

Primary 1978

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U.S. Senate

Eight Demos fight to face Helms in November

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CBS election night coverage, November 1978. In the network's New York studios, Walter Cronkite turns to Dan Rather for a report on the senatorial races in the South.

"Walter, we have an upset in the making in North Carolina," Rather says. "Incumbent Republican Sen. Jesse Helms trails his Democratic opponent with 54 percent of the precincts reporting."

Rather turns to the large tote boards and says, "Now I've received word that CBS projects that when all the votes have been counted the new senator from North Carolina will be..."

Fiction? Perhaps so. But many North Carolina Democrats believe their party's nominee can defeat Helms, although the election is more than six months away and the Democratic candidate has not been chosen. On Tuesday, party voters go to the polls to determine which of the eight candidates will earn the right to face Helms in November.

They include the son of a former governor and a state legislator who ran against the father 22 years ago. The other six candidates

range from the state insurance commissioner to a politically unknown millworker. Two state senators and a pair of former newspaper writers round out the field. The crowded race falls one short of the record nine candidates in the 1974 Democratic U.S. Senate primary won by Robert Morgan.

The target of all this Democratic activity is Jesse Helms. He is the lone survivor of the 1972 election when Republicans won rare victories in North Carolina presidential, gubernatorial and Senate races. It had been a long drought for the GOP in a one-party state: Republicans had won only four such elections since Reconstruction.

Richard Nixon carried the Tar Heel state in both 1968 and 1972, but Herbert Hoover was the only other GOP presidential candidate to do so since Ulysses S. Grant occupied the White House.

Sen. Jeter Pritchard, elected in 1896, and Gov. Daniel Russell, elected in 1897, were the only Republicans to win election since the 1870s until Helms and Gov. Jim Holshouser won six years ago.

In the 1976 elections, however, Jimmy Carter and Jim Hunt re-established Democratic control in the White House and the governor's mansion. Now only Helms stands in the way of what loyal Democrats

consider a "return to normalcy."

While the main objective of the Democrats is to pick the best candidate to defeat Helms in November, the campaign has turned into a free-for-all battle among the party candidates.

State Democratic chairperson Betty McCain has urged party unity after the heated nomination race is over.

"Every time we cut and draw blood, it will be hurting us in the fall," McCain said as she pleaded for the candidates to allow "as little bloodletting as we can."

State party officials are urging this show of unity, because they realize their task of displacing Helms will be a difficult one.

"The candidates mustn't forget who our ultimate opponent is and the polls show the ultimate victory can be won," McCain said.

Numberous pollsters have attempted to determine which Democratic candidate has the most public support and the best chance of defeating Helms.

A statewide Carolina Poll, conducted by students in the UNC School of Journalism, showed in November 1977 that most of the state's Democrats did not know whom in the crowded contest they would vote for. Another Carolina Poll in February revealed

that former Charlotte banker Luther Hodges was the only Democrat who could defeat Helms, followed closely by Insurance Commissioner John Ingram.

A Raleigh newspaper reported the results of a similar poll taken in April that showed Hodges leading the Democratic race with 34 percent, followed by Ingram with 12 percent. State Sen. McNeill Smith polled 7 percent, while state Sen. Lawrence Davis followed with 4 percent.

But 42 percent of the Democrats polled said they were undecided. Candidates Joe Felmet, William Griffin, David McKnight and Thomas Sawyer commanded the remaining 1 percent.

The April survey indicated that the state's voters believe Ingram, in addition to Hodges, has a chance to defeat Helms in the November election. The poll showed Hodges would defeat Helms 42 percent to 37 percent, while Ingram would outstrip the Republican incumbent 38 percent to 34 percent.

Even though the party primary is the center of attention now, Democratic leaders are looking ahead to the struggle in the fall. Publicly, they say Helms can be beaten. But privately, political veterans concede the fight will be uphill.

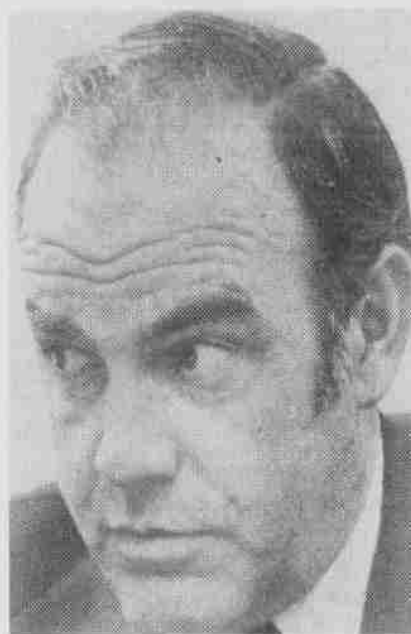
Pushing for jobs, Hodges defends pot statements

From staff and wire reports

Pushing economic issues as the focus of his campaign, Democratic U.S. Senate candidate Luther Hodges has been telling the crowds the election Tuesday will determine "whether North Carolina can offer positive and intelligent leadership or negative emotionalism."

North Carolina has an unemployment problem and the federal government should provide more and better jobs, Hodges says. Like most other candidates, he supports "right-to-work" laws, Hodges says he

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Luther Hodges

Trouble-shooting Ingram fighting 'special interests'

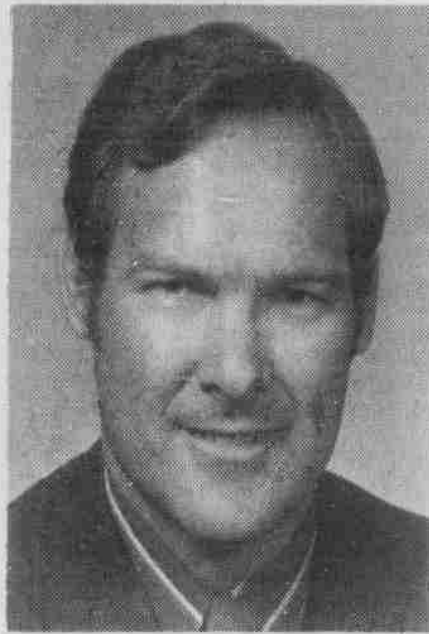
From staff and wire reports

It has been more than five years since trouble-shooting Asheboro lawyer John Ingram stormed into the state's capitol city on a white horse named Insurance Reform.

Since then, insurance-industry officials and other opponents have referred to Insurance Commissioner John Ingram as a nemesis sent by the devil himself. His supporters have said he is the last defense against ever-rising insurance rates.

To the "little guy," the headlines surrounding Ingram's relentless pressure on

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John Ingram

McNeill Smith: best-informed, worst-financed

From staff and wire reports

McNeill Smith, a three-term legislator from Guilford County, proudly displays newspaper clippings calling him the most informed of the eight Democratic candidates for the U.S. Senate. But he admits his problem is competing with better-financed organizations of other candidates who can afford large media campaigns to boost name recognition.

"I'm in this race because Jesse Helms is in the U.S. Senate," Smith says. "I'm the candidate best able to get him out."

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McNeill Smith

Legislative vet, Davis Campaigns to cut inflation

From staff and wire reports

Lawrence Davis, a Winston-Salem lawyer and a four-term veteran of the N.C. General Assembly, has campaigned for the U.S. Senate on the premise that inflation is the nation's top problem. He spent two terms in the N.C. House of Representatives and now is in the state Senate.

Social-security taxes should be reduced and federal, state and local government employees included in the social-security program, Davis says. He believes military pensions are costing too much and should

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Lawrence Davis