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Danielle Smith of Washington, D.C., says she's forced to be color-conscious because of comments from African Americans about her dark complexion.

When black isn't beautiful

Color-consciousness remains painful reality

By Hazel Trice Edney

WASHINGTON - Atima Omara-Alwala had just left her office at the State Capitol in Richmond, Va. and was on her way to lunch when she heard a voice from a passing car scream, "Blackie!"

It was the kind of insult that she has come to expect but not accept.

A few years earlier, as a sophomore at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, 40 miles away, she heard some guys in a passing car laugh as one yelled, "Darkie!"

That anyone would stoop to that level of behavior was disappointing enough. But what made these insults doubly painful was that they were uttered by black men.

"It's not surprising anymore. But it's still, somewhat painful," Omara-Alwala admits. "I kind of wince or flinch on the inside. Even when I work in black communities, I'm always conscious that there might be some reason that I'll be picked on - not because of any fault in my personality - just the fact that I'm this complexion. And, of course,

Please see AFRICAN/7A

Allure of voting wanes among S. African voters

By Elliott Sylvester

CAPE TOWN, South Africa - President Thabo Mbeki's African National Congress party is poised to retain - or even increase - its sweeping parliamentary majority in Wednesday's national election.

While the outcome is certain, political leaders worry that interest in the democratic process is waning a decade after South Africa's first all-race vote ended close to half a century of white minority rule.

Voter turnout dropped for the second democratic election in 1999, and a further decrease is expected in this vote to choose a new national parliament and provincial assemblies.

South Africa's lingering poverty and unemployment, along with crime, corruption and a devas-



Mbeki

Please see ALLURE/6A

Mecklenburg County faces a massive budget deficit. The need for services is growing. Neither can be ignored for very long.

Ends will meet, at a cost

By Herbert L. White

Mecklenburg County's fiscal belt-tightening is bound to hurt.

Who and how much has yet to be calculated.

County Manager Harry Jones' proposed budget, to be presented to commissioners May 18 is expected to toe the fiscal line between stagnant tax revenue and growing needs for services.

Mecklenburg faces a deficit of up to \$34 million for fiscal year 2004-05. But one option for addressing the shortfall - raising taxes - is an option the

Republican majority has pledged to leave off the table.

"I can say at this point I'm not prepared to raise taxes," District 5 Commissioner Ruth Samuelson said. "I have serious concerns if we raise property taxes there are people who can barely afford their homes will be able to stay in them."

Property owners aren't the only ones to consider, District 3 Commissioner Valerie Woodard says. The working class and low-income stand to suffer from budget cuts or fee increases - a real possibility next year.

"The conservative people

have boxed themselves in," said Woodard, a Democrat. "Even they can't see a way out. I see a dilemma for our conservative colleagues."

Mecklenburg's budget difficulty can be traced to a gift from the state. Counties were given the option of raising sales taxes by a half-cent in 2002 to increase revenue. Mecklenburg commissioners, with a 5-4 Republican majority, voted to put those proceeds - \$24 million - into property tax cuts for residents. Demand for programs and services didn't drop, however. Even with the extra sales tax money, the county would still face a deficit, albeit smaller, District 2 Commissioner Norman



PHOTO/WADE NASH

County-funded athletic leagues and use of public facilities could be impacted by user fees.

Mitchell said.

"I don't think they've painted themselves into a corner," he said. "They've painted themselves onto a cliff."

The austerity push is already on. Fees could increase at some county-funded swimming pools and athletic programs to offset operation costs. And Jones wants commissioners to allow him to evaluate the possibility of making some aquatic services self-sustaining through fees. Opponents argue taxpayers will be forced to foot the bill for using resources they helped fund through taxes or bonds.

"That's not fair to me," Woodard said. "That's double-dipping."

There's also the spectre of reducing services. The county, which funds Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools and the Department of Social Services, also acts as a de facto board of health. As more people move into the county, the pressure to keep

Please see BUDGET/2A



FILE PHOTO/CALVIN FERGUSON

Mecklenburg tax dollars also pay for health programs, which could face county commissioners' scrutiny.

Caucus more than picking delegation

By Cynthia Dean

RALEIGH - John Kerry has already wrapped up the Democratic presidential nomination, but N.C. Democrats will still get their say Saturday.

The party will hold its caucus Saturday from 8 a.m. -12 p.m. There will be at least one polling site in every county, with four in Mecklenburg: South Mecklenburg High

School, Barringer Elementary, Derita Elementary and Simmons YMCA.

John Kerry, Howard Dean, Al Sharpton, John Edwards and Dennis Kucinich will be on the ballots.

Stella Adams, chair of the African American Caucus of the N.C. Democratic Party, said the purpose of the caucus is to select delegates for the Democratic convention in July. The caucus replaces the prima-

ry originally set for May 4 but postponed because of a redistricting lawsuit.

"This is the first time this has been done in North Carolina," she said. "There is still a lot of high drama going on within the party," adding that a vice presidential running mate has not been chosen.

Adams said a strong turnout for the caucuses would also let the party know how much they have to do to prepare for the

upcoming elections. "It's a critical barometer of how much work we need to do," she said. "We're really asking people to turn out and participate in the process."

"It is an opportunity to share with the world that we are not happy with the job losses in North Carolina. It not only sends a message to Democrats, but to the Republicans as well about how disappointed we are in our leadership."

Anti-speeding crusader takes message to schools

By Stacy Gibbs

Charlotte-Mecklenburg teens are taking a serious trip with Kendall Phillips.

Phillips, whose husband Bobby, a Charlotte Hornets player, was killed street racing four years ago premiered an new anti-speeding film, "Road Trip," at South Mecklenburg High School last week. The film kicked off the city's annual "Speed a Little, Lose a Lot" campaign,

which tries to reduce accidental deaths due to speeding.

"Teenagers need to understand that sometimes the consequences of their bad decisions lead to death. They are not invincible," Phillips said. "I know because it happened to my family."

The six-minute film, which features several CMS students, tells the story of teenagers who challenge each other to race to the local pizzeria after playing a game

of hoops. On the way, subliminal messages make the kids stop and think about their decision. As a result, the teenagers decide it's not worth the risk, and they slow down.

Quiet gasps were heard throughout the auditorium as students watched "Road Trip" and heard Phillips tell the story of her husband racing David Wesley at 107 miles per hour.

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PHOTO/CALVIN FERGUSON

Kendall Phillips (center) talks to South Mecklenburg High School students as part of an anti-speeding campaign.

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