

ELECTIONS '92

Political war-horses, baby-boomers lead pack in state primaries

By Anna Griffin
Associate Editor

RALEIGH — The 1992 N.C. primaries were a striking example of the hard-nosed, winner-takes-all campaigns that traditionally have characterized politics in the Tar Heel state.

Although some younger players — such as lieutenant governor candidates

Art Pope and Dennis Wicker and labor commissioner candidate Nelson Dollar — stood up to grab their share of the pie, the primaries were dominated by four grizzled veterans.

In the state's most carefully watched race, former two-term Gov. Jim Hunt began his political comeback by routing state Attorney General Lacy Thornburg, 65 percent to 27 percent, in

the race for the Democratic gubernatorial nomination. Hunt also scored large margins of victory over little-known opponents Marcus Williams, Wendell Briggs and Eddie Hatcher.

To complete the "Battle of the Jims" scenario, Republican Lt. Gov. Jim Gardner notched an impressive 82 percent of the total votes against Ruby Hooper and Gary Dunn for the Repub-

lican nomination, setting up a Nov. 3 showdown between two candidates who have run for the state's highest office a total of five times.

While younger, baby-boom generation candidates were capturing victories in other congressional and Council of State races, the governor's race represents a throwback to the "good ol' days" of N.C. politics, said UNC political science professor Thad Beyle.

"(Hunt and Gardner) are consistent politicians," Beyle said. "They've lost big races but they obviously didn't take politics out of their minds."

"They're like the Energizer rabbit —

they just keep going."

State GOP chairman Jack Hawke said the race could turn dirty quickly.

Gardner has said he will be focusing on the "Martin record" to prove his qualifications to voters. Hunt has said that instead of attacking Gardner, he will play up the economic growth he contends North Carolina experienced under his two administrations.

"This campaign ought not be about dragging down our opponents," Hunt said in his victory speech at the North Raleigh Hilton. "This campaign should be about building up North Carolina."

But crucial issues such as education

and the economy could be abandoned quickly in favor of more controversial subjects, Hawke said.

"When you look at the issues, the two candidates are similar," he said. "That can only lead to nasty politics."

In the battle for U.S. Senate — another race that could turn ugly early — former Democrat D.M. "Lauch" Faircloth won the Republican nomination and the right to face U.S. Sen. Terry Sanford by defeating former Charlotte Mayor Sue Myrick in the GOP primary.

Although the two men were once close friends — as governor, Sanford named Faircloth state highway commissioner — their relationship turned bitter in 1986 when Sanford decided at the last minute to run for senator, a post Faircloth was planning to seek.

But at his May 5 victory party in the North Raleigh Hilton, Faircloth said he had no plans to make this a negative campaign.

"This will be an issue-oriented campaign," Faircloth said. "The issue is: Senator Sanford is a liberal and believes in big spending. I am a conservative and believe we must bring fiscal spending under control."

Faircloth's victory was surprisingly easy, particularly in Mecklenburg County, Myrick's home district, where the businessman won by a 2-1 margin. In all, Faircloth captured 48 percent of the vote to Myrick's 30 percent.

The most surprising election-day outcome was state Rep. Harry Payne's, D-New Hanover, victory over incumbent Labor Commissioner John Brooks for that post's Democratic nomination.

Brooks, a four-term incumbent, had drawn harsh criticism for his handling of the Sept. 3, 1991, Hamlet fire that resulted in the deaths of 25 people. Brooks also created controversy recently by attempting to block a federal takeover of the state Occupational Safety and Health Administration, a bureau of the N.C. Labor Department.

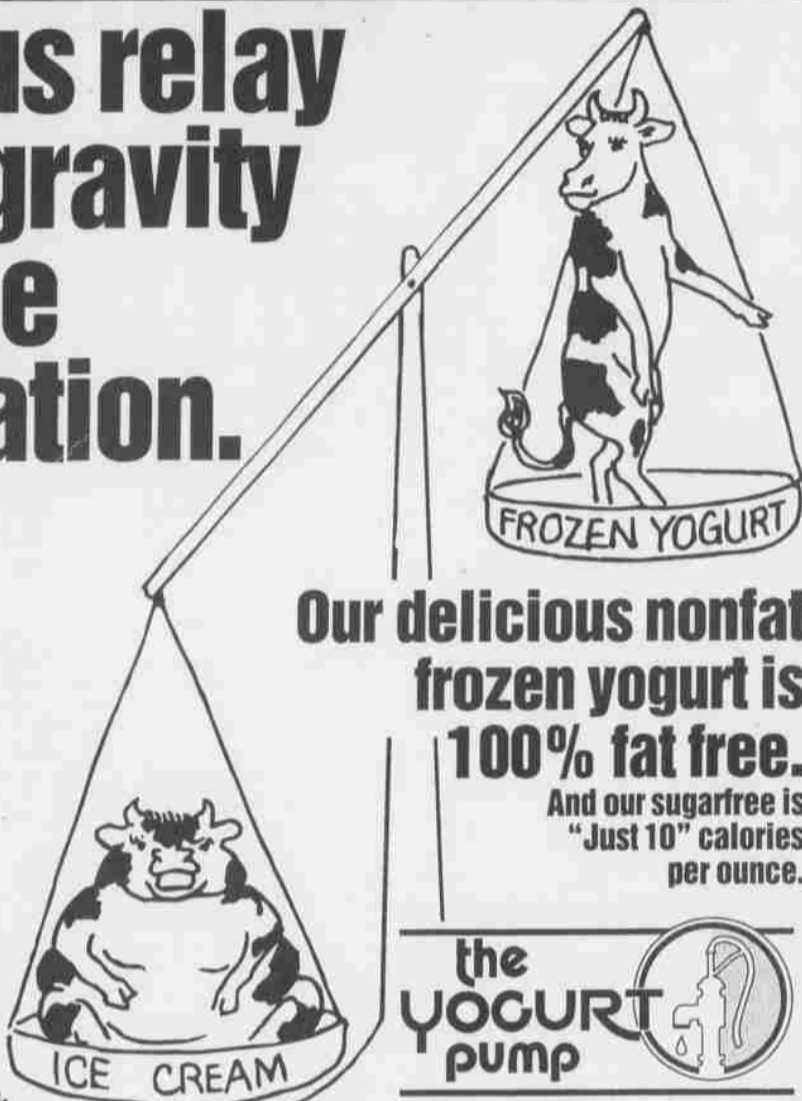
Payne, a soft-spoken legislator from New Hanover County, said the six-term state representative said Brooks should not be blamed for the fire.

"(The campaign) focused attention on an agency which we capitalized upon," Payne said. "There should be no attribution of that tragedy to that agency or to Mr. Brooks."

Payne's GOP opponent will be 33-year-old Nelson Dollar.

In the year's most hotly contested races, the party primaries for lieutenant governor, state Reps. Dennis Wicker, D-Lee, and Art Pope, R-Wake, squeaked past their respective opponents, Reps. Jim Crawford, D-Granville, and Doris Huffman, R-Catawba.

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