

Woman suing over lottery faced past charges

CLEVELAND (AP) - A woman who claims she lost the winning Mega Millions lottery ticket and is suing to block payment to the acknowledged winner said Wednesday she was charged previously with credit card fraud and assault.

When asked about past run-ins with the law, Elecia Battle said she was charged but not convicted.

"I'm done with that," said Battle, 40. "I paid the fine. That's end of story. It makes me look like I'm a bad person. Everybody has bad in the past, I'm not even wor-



Rebecca Jemison speaks about her good fortune after claiming the \$162 million Mega Millions jackpot Tuesday, at Ohio Lottery headquarters in Cleveland. Jemison, a hospital worker in South Euclid, Ohio, had the lone winning ticket for the 11-state jackpot.

ried about that, really. I never did any jail time for that."

Battle said Wednesday that she was charged in the Cleveland suburb of South Euclid under her former married name, Elecia Dickson. She refused to discuss why or when she was charged. A call to the South Euclid police to try to confirm the charges was not immediately returned.

The Ohio Lottery on Tuesday declared Rebecca Jemison, 34, of South Euclid, the winner of the 11-state Dec. 30 drawing, qualifying her for a lump-sum payment

of \$67.2 million, after taxes.

Later Tuesday, Battle sued, asking a judge to block the lottery from paying Jemison.

Battle claimed in a police report that she dropped her purse as she left a convenience store after buying the ticket and only realized after the drawing that the ticket was missing.

"My ticket was lost. I do recall all the numbers. They are all somehow family related. No one can tell me what I did and did not play. I did it honestly and I have no doubt," Battle told The Associated

Press at the office of her attorney, Sheldon Starke.

Authorities in South Euclid feel Jemison's winning ticket "obviously draws into question the integrity of Elecia Battle's report," said Lt. Kevin Nietert. Police are now investigating whether she lied in the police report — a misdemeanor punishable by 30 days to six months in jail.

Jemison said Battle's claim prompted her to quit stalling and submit her ticket.

"I was angry at first, but not worried at all," Jemison (See Lottery, Page 5)

Uninsured

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NAACP.

"So many people are out of a job," Lydia said. "Many companies might be making more profit, but they're doing it with fewer workers. We still have a record number of people who are unemployed."

The situation particularly affects Hispanics and African-Americans who are more likely than Whites and Asians to be without health insurance. Because of the disparity in medical insurance, Black women are diagnosed and treated later for breast cancer, and have worse outcomes, said Jerry Frankel, a Dallas-area urologist and a board member of Physicians for a National Health Program. "This trend is worsening as the number of uninsured worsens," Frankel said.

Attempts to expand Medicaid to help the uninsured are thwarted as many states, including Texas, are faced with budget deficits and cut their Medicaid budgets, he said.

The ultimate solution would be to provide universal health insurance through the federal government, Lydia said, although he doesn't see such a measure passing under the Republican-controlled Congress.

U.S. Rep. John Conyers Jr., (D-Mich.), ranking minority member of the House Judiciary Committee, introduced a bill called the United States National Health Insurance Act last year. Besides covering the 44 million Americans without health insurance, the legislation would allow patients to choose their own physicians from a wider pool and provide better drug coverage for seniors, according to a news release from Conyers' office.

The program proposed by Conyers' bill would be paid for by current government health spending — estimated at about \$30 billion — and some "modest new taxes" that would be offset by reductions in premiums and out-of-pocket spending.

But an aide to Conyers said he doesn't expect that legislation to pass soon, especially after the passage of the almost \$400 billion Medicare bill. Nearly 30 representatives have signed on as co-sponsors to Conyers' bill, including Rep. Elijah Cummings, D-Md., chairman of the Congressional Black Caucus, and Democratic presidential candidate Dennis Kucinich, D-Ohio.

Many Republicans and some Democrats favor offering tax credits to help individuals or small businesses buy private insurance through a bill called the Fair Care for the Uninsured Act, which has received more support with 123 co-sponsors.

The legislation, which would provide up to \$3,000 per family in tax credits, was introduced last year by Reps. Mark Kennedy, R-Minn., and Bill Lipinski, (D-Ill.).

A companion bill was introduced in the Senate in August by Sen. Rick Santorum, R-Pa., making its progress more apparent than Conyers' bill, which has yet to receive Senate support. The tax-credit plan is expected to be worked on in more detail in 2004.

Many Republicans also laud the Medicare prescription drug bill that recently passed in Congress. But the legislation doesn't address Americans who don't have health insurance and is a big giveaway to pharmaceutical companies, said Cummings of the Congressional Black Caucus.

"What we are delivering to seniors is a bad bill of goods," Cummings said.

"We cannot settle for a prescription drug plan that gives away enormously expensive windfalls to the drug manufacturers and large HMOs while failing to provide much in the way of real help to the people we represent."

