

# A controversial career for a gubernatorial appointee

From Page B10

Henry Frye of Greensboro as an associate justice to the N.C. Supreme Court. "Since Hunt has been governor, 600 blacks have been elected to public office," he said.

The governor has been a friend to blacks in North Carolina," Ruffin said. "The blacks have befriended him, and he has befriended them."

Hunt has brought \$13 billion of new industry and 2,000 new jobs to North Carolina, Ruffin said. He has upgraded the quality of education in the state and is still a volunteer at Broughton High School in Raleigh, where he tutors students in reading. Hunt also has reduced the prison population, he added.

"He has developed the future of this state," Ruffin said. "Hunt has a record that he can be proud of. He has reached down to the grassroots and touched the people."

Many black political observers have suggested that Ruffin again seek public office. In 1972, Ruffin was defeated by 276 votes for an at-large seat on the Durham City Council.

"I don't want to be governor of this state," Ruffin said. "I don't have any ambition to do that."

Several people have asked Ruffin to run for lieutenant governor, he said, but "I always declined any offers to do so."

If Hunt defeats Helms, black political observers say Ruffin would be among those that Hunt would name to his Washington staff. "If he would extend an invitation, I would probably go," Ruffin said. "After all, he's going to win."

Ruffin, along with state Personnel Director Harold Webb, is considered to be the most influential black in state government.

"Mr. Ruffin is a competent and influential member of the governor's staff," Webb said. "He is effective in the mountain areas, in the west and in the eastern rural areas to Bertie County. He is very effective in pushing for minority representation on boards and commissions."

Hunt's press secretary, Gary Pearce, said the governor often seeks advice from Ruffin on key policy matters. "Ben has so much common sense and is such a good problem solver."

In May 1982, Ruffin was embroiled in a controversy surrounding his involvement with REMCA Inc. and with Community Research and Development Associates Inc.

The Daily Times-News of Burlington reported a possible conflict of interest involving Ruffin when \$135,900 in Comprehensive Employment and Training Act funds was awarded to a Ruffin corporation between 1979 and 1981. The story said the money came from a special account that Hunt controlled.

Ruffin said at the time that he didn't know the CETA grant given to the Durham-based REMCA came from the governor's special account. He said his participation in the Community Research and Development Associates, a housing consultant firm that attempted to get state financing for a High Point apartment development, involved no personal profit. "I never received a penny," Ruffin said. "They assumed that because my name was on some of the documents that I get part ownership in a development," Ruffin told the Associated Press at the time. "My involvement was tantamount to serving on the United Way. I did it at a sacrifice of my time."

In May, the state attorney general's office ruled that Ruffin violated no laws with his involvement with the two firms, because he made no profit through the corporations. "Ruffin had nothing to do with the board making a CETA grant," the office said. "Nothing whatsoever was wrong. There was no compensation to Ruffin, directly or

indirectly, nor did any member of his family receive any."

Ruffin praised the accomplishments of former Democratic presidential can-

didate Jesse Jackson. "Jesse Jackson has done an outstanding job in arousing the conscience of our people," Ruffin said. "His candidacy has increased black

voter registration to unparalleled heights. He has earned my support. Jackson has the banner of hope for our people."

North Carolina is about 10

years away from electing a black for governor, Ruffin said. "It depends on the timing and the person. The person that runs must be able to attract a large

number of white voters." So far, no black candidate has demonstrated that ability except Henry Frye.



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