

Fired black worker alleges discrimination

By Gordon Johnson

The state ombudsman's office may subpoena university employees in order to investigate charges of racial discrimination filed by a former black female custodian, according to Murrell McNeil, the state ombudsman.

The custodian, Girlean Woods, was fired Sept. 10, charged with "willful disobedience." The letter of dismissal said Woods took 45 minutes longer for a coffee break than was authorized and that she permitted unauthorized personnel to stay in Oldfather Hall past the 11 p.m. deadline.

Woods claimed she was fired because she is black, and

asked State Sen. Ernest Chambers of Omaha, Nebraska's only black senator, to look into the matter, Chambers said.

Chambers referred the matter to the state ombudsman because he said he felt the ombudsman could get better results.

McNeil said the university has not been cooperative. "They have denied us the opportunity to investigate the case," McNeil said. "We cannot pursue the case because the principles in the case have been instructed not to talk."

McNeil said university employees had been instructed by NU attorney Richard Wood not to talk.

WOOD SAID he advised employees involved in the case not to submit themselves to interrogation by the ombudsman's office, because the ombudsman does not have legal authority to investigate university matters.

Wood said that the state ombudsman does have subpoena powers granted by the Public Counsel Act, but that the university does not fall under the act's jurisdiction. "As far as I am concerned, he (McNeil), is interpreting the law incorrectly," Wood said.

McNeil said he can issue a subpoena from the ombudsman's office to get NU to cooperate in an investigation.

"At this point I am going to make a final attempt to work through the university on this issue, to discuss it. If it (the attempt) is successful, the investigation can continue. If it is not successful, other avenues are available and we will pursue those options," McNeil said.

"WE FEEL this is an overwhelmingly important issue. We feel the law gives us the right to investigate," he said. McNeil said that he has never encountered a situation like this before, and it would be a test case.

The issue was brought up Friday at a legislative hearing when Chambers charged that Nebraska contains a large number of racists and that racism exists at NU.

Woods was team leader in charge of a small number of other employees on her shift, according to Chambers. When she was promoted to the position of team leader, some animosity arose between her and those under her because she is black, according to Chambers.

He said after Woods became team leader, the team leader responsibilities were changed to include some tasks Woods could not complete.

Woods was a good worker who was fired for racial reasons, Chambers said.

TO SUPPORT the contention that Woods was a good worker, Chambers produced a letter of recommendation to Woods from the Assistant Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences James C. Van Horn, on the job she did cleaning her assigned area. The letter was written Jan. 30, 1979.

UNL Chancellor Roy Young said Woods did not go through university procedures to resolve the matter. According to Young, she could have filed a complaint with the affirmative action officer or filed a grievance which would have to be investigated within 10 days of its filing.

However, Chambers said Woods felt she would not receive a fair hearing from the university.

"The lady brought the problem to me because she did not think she could get justice at the university in view of the skulking and spying tactics used against her to fire her," Chambers said.

CHAMBERS SAID that her supervisors, Heinz Matthiesen, custodial division supervisor, and John Marker, assistant manager, spied on her and did not give her previous warning about breaking the rules.

The two men who were allowed to stay in the building were the husband and minister of a coworker, Chambers said.

Matthiesen and Marker refused to comment on the case. Matthiesen and Marker are the supervisors who filed the report against Woods.

Harley Schrader, director of the physical plant, said that proper procedure was followed in Woods' firing. Schrader also said that Woods had been warned on similar infractions before she was fired.

Chambers said that Woods had not been given previous warning.

Woods could not be contacted for comment.



Rolling clouds

It looks like a storm is approaching as dark clouds roll in over the Steinauer, Neb. firehouse and post office.

Photo by M. Billingsley

Choice advocate: Regents ignored pro-choice side of abortion issue

By Michelle Carr

The NU Board of Regents decided to prohibit non-therapeutic abortions at the University of Nebraska Medical Center in Omaha before it heard the opposition's opinion, according to a pro-choice abortion supporter.

Regents establish a committee to study sales of student football tickets and set capital construction priorities. Page 7.

Kappie Weber, a member of the Nebraska Religious Coalition for Abortion Rights, said Sunday that Regents Chairman Robert Koefoot's motion to vote on the abortion resolution after hearing only one pro-choice testifier proved that the regents had already decided to approve the measure.

After hearing testimony by Chris Funk, director of the Lincoln-Lancaster Commission on the Status of Women, Koefoot moved that the regents vote on the resolution. However, others were allowed to testify.

The regents Friday unanimously passed a resolution which banned non-therapeutic abortions and educational or research programs relating to non-therapeutic abortions according to new NU policy. Kermit Hansen, was absent from the meeting. He is recovering from surgery.

Kay Ridenour, president of the Lincoln chapter of the National Organization for Women, said Sunday she was concerned about the quickness with which the regents reached their decision.

She said Sen. Bernice Labez of Omaha was one of the persons who requested action by the regents.

Labez testified at a morning subcommittee meeting, asking the regents to decide immediately. She said she was saddened and upset after reading the accounts of a live birth after a saline-induced abortion performed at the Medical Center.

Later, Labez told the regents that had they not approved the resolution, she would have proposed an amendment to a university appropriations bill in the Legislature, which would have prohibited non-therapeutic abortions at the medical center.

Weber said she heard Friday morning that the abortion resolution would be placed on the agenda.

Weber said she was concerned that the regents did not address the problem. She said the medical procedures in handling an abortion in the second three months of pregnancy were not covered in the resolution.

The medical center's procedures must be questioned, she said, adding that the religious coalition was concerned about the care the women receive at the center.

Both Ridenour and Weber said that they would have to do research to determine if the regents' decision was legal under recent Supreme Court decisions.

Proposed student fee raise might be postponed, lowered

Raising student fees next semester might not be needed, but fees will have to be raised next year to meet utility costs of the UNL Nebraska Unions and the University Health Center, according to Richard Armstrong, UNL vice chancellor for student affairs.

Armstrong discussed the utility budget Friday at a NU Board of Regents business affairs subcommittee meeting. Armstrong said he came before the committee to discuss alternatives to a fee raise, instead of asking for a raise.

According to a law passed by the Nebraska Legislature last spring, the state cannot pay for projects financed by bonds. The unions and the Health Center are bonded projects and their utility bills previously were paid by the State.

Armstrong said he had proposed a \$4 fee raise

originally, but because the University Health Center is doing well this year, he suggested a \$2 raise instead.

However, if funds can be found in other ways, no increase will be suggested for next semester, he said.

The unions and Health Center's budget cannot absorb the utility costs within their budgets and unless the Legislature reconsiders, fees will have to be raised or other alternative financing found.

Regent Kermit Wagner of Schuyler said students will be upset about a fee raise.

"I don't see how students will want to pay a \$2 fee, when they are upset about tuition."

"I'm for a decrease in student fees. There are a lot of opportunities where there could be some cutting," Wagner said.

Ron Wright, vice chancellor of business for business and finance, said he is aware that students are opposed to a fee increase, but the regents will "still have to address the question (raising fees) for next year."

inside monday

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