The \$395 billion plan actually would weaken Medicare while failing to truly address the prescription drug crisis, Cummings said. Seniors who require catastrophic prescription drug coverage will still pay close to 80 percent of all expenses, he said.

"That means to be eligible for drug coverage above \$5,044, seniors will have to cough up \$4,020," Cummings said.

A recent ABC News/Washington Post poll found that 62 percent of respondents supported a universal health insurance program paid for by the government, while only 33 percent opposed the plan. More people also noted the irony of U.S. taxpayers paying for medical coverage for Iraqis, but not for all Americans.

"What's new about this groundswell of public support for a single-payer plan is that it includes the middle-class. The middle-class is hurting," said Dr. Steffie Woolhandler, an associate professor of medicine at Harvard University.

"Homeowners, people earning more than \$50,000 a year, even a substantial number of physicians, find themselves locked out from coverage."

Woolhandler noted, "Americans already pay the highest health care taxes in the world. We pay for national health care, but we don't get it. We don't need more money in the system; we can save enough on paperwork to cover everyone."

But other surveys have showed that Americans prefer to have private health coverage

rather than government-run public programs, Owcharenko said.

Any national health insurance plan has to keep small businesses in mind and should be administered by the private sector, said Harry Alford, president/CEO of the Washington, D.C.-based National Black Chamber of Commerce.

"Medical insurance costs are getting totally out of hand for business owners," Alford said.


"We see a solution to this being major associations, such as U.S. Chamber of Commerce, being able to offer its members plans that are affordable and manageable. This is extremely important if we want to offer good

benefits to our employees."

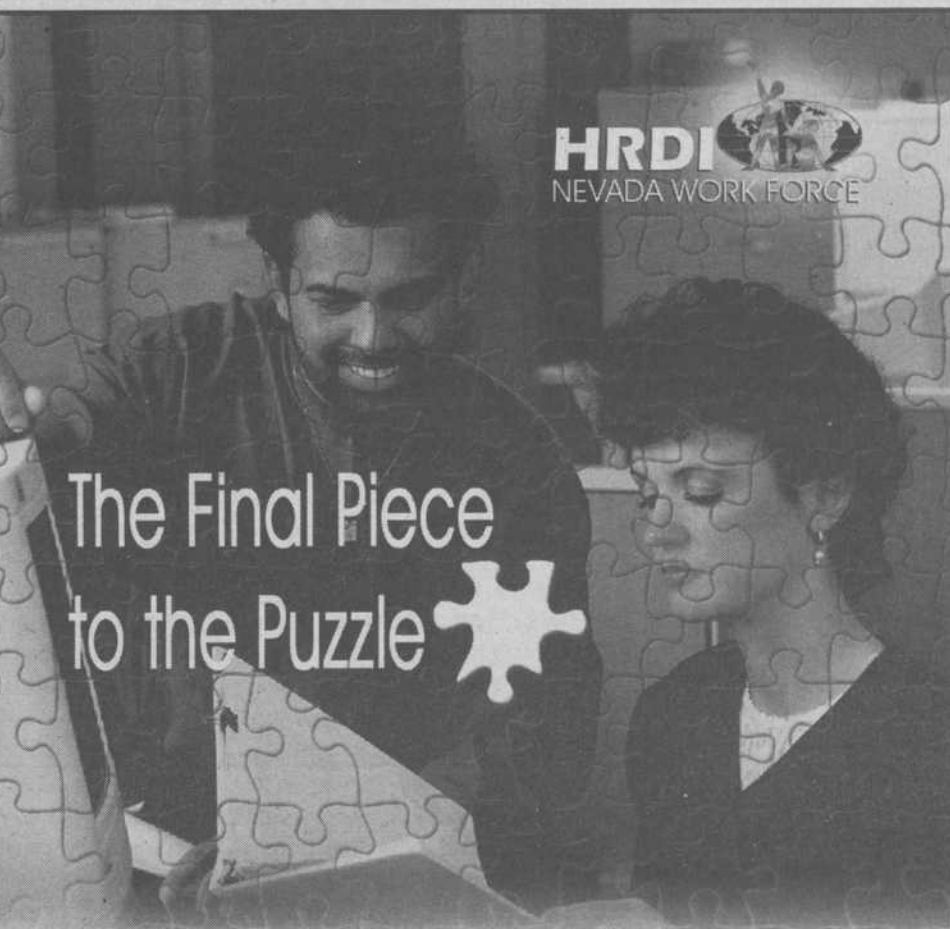
In speaking before different groups, including business ones, Frankel said he points out that expanding medical coverage to all Americans would help create a more productive workforce through healthier, more secure and ultimately happier employees.

"Jackie Robinson and the end of segregation in Major League Baseball not only benefited minority ballplayers, but put money in the pocket of the once 'racist' owners who saw the value of their franchises skyrocket from gains in attendance and TV revenues from a better product," Frankel said. "Universal health care will do the same."

Kevin Shay writes for Dallas Examiner.



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