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NORTH MIAMI

CRA employee's show creates interest, questions

Lesly Prudent has permission to do his radio show, but some of his political content might be reviewed.

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If you happen to tune into the Creole-language Radio Spirit on a workday afternoon, you likely will hear Lesly Prudent hawking everything from colonoscopies to Gospel concerts — all while drawing a full-time paycheck as a North Miami official.

Prudent — who also enthusiastically stumps for Democratic candidates during his daily half-hour show on WLQY-AM (1320) — is the second-in-command at the city's Community Redevelopment Agency, where he draws a \$77,900 annual salary.

He also gets paid by North Miami taxpayers through another source of revenue: The city buys ads on the daily program hosted by Prudent from 1:30 to 2 p.m., which at least in theory is during normal working hours for most municipal employees.

City Manager Stephen Johnson, who is Prudent's boss and the head of the CRA, said he and the radio host have an understanding giving permission for Prudent's daily program, called Radio Lespri, the Creole word for "spirit".

"When he came on board he told me about the radio show and asked my permission to do it, and I granted him that," said Johnson, who said that Prudent often works more than eight hours a day and as a salaried employee does not draw overtime pay.

Johnson said he was not aware of the partisan nature of Radio Lespri, which often features Prudent exhorting voters to cast ballots for President Barack Obama and other Democratic candidates.

During a recent show, Prudent told listeners they don't have to look at the names of candidates when they vote "as long as it's a Democrat."

"October 9 is the last day to register to vote for Obama," he told listeners on Monday.

Johnson, who does not speak Creole, said he will speak with the CRA attorney about whether the political portions of the show are appropriate.

"I will certainly get an



CANDACE BARBOT/MIAMI HERALD FILE, 1997

SPEAKING HIS MIND: Lesly Prudent's political views can be heard on WLQY-AM (1320).

opinion to make a determination of what he's at liberty to say or not say," Johnson said.

Not all of the content is political. Prudent tackles topics such as wacky stories of the day and educational opportunities for adults.

Like many local AM radio hosts, Prudent buys radio time from the station and in turn sells advertisements to businesses and government agencies.

Recent radio spots featured ads for an upcoming Christian concert, a local chiropractor and colonoscopy screenings for people who "feel a tickle where worms tickle."

Joseph Centorino, director of Miami-Dade's Commission on Ethics and Public Trust, said because the CRA is a semi-autonomous agency, Prudent does not have to follow some of the same rules as city and county employees.

"Certainly these scenarios raise some ethical questions, but since he is not under our jurisdiction, we are not at liberty to opine on that," Centorino said.

A CRA is a government agency created by a municipality usually to boost economic development and eliminate blight. The North Miami City Council acts as the agency's board of directors and oversees millions of dollars generated by property taxes. Some of the agency's functions are merged with City Hall, as the city manager is also the CRA director.

Prudent was hired in December to supervise and coordinate the CRA's community programs and administer grants.

North Miami requires city employees with other jobs to fill outside employment disclosure forms. According to North Miami re-

ports, Prudent did not submit a form.

The city manager said Prudent is not required to do so because he is a CRA employee.

Johnson said no other city or CRA employees are allowed to work a second job during the city's business hours.

"Lesly is a very hard worker, I'm very pleased with his work," Johnson said.

Prudent profits from dozens of businesses and agencies who pay him for ad space during the segment.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools paid \$6,000 for ad space on Prudent's daily show this year, according to public records. A former principal for the school system, Prudent promotes adult education programs.

"It's never too late to go to school," he tells listeners.

North Miami paid Prudent \$200 for four radio spots before the August primary to educate North Miami voters about a referendum on a multi-million-dollar bond issue for the city-owned Museum of Contemporary Art, according to records provided by the city. Voters rejected the proposal.

Johnson said he did not know that the city contracted with Prudent for ad space.

Conflict of interest and ethics rules laid out by North Miami prohibit employees from doing business with the city. Johnson said that rule should also apply to CRA employees.

"I would like to follow the same spirit of the rules we have for city employees. That is my position," said Johnson. "I would have preferred for it not to be done that way."