

12th

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School Board, said he is the only candidate who has experience with education and health care federal law and policy. The father of two said he entered the race because he wants to help create a better world for his children.

"I'm running for Congress because I want my children to have the same opportunities that I've had," he said. "...I want my three year-old son to be able to walk down any street in this country without the fear of being gunned down."

Brandon highlighted his record — including his "Ban the Box" campaign, which would do away with the felony conviction question on job applications — and his ability to garner bipartisan support in the General Assembly.

"Out of everybody in this race, I have the highest effectiveness rating. I have passed the most bills," he stated. "...You have to be able to work across the aisle, and I'm the only one in the race that's been able to get things done with Republicans in control."

Graham, who is in his fifth term in the N.C. Senate, emphasized his connections to the Twin City, including Mayor Allen Joines' recent endorsement of his campaign. Graham said he is guided by his moral compass, not party politics, when it comes to supporting legislation.

"I will fight for you," he told attendees. "I know the difference between doing what is right and doing what is popular, and if it's not popular but it's right for us, I'm on your side."

Patel chastised the other candidates for focusing on bills that he believes have done little to effect change in the 12th.

"I heard a lot of bills being passed and a lot of our young kids are still dying," he intoned. "...If you're satisfied with our kids dying and living in poverty, don't vote for me. Let them keep passing bills."

Hartsfield questioned the candidates about the causes they would champion in Congress.

Osborne, who is licensed to practice law in four states and the District of Columbia, said he would work to strengthen legislation that protects voting rights.

"North Carolina has the most restrictive and — I call it regressive — voting rights laws in the entire country," he declared. "If you send me to Washington ... I will work with my colleagues to amend the 1965 Voting Rights Act so that the full intent of that law will be upheld."

Adams, who represents Guilford County's District 58 in the NC House, said she would work to increase the federal minimum wage.



Photo by Layla Gamm
State Sen. Malcolm Graham speaks as State Rep. Alma Adams looks on.

"We need a living wage. That is critical," she declared. "People should not have to work two and three jobs, work everyday, and live in poverty. This is America. That is not the way."

Patel, a Vietnam veteran, said he would work to find solutions for the backlog of claims at the Veteran's Administration in Winston-Salem. The current backlog has created a waiting list where veterans often must wait months for their claims to be processed, a fact that Patel called "appalling."

"I will address the Veterans Administration about the problem and the backlog that they have," he promised. "I would address Congress to get some help, to get funding to get those claims sent through immediately."

Seven-people were seeking the Democratic nomination for the seat. Charlotte City Council member James Mitchell bowed out on April 14, partly citing his inability to raise money.

"The crowded field in the Democratic primary made it difficult to raise the necessary funds to run a competitive campaign," he said in a statement. "... It became clear that it was not possible to be competitive, let alone win this race."

Adams is leading the fundraising quest, according to Federal Election Commission filings. She raised \$150,853 during the first quarter of 2014, more than double that raised by second top fundraiser of the quarter — Battle, who pulled in \$65,108.

If none of the six candidates receives at least 40 percent of the vote in the Tuesday, May 16 primary. The leading two vote-getters will square-off in a runoff that will likely take place in mid-July. The ultimate winner will face either Vince Coakley, a former broadcast television anchor and radio host, or Leon Threath, a Charlotte based pastor. The men are facing each other in the Republican primary.

Reform

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Richmond, Va., agreed, adding that special consideration should be given to Dreamers, young immigrants who were brought to this country as children and have little or no knowledge of or experience with their native lands.

"They're Americans, basically. They were brought here and raised here, so why not treat them like everybody else?" Hannah said. "...I don't have any personal experience with immigration, but I do feel like it shouldn't be as hard for somebody to better their life."

The issue hits close to home for Mac-Thompson, a native of Freetown, Sierra Leone who immigrated to the U.S. in 1976. In those days, becoming an American was easy, Mac-Thompson says. He arrived in the country on a Friday and spent the weekend with a professor. Within days, Mac-Thompson was a card-carrying American.

"On Monday, he took me over to Social Security office and I got my Social Security card for 25 cents," he recalled. "... That's why I am so frustrated knowing what people go through now."

Today, there are approximately 11 million undocumented immigrants in this country; many of them have lived here for decades, work steady jobs and are raising children who were born here. President Obama made the promise of comprehensive immigration reform one of his main campaign planks in 2008 and again in 2012. While Republicans, many averse to the path to citizenship that a reform bill would likely include, are blamed for stalling immigration legislation, the Obama administration has also been harshly criticized for deporting a



Photo by Layla Gamm
WSSU students Bria Jones, Michael Lane and Endazha Hannah.

record number of undocumented immigrants. Immigration advocates say more than two million deportations have taken place on the president's watch, a number much higher than those that took place during President George W. Bush's two terms.

Mac-Thompson said the tragic events of September 11, 2001 have contributed to a collective sense of wariness about foreign-born people and generated a bevy of rules and regulations that impede many in their quest to become citizens.

"I think maybe the hesitation comes in part from our lifestyle, that we are so much used to," he said. "There is always a fear of the unknown, and we think that if the population increases a measure ... we might have to shift our lifestyles."

Michael Lane, a junior political science major, likened the complexity of today's immigration process to voter identification laws, which he believes are discouraging participation in the electoral process, just as immigration laws are deterring some would-be immigrants from considering relocating to the U.S., a choice that is often to our nation's detriment, he believes.

"I do feel that there are bright minds being turned away," he remarked. "Hopefully, that can be rectified going forward."

Lane said he would like to see President Obama take a stronger stand on the issue; he is not alone. Many are calling on the president to use executive power to halt the high number of deportations taking place; it is an option that he is reportedly exploring. Obama again last week called on House Republicans to advance an immigration reform bill, telling CBS news that the issue will haunt lawmakers otherwise.

John Boehner, the Republican Speaker of the House, has been irresolute on the issue. At a fundraiser in March, he told a group he was "hellbent" on getting a reform bill passed this year. Last week, though, he said it "would be difficult to pass this year."

Mac-Thompson said the fact that both sides see the issue as crucial is a positive sign going forward.

"I think there is a consensus among conservatives and liberals that we need immigration reform," Mac-Thompson said. "What do we disagree about is how we go about it. That's the big difference."



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