

Union launches TV ad, accuses governor of 'recycling his cronies'

By Steve Peoples

PROVIDENCE -- Rhode Island's largest state employees union has launched a television advertising campaign attacking Governor Carcieri for "recycling his cronies into high-paying jobs."

Council 94 of the American Federation of State, County & Municipal Employees spent \$20,000 on the advertising buy, which began airing Wednesday on local and cable television stations and will run at least through the weekend, according to Dennis Grilli, the union's executive director.

"Governor Carcieri doesn't have a problem trashing unionized state employees. But when it comes to his cronies, he's a leader in recycling," says the male narrator, while an animated scene depicts the Republican governor dressed as a garbage man tossing bureaucrats — such as former Communications Director Steve Kass — into a recycling bin.

At least four administration officials making between \$67,000 and \$122,000 have recently been moved to new state jobs.

The attack ad, which comes amid informal labor negotiations between the governor's office and Council 94, prompted an angry response yesterday from Carcieri.

"In particular, the employee union leaders are trying to distract from the fact that they have so far been unwilling to help solve the state's massive budget deficit," Carcieri said in a statement. "After 19 separate meetings, the unions have simply refused to offer any significant concessions."

Earlier in the month, the governor acknowledged he had abandoned plans to force all state workers to take off six unpaid days before July — a "furlough" plan he said would save \$15 million. When asked about an emergency cabinet meeting, Carcieri said: "The cabinet meeting is just because we were counting on some furlough days and some

things to get through in the supplemental. We're out of time to do that."

AFL-CIO Secretary-Treasurer George Nee noted that union members lost some retiree health benefits in the recent budget-repair bill, and that the governor was continuing to pursue plans to cut the state's work force by 1,000.

He said that union discussions with the governor's representatives would continue, adding that they had met again yesterday morning. The majority of state employees' union contracts expire June 1 and the governor is hoping to negotiate reduced benefits, among other things, to help close a budget deficit estimated at \$425 million for the coming year.

"I am still hopeful that a resolution can be reached," Nee said.

The governor's spokesman Jeff Neal said the administration would continue discussions with the unions. "Of course, in the wake of this attack ad, one has to question whether the unions were ever discussing these issues in good faith," he said.