

Title: U S West settles with minority businessmen, one holds out

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ENGLEWOOD, Colo. (AP) _ U S West has negotiated financial settlements with six of seven black businessmen who filed a lawsuit claiming the communications giant discriminated against them. Terms weren't released.

The June 1996 lawsuit filed in Denver federal court accused the Englewood-based Baby Bell of a "pattern and practice" of denying vendor contracts to black-owned businesses.

"We have asserted all along that our company is open to bringing in diverse vendors," U S West spokesman David Beigie said Friday. "The whole issue here was about trying to bring more African-American firms into the company, and we are working with a number of firms to do just that."

Beigie said the settlements "allow us to focus on bringing more diversity to the company" and its vendors.

The company, at a court hearing last March, said it spent \$18 million with black-owned businesses in 1997, up from \$13 million spent with them in 1996, and nearly double the amount spent in 1994.

One plaintiff has not settled. Herman Malone, owner of RMES Communications Inc. and former chairman of the National Black Chamber of Commerce, said Friday the company's proposed settlement fails to address "how African-Americans will do business with U S West" in the future.

He said he hoped an agreement could be reached.

Beigie said U S West had asked Judge Wiley Daniel to end Malone's case. But Beigie said U S West was continuing to negotiate with Malone and the company was also ``hopeful" it could craft a seventh settlement, perhaps over the weekend.

Malone said the confidential offer he received from U S West wasn't enough to make up for the contracts he lost to non-minority vendors since the early 1990s.

Malone's company has filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection, listing debt of \$1.3 million and assets of \$1.2 million.

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