

# North Carolina GOP elects first black chairman

BY GARY D. ROBERTSON  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

**RALEIGH** — The North Carolina Republican Party elected its first black chairman Saturday, June 6, in an upset victory over the candidate backed by Gov. Pat McCrory and other top leaders in the GOP establishment.

Hasan Harnett of Harrisburg won the vote of Republican activists at the state GOP convention over Craig Collins of Gastonia. No vote was announced, although the roll call from North Carolina's 100 counties showed Harnett receiving 700 votes to 562 for Collins before Collins asked delegates from the convention floor to elect Harnett to a two-year term.

"I'm humbled by the win, and it speaks volumes to the delegates who have made their voices be made known," Harnett said in an interview after the vote. As for whether his victory will help broaden the party's base to more black voters, he added: "I think it's a good start and there's much more work to be done."

Collins had been endorsed by McCrory, U.S. Sens. Richard Burr and Thom Tillis and the top leaders at the General Assembly: Senate leader Phil Berger and House Speaker Tim Moore.

Some delegates were unhappy with what they considered to be top leaders trying to predetermine the race's outcome. Endorsements for Collins, a regional party leader, came within hours of departing Chairman Claude Pope announcing his decision not to seek a second term.

"The whole idea of this massive intervention in the leadership by the powers that be was said Vernon Robinson, a Forsyth

County delegate and former candidate for statewide office who is black. "It shows (there are) much more activists and conservative delegates than there have been in the past."

Harnett, a campaign manager for a 2014 congressional candidate and minority outreach director for the state GOP, had been in the race weeks before Pope's announcement. He said he made 4,000 personal phone calls with delegates to the convention since mid-April.

Harnett, 39, will serve at a time when Republicans control both the legislature and governor's office for the first time in more than

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140 years. The 2016 election will feature the presidential race, along with re-election bids by McCrory and Burr.

"We need a bold, reinvigorated Republican Party who listens to grassroots," Harnett said during his nomination speech, in which he arrived in the delegate hall in Raleigh with a small marching band drum

line banging out a beat to rev up the crowd. "Together, we will win in 2016 because teamwork "

McCrory said in a statement Saturday night that he had spoken with Harnett "forward to working with him to grow our party and "

Rep. David Lewis, R-Harnett, who officially nominated Collins, said he doesn't believe Harnett's

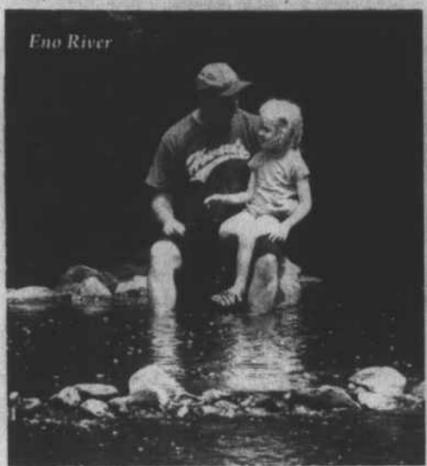


were behind Hasan" and helped him win.

"Certainly, Hasan will Lewis said."

Harnett is the state's first black chairman, according to party Executive Director Todd Poole, who said he had completed a history of state GOP chairmen and conventions. The state party was founded officially in 1867 by black and white residents.

Robinson, who runs a super PAC backing Ben Carson for president, said he believes Harnett's victory will help expand the "opportunity to broaden the electoral base in the GOP."

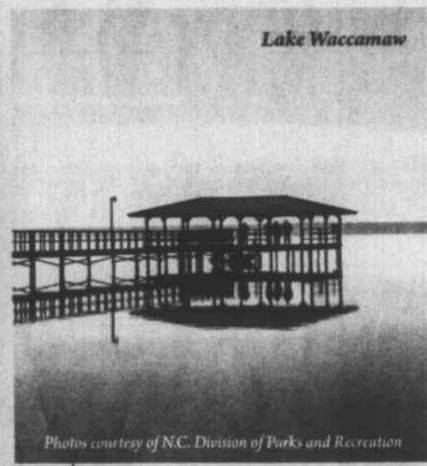


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