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## Ex-Energetix worker sues over racist e-mail

BY STAFF WRITER

**BEN RAND**

A supervisor at energy provider Energetix Inc. is being accused of sending a racially charged e-mail moments after suspending an African-American worker last spring.

"The jig has been lynched," the e-mail read, according to a discrimina-

tion lawsuit to be filed today in U.S. District Court in Rochester.

"Jig," short for "jigaboo," is an ethnic slur used to refer to African Americans, according to the 4th edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary*.

William Bell, the suspended worker, alleges in his suit that the derogatory e-mail was sent by William Diamond on May 21, about 20 minutes after the conclusion of a meeting in which Bell was suspended without pay.

A printed copy of the e-mail is not included in court papers but was shown to a reporter Wednesday. Bell's lawyer, Nelson Thomas of Henrietta, said he obtained the mail from an unidentified

employee at the company, which is now part of Energy East Corp. He said he does not know how the employee obtained the e-mail.

The suit names Energetix, Energy East, Griffith Oil Co. and Rochester Gas and Electric as defendants, as well as Diamond and RG&E managers Jerry

## Energetix

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Strassner and Barney Farnsworth.

The company said it had not yet seen a copy of the lawsuit. "If this matter is going to litigation, we cannot comment," spokesman Mike Power said.

Diamond could not be reached for comment.

Bell's suit alleges that the e-mail was a culminating event in a series of discriminatory acts dating to the spring of 2000.

He says he was repeatedly subjected to racial epithets and other inflammatory statements. After Bell complained, the suit states, job conditions worsened.

him. Energetix prohibits employees from seeking benefits unavailable to non-employee customers, Thomas said.

Bell contends that his termination was racially motivated and in retaliation for his complaints. He has since returned to work with another employer but says the experience has been emotionally trying.

When he heard about the existence of the e-mail, he says, he was "flabbergasted. I was rather taken aback," Thomas said. It is unusual to find such evidence in discrimination cases.

Bell is asking for an unspecified amount of lost wages, back pay, punitive damages and other financial relief. □

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