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PRICELESS

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ROBINSON - BESTS WARD IN DEBATE

by: Roxane Perles

Vernon Robinson, former Winston-Salem State University professor and the first African-American nominee for State Superintendent of Public Instruction bested his opponent, Mike Ward, a former Granville County School Superintendent in the first ever State Superintendent candidates' debate, televised statewide on North Carolina Public Television.

Robinson repeatedly hammered his opponent for his role in giving out 12th grade diplomas for 6th grade work, shattering the lives of children who were not prepared for college - and offering nothing better to the African-American community than 3 out of 4 black male 5th graders failing the 5th grade end-of-course proficiency tests.

Mike Ward tried to make the case that he was the best candidate for the top school job, because of his experience as a coach, teacher, principal and superintendent of the year, and that his experience was at the university level...teaching children who were poorly served by Mr. Ward's system.

Patrick Killough, a retired foreign service officer from the Asheville area, who watched the debate, felt that "Robinson looks tense and tired at the beginning of the debate. I think he did succeed in tying his opponent to the problems in the system. Robinson clearly won the exchange in the middle of the debate when the candidates asked each other questions. In the closing, Robinson finished strong while Ward stumbled..."

School choice was hotly contested. Vernon Robinson said "the public schools are not giving parents what they want because school personnel cater to funding sources, politicians, bureaucrats and special interest groups." He added, "The only way to improve public schools so that parents get what they want, safe, effective schools, consistent with their values that spend money in the classroom, is to take power to the parents so that they can choose a better school for their child." Ward said he wanted greater choices for parents in public schools, choices that the local school board approve."

-Paid for by the Committee to elect Vernon Robinson

Robinson emphasize his point, Robinson invited Phyllis Lanier, a mother of two young boys who is a strong and loyal Democrat, living in public housing has decided to support Robinson because of his work to give her and other poor people school choice. Robinson asked his opponent to explain "given your system can only prepare 1 of 4 black boys to successfully finish 5th grade, can you explain to Ms. Lanier why you want to prevent her from saving her two sons by choosing a better school...why you don't support my proposal to give \$2,500 per child to the poorest citizens of our state - to get a better school. Ward said he opposed vouchers and tax credits. Then Robinson, according to Jonathan Jordan, a recent UNC law school grad, delivered the best line of the debate. Until Ms. Lanier and other residents of public housing can choose a better school and leave schools failing their children, the public school system will never improve. Bill Clinton should not be the only resident of public housing who can choose a better school for his child.

In the closing statements, Ward reemphasized his experience in the system and that with more



programs and more training for public school employees, a change would come. He said "we need to improve public schools rather than abandon them. Robinson closed by criticizing Ward for never having specified what his programs were; how they would work or how much they would cost tax payers. He said more spending in the current failed system would never improve schools and if spending could fix the problem, it would have done so 3 billion dollars ago. The bottom line - Robinson's opponent believes that he and his fellow bureaucrats know what is best for your child and he wants to be a passionate advocate for the system. VOTE VERNON ROBINSON - He will be an advocate for YOU!

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March of Dimes

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T O
THE 1997 PHOENIX Community Festival committee will meet the 1st Wednesday in February, 1997. All persons interested in serving on a committee should fill out the form inside this edition, and mail it to PO Box 4416, Winston-Salem, NC 27115-4416. Should you have any questions regarding the festival, please do not hesitate to contact our offices Monday thru Friday - 8AM -5:30PM. We can be reached at (910)727-1171. Anyone in the office should be able to help you.

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