

Helms Advocates Expanding Magistrate's Authority

By Susan Ellsworth
Post Staff Writer

"People are losing confidence in our system of government because of the way our criminal courts operate," warned Democrat Parks Helms, a three-term general assembly member in the State House of Representatives.

Helms, who now chairs the Judiciary II committee and the N.C. Courts Commission, called for reducing the backlog of cases by first decriminalizing traffic litigation and then enforcing the speedy trial law.

Seeking his fourth term, Helms advocated expanding a magistrate's authority to allow him to hear more cases, and creating a separate department for traffic.

This move "will keep the average citizen from becoming unduly involved in the criminal court and free judges and the district attorney to concentrate on criminal defendants charged with serious misdemeanors and felonies," he said.

An attorney and partner in the firm of Lanes and Helms, the candidate is pressing to expand the public defender system.

The state should provide additional money to afford and keep a qualified attorney as public defender, Helms said.

He emphasized that the term indigent needs a more clear definition so only the truly destitute will receive services.

Although Helms admitted a moral and religious opposition to abortion, since it is already legal



REPRESENTATIVE PARKS HELMS

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here, he supports funding abortions for poor women.

This deacon at Park Road Baptist Church called it unfair that

abortion are available to the wealthy and middle class women who can afford them, but not to the poor.

Is there a way to relieve the housing crunch for low income people? Helms thinks so. He has advocated giving tax credits for

part of the purchase price of a home.

Helms also recommended state funding for low income resident's housing.

As a member of the Banks and Thrift Institutions committee, Helms also proposed the state administer these programs on behalf of the federal government.

"There is a good stock of existing homes in this community," Helms pointed out, "...but people can't repair their homes if they can't secure money."

He emphasized, "We can't give areas like housing funds and still expect to cut taxes. Legislative leadership is needed to develop these kinds of initiative."

A member of the Mental Health Study Commission, Helms suggested sending alcoholics to a local treatment facility which would operate on a lower budget instead of a psychiatric hospital to dry out.

Helms is a past president of the Charlotte Jaycees, a former Goodwill Industries director. He is a graduate of UNC-C, and a member of the State Bar Association, American Bar Associations and the North Carolina Academy of Trial Lawyers.



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