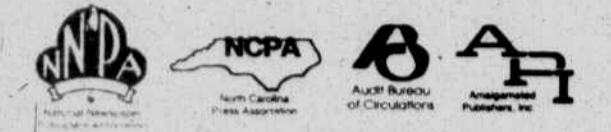


# OPINION

**THE CHRONICLE**

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## Will Vernon Robinson be more than a politician?

It hasn't taken very long for neophyte Alderman Vernon Robinson to thrust himself into local headlines. He may be getting a lot of attention now, but in the long run, that visibility may come back to haunt him.

At his first Board of Aldermen meeting, Robinson let it be known that he is both a committed Republican and a staunch supporter of the Winston-Salem police. The police, of course, have come under the scrutiny of many black people and ethnic organizations because of the department's use of pepper spray.

For the most part, the aldermen have been divided along racial and political lines about the effectiveness of pepper spray and whether it should remain a weapon in the department's arsenal. Although Robinson is black, he is also a Republican. The two need not be mutually exclusive. But Robinson has left little doubt that if he has to pick between the two, he will choose his political party.

Robinson refuses to acknowledge that police could be motivated by anything other than honorable intentions. Only drug addicts and disorderly thugs will be sprayed, he argues. We'd all like to believe that.

But the statistics clearly show that in Winston-Salem, police are more likely to subdue a black person with pepper spray than someone who is not black. Good blacks, Robinson insists, have nothing to fear. And it seems that Robinson is going out of his way not only to pledge his allegiance to law enforcement officers, but also to prove that he is one of those "good blacks."

"My constituency is the police department and law abiding citizens," says Robinson. He adds that he "is not likely to have support from the criminals' lobby."

Robinson is entitled to his opinion. And that perspective may in fact be one that is shared by the people of the South Ward who elected him into office. But he goes too far when he openly attacks another alderman for having an opposing point of view.

Last week, Robinson sought out local media to, as he put it, admonish Vivian Burke from playing politics. This is the same man who told The Chronicle that an elected official could "either be on offense or defense." Robinson, of course, said he "plans to be on offense for the next four years."

Here's what he told reporters: "Mrs. Burke's attempt at taking pepper spray from the police, the most important public safety tool since handcuffs, her failure to support competitive compensation for police officers, and her remarks about minority recruiting at a past graduation all serve to weaken police morale and make it harder to recruit police officers be they black, white, green or red."

First of all, it was Alderman Wanda Merschel, not Burke, who made the motion to withdraw the resolution supporting police use of pepper spray. Why isn't Robinson attacking her?

Perhaps it's because he can garner more political points by distancing himself from the other black elected officials. That tactic may score points with other Republicans initially. But most people have a strong displeasure for incivility. There was no reason for Robinson to attack Burke.

Many in the black community have been more skeptical of black Republicans than their white counterparts. And Robinson's unwarranted admonishment to Burke gives them reason. After a while these verbal assaults will become as revolting to those in his own party as they are to everyone else.

We had hoped that Robinson would be a positive example of how blacks can benefit from and participate in the two-party system. So far, all Robinson has shown us is his party loyalty.



### Who do they represent

**To the Editor,**

After the autopsy report on Warnie Lee Patton was made public last Monday, members of the Black Leadership Roundtable proved once and for all that the real intent behind their opposition to the use of pepper spray is to restrict the effectiveness of the police department.

After the death of Warnie Lee Patton, members of the Black Leadership Roundtable, such as Rep. Larry Womble, Walter Marshall and Tatum, requested that the Board of Aldermen place a moratorium on - or suspend use of - pepper spray until the official autopsy report on exactly how Warnie Lee Patton died was released to the public. They made this request during the Public Safety Committee meeting on Dec. 8. They said that they wanted to be absolutely sure that the pepper spray did not have anything to do with Patton's death.

The report came in last Monday and Dr. John Butts, the state medical examiner, stated in his report that Patton died from cocaine abuse and that contact with pepper spray did not play any role in his death.

Although Womble, and other members of the Black Leadership Roundtable said that they wanted the use of pepper spray to be suspended until the report was made public, Womble appeared on a local television news report and basically said that the state medical examiner wasn't good enough for the Black Leadership Roundtable and that they want another opinion.

If Womble and the other members of the Black Leadership Roundtable really wanted to know the truth about whether or not pepper spray is dangerous to use, they would accept what the state medical examiner reports. But now they don't care about the report. They don't even care about Patton's drug problem, which ultimately led to his death. All they care about is a platform to stand on to help them restrict the police department and they're using Patton's tragic death to further this agenda.

They were hoping that the state medical examiner would say that pepper spray did play a role in Patton's death, thereby giving their claim credibility. Since the report doesn't support their claim, they've thrown it out the window, even though they wanted everyone to wait for the report and respect its conclusion initially. Now, they're seeking confirmation somewhere else and intend to present it to the Board of Aldermen in March.

The Chronicle welcomes letters as well as guest columns from its readers. Letters should be as concise as possible and should be typed or legibly printed. To ensure the authenticity of the letter, you must include the name, address and telephone number of the writer. Columns must follow the same guidelines and will be published if they are of interest to our general readership. The Chronicle will not publish any letters or columns that arrive without this information. We reserve the right to edit letters and columns for brevity and clarity. Submit letters and columns to: Chronicle Mailbag, P.O. Box 1636, Winston-Salem, NC 27102. E-mail address: wschron@netunlimited.net



But exactly who is the Black Leadership Roundtable speaking for on this issue? Who are they lobbying for? Hard-working, respectful, law-abiding members of the black community, who public officials are sworn to protect, are not impacted by this issue because the police only go after criminals and the disorderly. Hard-working, respectful, law-abiding members of the black community are not strung out on drugs. Therefore, hard-working, respectful, law-abiding members of the black community are in no danger of being sprayed with pepper spray.

