

Health Care, Education, Minority Districts will be Concerns in 21st Century

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While there has been much concern among African Americans over gerrymandering charges from opponents of the 12th Congressional District, state representatives Annie Brown-Kennedy and Warren "Pete" Oldham, both Forsyth County democrats, say African Americans face other similarly important challenges legislatively in the 21st century.

They include health care and education, the legislators said.

"On the national level they may be initiating the (health care) package, but in the final analysis it will be left up to the state and local level to implement it," he said.

Kennedy and Oldham are expected to attend the N.C. Black Leadership Caucus here this weekend. The theme of the conference, "Challenges of the 21st Century, Will You be Prepared?" will focus on social, economic and political issues African-Americans must be concerned with in order to prosper in the next century.

Kennedy will be honored Friday evening in a banquet recognizing retiring and deceased legislators.

She announced that she will not seek re-election.

Oldham said legislators will be working to get the best possible health-care plan possible. While there have been many disputes as to who should be covered and how, Oldham said he believes they will come to some common ground.

"We're facing a lot of problems, but we've gotten over a major hurdle by recognizing the need for a health-care package," he said. "Now it's just a matter of hammering out how it should be done. In the final analysis, common sense will prevail."

Elderly, minorities and the poor are the groups Oldham is most concerned about in health-care reform.

"I call that group the uninsured and the underinsured," he said.

He added that legislators must be concerned about those groups who are not getting those higher-wage jobs that provide a health-care plan. Because many companies continue to downsize, people are forced to accept lower-wage jobs that provide inaccurate or no coverage at all. Then they have to provide their own health-care coverage or many of them drop it all together because they can't afford it.

Both representatives are also concerned about education.

Kennedy said African Americans must be concerned about the money the General Assembly provides for education. Kennedy and Oldham are concerned about the lack of funds historically black colleges and universities have been receiving in the state's budget. Traditionally predominantly black colleges and universities have been underfunded when it came to capital improvements, faculty, etc. The state budget, Kennedy said, shows a lot about the priorities of the legislators.

"Then it becomes important to have legislators who understand your needs and address your needs fairly," she said. "The decisions to fund various institutions are based on personal projects of individual legislators without looking at the needs."

During the preparation of the biennial budget, Oldham said, black legislators expressed concern over what the university system allotted

for black colleges and universities. He added that the state Legislative Black Caucus is constantly pushing for more money to be allotted to these institutions.

"It's one of our priorities as black legislators to see to it that better funding is provided for black institutions than in the past," Kennedy said. "We have made some progress but we must keep this issue alive."

Oldham said there is also a push for special provisions for these institutions to make up for traditionally being left out in state funding.

While the issues of school and health care are important, the issue of the black congressional districts must not be overlooked, they said. The case concerning the 12th district, represented by Congressman Mel Watt, has been argued before the court and a decision has yet to be made.

The case, *Shaw vs. Reno*, challenged the constitutionality of North Carolina's congressional plan. The Supreme Court in June 1993 decided that a redistricting plan that segregated voters by race and was "irregular on its face" was subject to



Annie Brown-Kennedy



Warren "Pete" Oldham

strict constitutional scrutiny.

The original district submitted by the state was rejected, so the minority districts were drawn to be in compliance with the Voting Rights Act.

The case, now referred to as *Shaw vs. Hunt*, was filed by five whites and was heard in March.

Oldham said whichever side loses, he expects an appeal will be filed. Kennedy, a lawyer, said the districts are necessary because government is not inclusive of African-American representation.

"Black leaders in the past have

not been inclusive in making decisions," she said. "Perhaps it has become necessary to have an unorthodox plan that will assure African Americans will get a fairer share."

The attack on these districts should send a message to blacks about the importance of voting, the legislators said.

"It should send a stern message," Oldham said. "The reality of the situation is that no one is going to be able to be aware of various legislation on minorities as minorities."

N.C. Black Leadership Caucus Convenes in Winston-Salem

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economic Development Institute released in May cited that while economic development for the state has been increasing at a steady pace, the gap between blacks and whites is still tremendous. The study shows that minorities still have the lowest-paying jobs and live in the poorest counties in the state and have an unemployment rate three times that of whites.

Even in the area of home ownership, minorities do not fare well. Grace said more than 55 percent of the residents in the eastern part of Winston-Salem are still renting.

While the General Assembly

sets aside money for economic development, minorities have a problem with access to these funds. Harris said that lack of access is the reason there is a need for such community-based organizations like the CDC. "The larger community does not even think about minorities when it comes to economic development," she said. She said these community-based organizations are needed to build a base to handle economic problems facing black communities and to get the larger economic arena to realize the necessity for inclusion in the economic development of the entire state.

