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Expected Dismissal

Suozzi: Supervisor taped using a racial slur

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STAFF WRITER

Nassau County Executive Thomas Suozzi is expected today to fire a public works supervisor who administration officials say was caught on tape repeatedly using a racial slur to refer to a black employee.

In a telephone conversation that was secretly taped by another department employee, administration officials say Linda Alberti, a labor supervisor, used the word "nigger" to describe Willie Warren, an equipment operator, with whom she once had competed for a promotion.

Warren has long complained about alleged racism in the public works department. In 1997, he filed a complaint with the state Division of Human Rights about alleged bias after he was turned down for a promotion Alberti received. The matter is still pending.

Top administration officials, including Suozzi, listened to the tape last week after it was brought to them by Warren's attorney, Hempstead-based civil rights lawyer Frederick Brewington. Suozzi ordered an immediate investigation.

Administration officials confronted Alberti with the tape on Friday, and she conceded it was her voice on the recording. Andrew J. Petti Jr., a labor su-

pervisor who made the tape, also confirmed to officials during a meeting on Friday that he recorded Alberti.

Suozzi plans to hold a news conference today to announce her dismissal.

On the tape, Alberti recalls conversations she had with other public works officials, including former deputy commissioner Russell Rinchiuso, in which Rinchiuso and others conspired to deny Warren, 36, a promotion.

Reached at his home Friday, Rinchiuso said, "I never denied anyone a promotion."

Also on the tape, Petti and Alberti discuss a promotion that was granted in the department.

"Well they should have given it to Willie Warren," Petti says.

"Yeah, they should have given it to him all right," Alberti says. "He's so poverty stricken, the poor nigger."

As she left a county building Friday, Alberti, 45, who has worked for Nassau since 1985, said she wouldn't discuss whether she made the remarks on the tape. "I'm not a racist," she said. "Trust me."

David Greene, the county's labor relations director, said the tape highlighted widespread racism and patronage within the public works department. Greene said minority workers have been overlooked for positions

while others have gained promotions despite their lack of qualifications.

Greene said Nassau has a "huge backlog" of grievances in such cases.

"There was a lack of professionalism and a failure to promote based on ability and qualifications," Greene said. "It became systemic. It became a culture."

Brewington said Warren plans to file a civil rights lawsuit against the county in U.S. District Court over Alberti's remarks.

"This tape represents an unfortunate and despicable underside of what may be going on in the county ranks," Brewington said in an interview.

While county officials are pleased the release of the tape has unearthed alleged racism in the public works department, a county administration source said Petti would be the subject of an investigation into the circumstances surrounding the taping.

But Petti defended his actions and said he did not prod Alberti into making the statements.

"She wanted to ramble, and she did," he said.

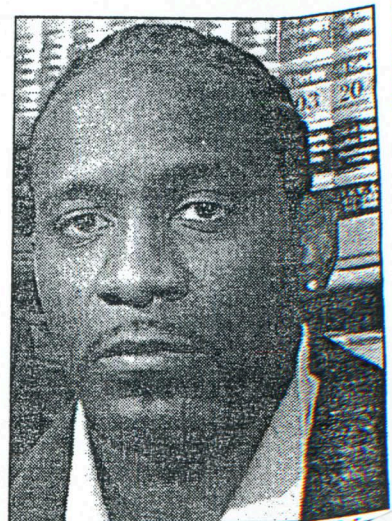
Petti said the recording will allow Warren to prove claims he has made for years.

"How could I throw that tape in the garbage pail?" he said. "If they want to hang me for telling the truth, so be it."



Newsday Photo / Dick Yarwood

Linda Alberti allegedly made racial slurs about Willie Warren, below.



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