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OUR VIEW

RETURN OF DR. HAMELI

Court-ordered return of medical examiner shows state weakness

WHERE WE STAND

The state, too eager to be politically correct, jumped the gun on this case.

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE

Gov. Carper should fix his damage-control process for managers.

The firing of Dr. Ali Z. Hameli from his long-term job as state medical examiner has had a bad odor about it from the beginning.

The first bad sign came when Secretary of Health and Human Services Carmen Nazario — apparently with the governor's approval — directed that Dr. Hameli be fired April 5. No official reason was given. With rumors flying

that he had been accused of sexual harassment by some members of his clerical staff, Secretary Nazario primly explained that confidentiality precluded explaining why she had summarily sacked one of the world's most prominent forensic pathologists.



Dr. Hameli

Instead, she explained how he had refused to retire, resign or go along with the state's procedure for terminating him. In essence, she said his firing was his own fault.

Subsequently, the state's reasons came out as part of Dr. Hameli's lawsuit against the state for denial of due process. It was, indeed, accusations of sexual harassment, though some seemed rather strained.

Last week, U.S. District Court Judge Sue L. Robinson told the state to reinstate Dr. Hameli with back pay and to make sure he

got a fair hearing on the accusations, including an opportunity to confront his accusers.

Hooray for Judge Robinson. Sexual harassment is a virulent disease of the workplace and must be eradicated, but employers must have safeguards in place against cheap shots and spite against employees and managers.

We, too, believe Secretary Nazario and the state rushed to judgment on Dr. Hameli. On April 8, we said the process used against Dr. Hameli by Secretary Nazario appeared to disregard the interests of the accused. On that basis alone the state deserved to lose the argument over due process. As for the accusations about sexual harassment, let them be aired fully and openly and the accusers cross-examined.

The state should have avoided the appearance of railroading a respected public official on unchallenged or unproven accusations, and that is exactly what Secretary Nazario's actions look like.