I think it's clear whose interests the Black Leadership Roundtable represent. They represent the criminals and the disorderly in the black community, which is why they want to restrict the effectiveness of the police department. Even if it means using the tragic death of Warnie Lee Patton to do it.

Ken Raymond

### Kudos to Fields for suing state

**To the Editor,**

I applaud Principal Larry D. Fields of Latham Elementary School for the civil-rights complaint over the ABCs of Public Education. Principal Fields is justified in protecting his faculty and students. He is an intelligent champion who trusts that the U.S. Department of Education will enforce the U.S. Constitution for

Eugene Bailey

### Volunteers make program work

**To the Editor,**

I take this opportunity to thank numerous individuals, organizations and agencies for their

devotion and commitment in providing services to court-ordered juveniles through out Teen Court and monetary restitution programs. Because of their involvement, over 200 juveniles paid back in excess of \$12,000, performed 4,000 hours of community service, and, best of all, have the skills to avoid further involvement in the juvenile justice system. Without the assistance and cooperation of our volunteers, this would not be possible.

Specifically, Samaritan Soup Kitchen, Wake Forest University, SCAN, Prodigals Community, STEP ONE, Kernersville Goodwill, Downtown Church Center, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Vision Works, 2nd New Bethel Baptist Church, attorneys and judges, juvenile court counselors, the personnel at the Hall of Justice and numerous businesses have all made immeasurable contributions in creating opportunities for juveniles to make better choices.

A special thanks goes to the Wake Forest University Law School for providing law students who serve as advisors for Teen Court and the use of their facilities for Teen Court training.

As we all show growing concern at the incidence and intensity of escalating juvenile crime, the many volunteers in our community who are making a significant difference deserve a well-earned "thanks."

James Blackburn  
 Program Manager, Restitution Programs  
 Forsyth Court Volunteers

# Parents Should Keep Pushing for School Involvement

BY GARRY BURNETT

"A school system without parents at its foundation," said Jesse Jackson, "is like a bucket with holes in it."

Experience has taught us that educational strategies won't hold water unless they involve parents. That's a key premise of the School Development Process (SDP). In place at several dozen Guilford County schools, the SDP strives to build trust among faculty, administrators and parents. In so doing, it creates a climate that fosters student success.

The SDP is not an add-on program. A child-centered process conceived by Dr. James Comer of the Yale Child Study Center, the SDP recognizes that parents and the community are crucial to change.

Study after study has shown that parental involvement enhances student achievement. That would seem sufficient reason for parents to get involved in their

children's education. Yet, many parents don't visit the school until there's a problem. Some are not only reluctant to visit the school, but are unsure of how to offer educational support at home.

Any principal will tell you, "Parental involvement can be difficult to enlist."

For years the PTA has promoted parental involvement and has made valuable contributions. However, the PTA fails to reach some parents who are put off by dues, formality and fund raising.

Fortunately, several Guilford County Schools (GCS) initiatives share the PTA's goals. The federally-funded Title I program, for example, holds workshops and meetings, issues a monthly parent newsletter and organizes a parent advisory council. The CCS Family Resource Center offers referrals, training, a resource library and guide, and Infoline, a 24-hour telephone service on parenting issues.

The School Development

Process holds perhaps the most promise for embracing parents who have in the past felt marginalized. All parents have an open invitation to attend parent team meetings.

"The team allows parents to share their knowledge about their children and the community with the staff, which in turn shares its knowledge about child behavior and learning with the parents," Dr. Comer, explains in his book

*Waiting for a Miracle.*

The SDP parent team advocates on behalf of the school's parents and works to involve parents in every level of school activity — from occasional participation to leadership.

SDP parent teams are not membership groups and charge no dues. Parent team leaders are selected rather than elected. And decisions are reached through consensus, not majority rule. Parent teams do not duplicate the activities of, or threaten to replace, existing parent groups. Some parents, however, are active with both parent teams and PTAs.

What the SDP parent team and PTAs share is a desire to create opportunities for parent participation and minimize perceived barriers. Applying the SDP guiding principles of no-fault collaboration and consensus decision making, parent teams foster child-centered, home/school partnerships.

Though it was launched just

four years ago in Guilford County Schools, the SDP is already making a difference. Parent teams have not only empowered parents who once felt disenfranchised but have reached out to the community as well. To involve parents who can't make it to the school, Welborn Middle School's parent team helped organize town meetings at community sites. Seeking to reinforce the discipline policy, Sedalia Elementary's parent team recruited mentors and community volunteers.

Washington Elementary's parent team alerted the School Board to the need for bus service for students from Ray Warren Homes. By state guidelines, the public housing community was within walking distance of the school. The students, however, had to cross a four-lane highway, and school attendance dropped during inclement weather. The parent team and the PTA joined forces together to address this problem. The students now receive bus ser-

vice.

Fairview Elementary's parent team offers a six-week series of EPIC (Effective Parenting Involving Children) twice a year. The team also initiated an after-school program at High Point's Southside Recreation Center and enlisted support from the Kiwanis club. The club sponsors a recognition program to reward student achievement and leadership.

If any lesson is to be learned from these successes, it's that parents often do a better job than school officials of involving other parents. The SDP parent teams have helped other parents adopt a more global perspective, instead of just focusing on their own children. And that benefits all children.

Garry Burnett is a parent facilitator for Guilford County Schools' School Development Process. He also serves as legislative chair for the Guilford County Council of PTAs.