"They must realize the quality of life for them (whites) is tied to the quality of life for the black community," she said. Business ownership is a way for blacks to improve economic situations, Blackwell said. He said many blacks don't think they can achieve the status of business owner because they may attend colleges that don't teach what's needed to become an entrepreneur.

"They prepare you how to work for someone else, but not how to work for yourself," he said.

Blackwell added that many of those who decide to go into business ownership often only look at only

the big contracts and ignore the smaller business because they may not immediately pay a salary one could get by working for companies such as IBM or R.J. Reynolds.

Banks also play a role in the lack of economic growth, turning down loans to minorities at a much faster rate than to the majority, Blackwell said. A study by the Community Reinvestment Association of North Carolina showed that numerous banks in the state have failed in their efforts of mortgage lending in minority communities.

Blackwell said one of the excuses banks use for turning down

a minority business loan is lack of experience.

"If they are not willing to give the loans, how do they expect us to get any experience," he said.

Progression in economic development in the areas of business and community go hand in hand, Blackwell said. There is a unity factor that comes into play where there must be a partnership between community and governmental leaders. They must work together to help achieve economic, political and social freedom for the black community.

It's also important that those who leave the community to get an

education do not abandon it. Reinvestment into the community will be an important factor in economic development, he added.

Harris agreed that the challenges have been and must be met by the community and partnerships must be formed to help the black community be noticed and get avenues to get involved in the economic development of North Carolina. "We must have community-based organizations," she said. "We must have the black media and entrepreneurs like Lafayette Jones to get them to understand the value of the black consumer."

Drayton Helped Dismantle Segregation in Winston-Salem

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But, Drayton is most proud of his involvement to dismantle segregation in the city. As a member of the Mayor's Good Will Committee, Drayton helped to desegregate hotels, restaurants, water fountains, rest rooms and other public facilities in the city. The committee was comprised of 20 predominant leaders in the city — 10 black and 10 white. Drayton said the mayor formed the committee because industrialist leaders were concerned about the reputation of the city during a time when civil rights protests were sprouting in nearby cities such as Greensboro and Durham. The efforts of the committee were performed before the Civil Rights Act was enacted in 1965.

In reflecting on the progress the city has made in race relations, Drayton said there has been some. But he added that just because the

situations in the '60s have improved, blacks must not think that the city does not have much to accomplish in terms of race relations.

"That doesn't mean the kingdom has come," Drayton said. "We have made progress in employment," he said, "but we don't have the power to go along with those positions. Don't ever have the impression that we have arrived." The problem with progress has a lot to do with people's attitudes, Drayton said. "I don't think white people as a whole have advanced in attitude comparable to the physical changes," he said.

The efforts of Drayton have been an inspiration to younger ministers in the city who are considered activist and community leaders in their own right.

"When I think of Dr. Drayton and many of the senior ministers in

this city, we're building on what they already have done," said the Rev. John Mendez of Emmanuel Baptist Church. "A lot of us younger guys know something was happening here before us. They made very significant contributions to the development of our people in this city. Had they not made the contributions, we would have been further behind than we are now. We're not inventing any new wheels. We're just continuing to articulate the concerns of the people."

Drayton defended the criticism of the black church by some who say it has not sustained the leadership role in the community that it once had. He said the black church has been continually progressing.

"The black church is the only institution in any community or state that is completely under the

control of blacks," he said. "And the black preacher is the freest black leader." Drayton does commend his congregation in its support of his activism and the leadership role he has played locally and statewide. Not all members supported Drayton's drive to be an activist and to involve the church in politics.

"I was talked about and some members left, but they made no problems for me," he said. "I was one of the pioneers for involving church and politics and now I don't know of a church in Winston that's not involved."

He added that may not be generally true across the state. There must be a distinction made between progressive and non-progressive ministers, but Drayton said most ministers here are progressive.

Most of the people in Drayton's congregation have supported him.

He said even ones who were critical of his activism in the beginning began to offer their support when his efforts began making a difference in Winston-Salem.

At New Bethel, Drayton has been a part of many projects that have benefited the church and the community. Buildings have been constructed and programs started that show the kind of leader Drayton has been at home and around the state. One particular church program was the idea of his wife, Susie Drayton. *Race Progress Day* brought in numerous blacks who were outstanding in their fields and could communicate important information to the congregation, Drayton said. *Race Progress Day* started 40 years ago with the intention to fill the void not filled by local universities and organizations at the time, bringing noteworthy blacks to the

area. In the 50 years of contributions and leadership Drayton has delivered to the community, he has found little time to relax. He said his best time for rest has been between meetings. Even when he and his wife go on vacation, there are always people they know who want to take them to dinner or see some sites.

