for March

See Farmers on A11

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Taxi drivers up in arms



Ali Shabazz, owner of A&S Taxi Service, says the city's new insurance requirements for cab services is squeezing small companies out of the market. "We offer an alternative, but we can't get out there like we want to," Shabazz said.

Insurance rate triples; small companies on rocks

By T. KEVIN WALKER
THE CHRONICLE
The city underscored its commitment to nurture upstart businesses last week when the innovative venture-capital investment program squeezed its way through the board of aldermen. But several local taxicab owners say the city has erected a brick wall on their path to success blocking them from achieving the American Dream. Six, mostly small, independent cab owners have signed a letter urging aldermen to lower the minimum amount of liability insurance that each taxi must have. They say the city requires

them to be insured at a level higher than anywhere else in the state. "Transportation is an important asset in this city. We offer an alternative, but we can't get out there like we want to," said Ali Shabazz, owner of A & S Taxi Service. Shabazz, who owns and operates just one taxi, said he was forced to stop transporting passengers last month because he could not afford the insurance premiums. He now is only permitted to transport parcels. Shabazz said he easily made \$400 a week transporting passengers, but now he's lucky to bring in \$100.

Many of his cohorts have also felt the squeeze, he says. The state sets minimum insurance liability rates for most vehicles at \$25,000 per person, \$50,000 per accident and \$15,000 to cover property damage. Most cities require taxi drivers only to be insured for the minimum. Until about three years ago, Winston-Salem was one of those cities. Citing a concern for the safety of citizens, the board of aldermen voted to drastically raise the liability minimums for taxicabs to \$300,000 per accident, \$100,000 per individual and \$50,000 for property damage. Cab owners say the higher

minimum rates have sent their insurance premiums soaring from about \$1,000 a year per vehicle to \$3,000. Dallas Hamilton, owner of Dallas Cab Co., and Shabazz say they both had hoped to add additional vehicles to their fledgling operations, but the city's liability minimums have put that dream on hold indefinitely. "This (insurance rates) is just hurting me," Hamilton said, "We think this was done to keep smaller companies out." But the city's transportation director said the move was made to give citizens maximum protec-

See Taxi on A10

12th back in court District once again faces challenge in high court

By HERBERT WHITE AND JOHN MINTER
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The 12th Congressional District is back before the U.S. Supreme Court. North Carolina officials are challenging an appeals court ruling last year that a 12th district map, redrawn in 1997, was unconstitutional. The 4th circuit appeals court panel, in a lawsuit brought by Robinson Everett, a Duke University law professor, said that race was the main factor in determining the district's boundaries. The panel ordered the legislature to redraw the 12th district a third time. The legislators hurriedly did so last year and the Congressional primary was delayed from May until September. Rep. Mel Watt, D-Charlotte, was elected to a fourth term in November, beating Salisbury dentist Scott Keadle to become the first African American elected in a predominantly white district in North Carolina this century. In 1992, Watt and Rep. Eva Clayton, a Democrat who represents the 1st Congressional District, became the first blacks elected to Congress from North Carolina this century. Both were elected in predominantly black districts drawn after the 1990 census. Then, the 12th District meandered from Gastonia to Durham, along I-85, earning it the nickname, "The Snake." Supporters said it was drawn to link urban areas. The district then was more than 60 percent black voters.

See 12th District on A3

Nobel winner to speak at universities

From STAFF REPORTS

Wole Soyinka - a Nigerian-born author and poet who became the first black to win the Nobel Prize for literature in 1986 - will speak at two local universities next week. Soyinka, the current Woodruff Professor of the Arts at Emory University, will deliver the Founder's Day Convocation address at Wake Forest University on Feb. 2. The free ceremony is open to the public. It will start at 11 a.m. in Wait Chapel. Soyinka's visit is part of Wake's Year of Globalization and Diversity, a 12-month program that will focus on development around the world and globalization. The following day, Soyinka will keynote the next Joseph N. Patterson Lecture series at Winston-Salem State University. The lecture at WSSU, will also be free and open to the public. It will begin at 10:00 a.m. in the Kenneth R. Williams Auditorium. Educated at the University of Ibadan in his native Nigeria and the University of Leeds in Great Britain, Soyinka has authored 24 plays, four novels, six volumes of poems and countless numbers of essays on subjects like art, literature and culture. He has also taught at many universities around world, including Yale

See Nobel on A11

New session offers hope for blacks

By ARCHIE T. CLARK II
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RALEIGH - With Democrats taking center stage after November elections ousted the GOP majority in the N.C. House of Representatives, members of the General Assembly say issues affecting African Americans across the state stand to gain more consideration. Topics that will face scrutiny by the new Democratic regime include welfare reform, minority economic development and aid to chronically underfunded historically black colleges and universities. Four years ago the Republicans had a similar victory by claiming the House in much the same way the Democrats took charge in the

last election. In November Republicans lost seven seats in the House and five seats in the Senate, and their cry of "revolution" was over. Now observers say African Americans stand to gain. Mickey Michaux, D-Durham, says the large voter turnout among minorities in the last election warrants an equal response from legislators when the new session gets underway. In November black voters went to the polls in record numbers making up nearly half of all of the voters that cast ballots. Now Michaux believes minorities are in a position to make demands on legislature but such action should not be necessary. "After the last election, anyone who does not prioritize minority needs near the top is fooling them-

selves," Michaux said. "It is evident from the election results what happened, and black people should not ever be in a position where they have to throw it up into their face." Topics in past sessions were often debated by Democrats with only mild success including welfare reform, particularly Work First, and reoccurring minority economic development issues. "This shift of power will definitely have an effect," Michaux said. "There will be some changes to welfare issues. And I would like to see the minority economic development put on to the continuation budget. We have been successful keeping money in the budget for these businesses, but they

See Session on A11

Holy alliance



Organizers of an East Winston restaurant are taking their pitch to local churches. For full story, see page A3.