

Garbage workers: Don't dump on our jobs



PHOTO/SOMMER BROKAW

Raleigh sanitation workers in Raleigh protested last week for better work conditions and compensation. About 60 workers from the North Carolina Public Service Workers Union and supporters marched in front of Raleigh's Municipal Building.

By Sommer Brokaw
THE TRIANGLE TRIBUNE

RALEIGH — Sanitation workers are still not satisfied with their boss, City Manager Russell Allen.

They blame Allen for allowing workers to put in long hours without fair compensation. They want more money, benefits and respect for their work.

About 60 sanitation workers, community leaders and other supporters gathered in front of the Raleigh Municipal Building last Monday to get city leaders to hear their concerns. The workers were disappointed after a previous meeting with Allen that they called a "flop."

Jerry Ledbetter has been a full-time employee of the sanitation department since 2001. He said he was disappointed that Allen did not recognize the UE 150 union members. He said all parties involved in the workers' disputes must be heard before negotiations can start.

Raleigh Mayor Charles Meeker said the department's temporary workers should go through a short

probationary period and then become full-time employees.

"After six months, they should become full-time employees with benefits," Meeker said.

The mayor is also waiting on a full report from the department regarding overtime pay and comp time issues.

Meeker told reporters that he supported the sanitation workers' right to demonstrate.

"This is public property, and they have a right to picket here," he said.

Employee Ricky Miller said the temporary workers are forced to work overtime hours but are not compensated for it. Miller is supposed to work until 5:30 p.m., but often stays until 7:30 or even 8 p.m.

"We get comp time, but that's nothing," he said, explaining that they hardly get to use those hours for vacation time.

City Council member James West said openness and dialogue reduces misunderstanding in cases like these.

"This is good for the workers, the city and the residents as well," West said. "I think it's going to be a win-win for everybody."

Angaza Laughinghouse is the statewide representative

of the UE 150 union. He said Allen "disrespected" the sanitation workers.

He outlined the employees' four urgent demands: to have the union fully recognized, eliminating forced overtime, include time-and-a-half pay for any overtime hours worked and all temporary workers to become full-time employees.

Dennis Orton said the main objective of the union is to get respect for the workers who are providing a public service to the city.

"We fight for power, respect and better wages," he said.

North Carolina still follows old laws like General Statute 95-98 that makes it illegal for employees to sign an enforce-

Please see WORKERS/7A

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Allen bill would help black farmers

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be a racial slur - during a mostly white rally.

Allen had been favored for re-election over Democrat Jim Webb, who served as Navy secretary under President Reagan. A former governor, Allen also had been considered a contender for president in 2008.

The bill Allen is sponsoring would give black farmers another chance at compensation under the settlement of a discrimination lawsuit against the Agriculture Department. A similar measure is pending in the House.

The department agreed seven years ago to pay farmers who could show they were discriminated against, providing payments of \$50,000 in most cases and unlimited payments in extreme cases.

More than 60,000 people submitted claims but missed the filing deadline. Black farmers' groups have been lobbying Congress to let those claims proceed.

"Our civil rights fight has taken a decade, but this is an important step in the struggle," Virginia farmer John Boyd, the president of the National Black Farmers Association, said in a news release from Allen's office.

Allen said the bill expands benefits from the settlement "to all African American farmers who suffered the indignity and inequality of being denied financial assistance through USDA."

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