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Doing right thing, but at what cost?

By John Minter
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Saying he was voting his conscience, Mecklenburg county commissioner Hoyle Martin sided with Democrats to pass a \$781 million county budget Tuesday that set a 68-cent tax rate for 1998-99. He'd drawn criticism from conservatives since he cast an identical vote in a straw poll of the nine commissioners Friday on a budget proposal by Republican Bill James that would have cut funding to schools, social services and environmental services. ("Commissioners chairman)

Martin swings liberal on budget

Bush wanted to go in with the thing on Wednesday night and vote in it then," Martin said. "That's why I asked to delay it one more night. You can't do that. But they made another change, a big cut in social service programs and there was some uncertainty about jobs being cut. I didn't want county employees to lose their jobs. I said I couldn't do that." Black political leaders said they were pleased with Martin's vote. Eric Douglas, chairman of the Black Political Caucus, denied Martin was

pressured by the black community, as James suggested. "I think Hoyle had a moral responsibility to vote for a budget that would help those people on the west-side," he said. "It was an obligation to his district. These are human lives you are talking about. He had to be true to his



Martin

constituency." County manager Jerry Fox's budget gave the school system all the money it requested, including \$6 million for a complete overhaul of its construction and building maintenance department. James' budget would have cut that out. James said Martin had betrayed Republican commissioners by promising to support the budget cuts, but then bowing to pressure from blacks and Democrats to switch sides. Martin denied James' allegations. Martin told The Post last See MARTIN on page 2A

Without more eligible voters, drive may fizzle

By John Minter
THE CHARLOTTE POST

It's crunch time for Hoyle Martin's effort to win reelection to the Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioners. Martin says he has about 11,000 signatures on a petition to include his name on the November ballot as an independent at-large candidate. He has until June 26 to get 15,580 signatures, but he's finding that as many as 15 percent of

those signing are not registered voters. He expected that number to be about 3 percent. "I have a little bit of a problem," Martin said Wednesday. "The last count I made, about 15 percent of those who signed the petition are not even registered." Martin is recruiting help in a final push for signatures by offering a \$500 scholarship to young people who gather more than 200 See PETITION on page 2A

Moving on up - and out of town

More Americans own homes; leaving city way of life

By Herbert L. White
THE CHARLOTTE POST

More American homeowners are people of color and moving to the suburbs, according to a national study on housing. The report, "State of the Nation's Housing: 1998," issued by Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies, shows that the number of homeowners rose by 4 million in the last three years to an all-time high of 65.7 percent. Although people of color account for only 17 percent of all homeowners, they are leading the explosion, with 42 percent of all homes bought from 1994-97.

Low-income communities have also benefitted from changes in America's demographics and bank policies. With more mortgage lenders willing to work with families on limited budgets and credit, their numbers have increased.

"Over the past several years, lenders have introduced and actively promoted products that make it easier for families with less accumulated wealth and no established credit history to qualify for mortgages," said Eric Belsky, acting executive director of the Joint Center. "In response, lending to minorities and to low- and moderate-income homebuyers has climbed much faster than lending to other groups. Add to that the rapid growth of the minority population fueled by immigration, and you have all the ingredients for a surge in minority homebuying."

With unemployment at record low levels and consumer confidence high, more families are taking the plunge to ownership, according to the report.

"At no other time in the past 50 years has there been such an extended period of steady, non-inflationary growth in the economy," said Nicolas Retsinas, director of the Joint Center. "In this stable environment, single-family housing construction has topped the 1 million mark for the past six years, multi-family production has reached an eight-year peak and manufactured housing production has held near recent

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Jump, jump, jump to it



PHOTO/WADE NASH

Double Dutch Forces of Columbia, S.C., demonstrate their rope-jumping skill Monday at the Charlotte Sting-Houston Comets WNBA game at Charlotte Coliseum. The troupe's halftime exhibition fared better than the Sting, which lost 79-65.

Racial divisions still tear at South Miami

By Bernhardt Dotson, Jr.
THE MIAMI TIMES

SOUTH MIAMI, Fla. - When South Miami voters elected Dr. Anna M. Price as the city's first black mayor in April 1997, some believed it was a watershed moment in local government. Some black residents admitted that for the first time in years,

they believed that there was finally someone in office who truly understood their needs and plight.

Price, a University of Miami administrator and professor, came to the job with strong academic credentials and a willingness to work with all segments of the city.

Also for the first time, Price's

election gave South Miami a predominantly black city commission, with David D. Bethel and Paul Young taking two other commission seats.

"Without a doubt, it was a wide cross-section of voters that enabled Dr. Price to win," said Leon A. Valentine, Price's campaign co-manager in a special mayoral election held shortly

after the death of Mayor Tom Cunningham.

"Without Anglo and Hispanic support, she probably wouldn't have won," he added. "That's what makes what is happening now so difficult to understand. If people come together to vote for the candidate of their choice, who happened to be black, how can

See RACE on page 6A

Wounded Ethiopians ready to fight former allies

By Dianna Cahn
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ADIGRAT, Ethiopia - Using his one good arm, Weldehlase Hailu pulled an assault rifle off the stump of his left shoulder, propped it up against his chest and took aim. His one good eye sparkled.

Weldehlase lost his left arm and eye to heavy artillery during the 17-year war his people fought alongside Eritrean rebels to overthrow Ethiopia's Marxist dictatorship.

Many members of local militias kept their weapons after the war and Weldehlase and fellow wounded veterans are ready to go back to war, this time to fight Eritrean troops

massed along their common border.

"I want to go to the war front to fight but the government won't let us because we are already wounded," the disappointed veteran said, scars along the right side of his face and mouth twisting with his bitter smile. "We fought against the (former regime) not only to end the war but to bring a better life to our people and recover the economy. I lost parts of my body for this. But the Eritreans have attacked us and brought us war."

Since border clashes erupted May 6, Ethiopia and Eritrea have been locked in a battle See DISABLED on page 7A



PHOTO/SAYYID AZIM

Displaced Ethiopians wait for food in the town of Adi Gudom, near Makelle, 478 miles north of Addis Ababa, Sunday. Hundreds of Ethiopians are crossing the border as hostilities between Eritrea and Ethiopia continue.

Espy faces 3 new U.S. charges

By George Lardner Jr.
THE WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON - A federal appeals court Tuesday reinstated three felony charges accusing former agriculture secretary Mike Espy of violating the Meat Inspection Act of 1907 by taking gifts from two companies he regulated.

Espy maintained that the law was meant to punish only front-line meat inspectors who take favors from companies, but the U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals for the District emphatically rejected the claim. For Espy's contentions to prevail, the court said, "there must be ambiguity in the statute - and we see none."

The ruling came as two officials of Tyson Foods Inc. went on trial here on charges that they used corporate aircraft, sports tickets and other favors to gain a "cozy" relationship with Espy while new poultry regulations were being considered.

Lawyers for the two defendants, Tyson's Washington lobbyist See FORMER on page 6A



Espy

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