Recently Drayton underwent an operation that amputated a leg, but it only will be a minor setback. Drayton said an associate minister is substituting for him in the pulpit and he will have to cancel a few meetings, but he is anxious to get back into the pulpit as soon as possible.

That will happen, he said, when he is fitted for his prosthesis. He will be undertaking some duties before returning to the pulpit, such as conducting a couple of weddings.

Minister: Black Churches Should Educate Children

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"The public school system is the biggest murderer of our kids," Mendez said. "Young blacks exemplify brilliance and academic talent in the early years, but when they reach the fourth grade, (the schools) kill their self-esteem and motivation to learn."

The Rev. Seth O. Lartey, pastor of Goler Memorial AME Zion Church, is planning the build a new church with a school and retirement

home. He said the school will begin after the church is completed in 1996 and offer grades K-8.

"The church has a mandate to teach people the ways of God, the ways of Christ," he said. "We believe what's missing in the lives of young people is a value-centered education that teaches respect for human life and family, becoming a good citizen. Our contribution to this nation is by helping citizens get

the kind of training they need to be productive members of society."

The Rev. Jerry Drayton, pastor of New Bethel Baptist Church, feels churches should be concerned with the children's education, but operating schools is a long shot. He said the idea of the church having a school is "folly" and that government and religious groups who have schools are facing numerous monetary problems.

Drayton also expressed uncertainty about enough churches marshaling together to take on the endeavor.

Robinson, who held a school choice forum last week, is proposing legislation enabling students to get tuition grants from the state to attend chartered schools.

He said it is not meant to segregate schools, but to put children in an atmosphere conducive to learn-

ing.

"If racism was a workable theory, then white kids would be doing extremely well and they are not," he said. "The reason why government schools don't work is not because they have bad people in them, they are run by a politicized bureaucracy that is not going to change."

Emmanuel Baptist Church currently owns the Kemet School of Knowledge, which teaches African

and African-American history.

Mendez noted that white churches have run schools for years and said blacks could do it if they pooled their resources.

"If we can build churches that cost millions of dollars, I refuse to believe we can't (build schools)," he said. "It might have to be a collective project, but it's something we certainly can do if we put some effort into it."

Program Aims to Increase Number of Black Teachers

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Forsyth County school board member Walter Marshall said he spoke with Martin about the program and was pleased with the program. He added that he didn't think the board as a whole was really interested in minority recruitment, but it will be one of the things that he will be pushing for, and Martin's programs seems like a good vehicle.

"I think it's a good idea, and I would be in total support of such a program," he said. "From talking with blacks in the community, it was one of the things most impressive about him."

Vickers said that WSSU is already involved in a program that trains African-American teaching assistants. Vickers said teaching

assistants are the target population because they are the group most likely to stay in the school system since they are already involved.

Livingstone College officials are pleased with the program, which is now 4 years old. Barbara Brown, vice-president for academic affairs and dean of the college, said the program offers many benefits to the school. One important aspect of the program is the partnership between the school and the superintendent, she said.

"The networking arrangement with your superintendent is important to any department of education," she said.

For the student, the program allows them to see what's going on

in public schools, which is more valuable than sitting and learning in the classroom, she said. The funding aspect is definitely a student benefit, Vickers added.

"That takes care of something many students have to work for on the side," she said.

The final benefit for students is they are guaranteed a job after graduation, she said.

Martin said scholarship recipients sign a contract agreeing to teach in the Rowan County school system for three years, which is when teachers can be tenured. Three years also serves as a good trial period, he said.

"It gives them an opportunity to see and know about us," Martin

pay two-thirds of the money. If the school system decides the arrangement isn't working, the student is free from repayment.

Young had to keep a 3.0 grade-point-average as a scholarship recipient and be available for peer tutoring during the year and some during the summer. But she added that it was a good kind of pressure.

"It was the kind of pressure that you didn't want to let anybody down," she said.

In addition to keeping up her grade point average, Young said she was very involved with programs dealing with children. She added that if things continue to go as well as they have been for her as she prepared to enter the Rowan County

school system, she will not have any problems staying longer than the required three years.

She said she had a good student teaching experience at Hurley Elementary School where she will begin her teaching career in August. She said the program also allowed her to get to know the administration and the school board she will be working with.

"The ice was already broken for me, and I knew what was expected of me," she said.

Young added that she is grateful to Rowan County school system for starting the program.

"It gives Livingstone College a chance to put more role models in the classroom," she said.