

N.C. NAACP dispute

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brother, Alfred Alexander, and mother, Margaret Alexander, to their old committee posts.

"I'm trying to extend an olive branch," Alston said. "We should be about our business and put aside any resentments we might have."

Kelly Alexander, however, said that if Alston were serious about reconciling differences within the state conference, he would rescind his committee assignments and stop trying to extend his personal power.

"The clear attempt here is to change the alignments," Alexander said. "If the appointments stand, these will be people who have primary loyalty to Mr. Alston. It will, in effect, become his committee."

"His actions seem to indicate he wants to be president of the organization."

Alston said he would accept the presidency if it was offered

to him.

However, in May the NAACP passed a new rule barring political candidates from serving as NAACP officers. Alston filed his candidacy for re-election to the Guilford Board of Commissioners four months before the rule was passed. If re-elected, Alston said, he would ask the state executive board to rule on whether he has a conflict of interest leading the state NAACP and being a county commissioner.

By then, Alexander's fate will have been decided.

Alexander was suspended by the national board of directors in May after Alston and other NAACP leaders alleged that he used an improper signature on checks withdrawing organization funds and may have used NAACP money for personal expenses.

"The charges are all unsupported," Alexander said.

Auditors will begin an investigation of Alexander's finan-

cial dealings this week. Using their findings, the national leadership will decide in October whether to reinstate Alexander or remove him permanently.

Black spending

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increase over \$4.1 billion a year earlier, the study found. That compares to just a 9 percent increase over a year ago for white households.

The survey analyzed in-person interviews and diaries taken from 3,000 black households for the U.S. Department of Commerce's annual consumer spending survey.

Among other findings, the average black household:

Spends \$1,592 a year on clothing, compared to \$1,650 for whites. But blacks outspent whites nearly 10 percent more on clothing for children under 15, \$292 vs. \$265.

Spends an average 48 percent more than whites on food prepared at home, including fresh meat, fish, eggs and poultry.

The numbers emphasize the differences in spending between blacks and other segments of the population and could give businesses more insight into how to expand markets believed saturated among the general population.

Following the general trend of the population as a whole, blacks posted large increases in purchases of appliances and consumer electronics. Smikle said the survey did not ask if blacks had bought new homes, although the numbers suggest a significant amount did.

Spending on travel and lodging fell 6 percent to \$4.2 bil-

lion from \$4.5 billion a year earlier, mostly on declining expenses for air and train travel. Expenditures for entertainment and leisure held steady at \$1.8 billion, the survey found.

Some call the findings conservative. A University of Georgia study conducted last year estimated black disposable income, or the amount of money available for spending after deducting taxes, at \$406 billion in 1995 and \$427 billion in 1996.

"The story is one of demographics," said Jeffrey Humphreys, the university's director of economic forecasting. "The black population is increasing faster than the overall population, meaning there are more black consumers."

Black buying power is likely to increase even more over the next decade because the majority of black consumers today are young and have not reached their full earnings potential, Humphreys said.

Businesses are taking note. Sears, Roebuck & Co., for example, buys a line of clothing tailored specifically to blacks in heavily black areas and this fall in Oakland, Ca., is opening up its first inner-city store in years. Other Fortune 500 companies hire black advertising and marketing firms to tailor their pitches to that segment.

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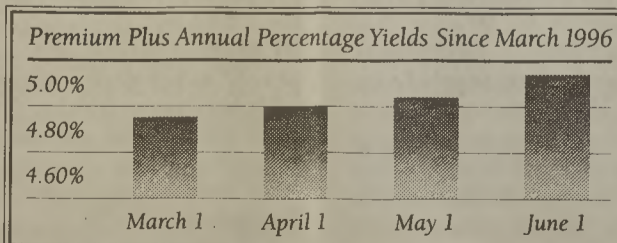


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