

Political landscape to change in East Winston

Parmon makes plans for Senate run as Womble bows out

BY LAYLA FARMER
THE CHRONICLE

State Rep. Earline Parmon's announcement Tuesday that she is running for the N.C. Senate was a "bittersweet moment."

Her longtime friend and colleague Rep. Larry Womble had hoped to run for the 32nd District Senate seat, but the extensive injuries he sustained in a December car accident that claimed the life of the other driver has forced the legislator to put his Senate bid on hold.

During a media conference Tuesday morning, as Parmon prepared to file for her Senate run at the Forsyth County Board of Elections, Womble, via speakerphone, said that Parmon has his "110 percent" support.

"I'm in full support of Rep. Earline Parmon running for the Senate," said Womble. "I can't think of anybody who's more professional, more qualified and who has the experience to run for Senate. She has proven herself down through the years that she is the right person to run."

Womble also announced that he will not run for re-election to his 71st District seat because of his continuing recovery.

Addressing the press for the first time since his accident, Womble, who was moved from Wake Forest Baptist Medical Center to a rehabilitation facility earlier this month, assured those in attendance that he is on the road to recovery.

"My recovery is coming along very well. It is progressing at a good pace. Maybe in the next month or two - four to six weeks - I'll be back on the trail again," he said to hearty applause. "I'll be out there campaigning for Earline Parmon."

Parmon said she is also optimistic about Womble's progress. She and Womble both expressed gratitude to the community for the outpouring of support they have received in recent months.

"It has been a really trying time, but because of the support of friends and supporters, I've been able to do the things that I needed to do to ensure that Rep. Womble is healing very well," said Parmon, who has played



State Rep. Earline Parmon holds a phone as State Rep. Larry Womble addresses the group via speakerphone.

an active role in caring for Womble since the crash. "I've seen him make a miraculous recovery and it's been because of people praying for him and me and for his family."

Parmon, who has represented the House's 72nd District alongside Womble since 2003, says the void of his absence is tangible everywhere she goes.

"It's hard for me to attend events on his behalf. I've had to take the lead on issues that he's been so passionate about," she remarked. "...He is such a force to be reckoned with in the House that he is sorely missed."

A number of people were also on hand at the Board of Elections to announce their plans to fill the shoes of both Womble and Parmon, whose House seat is now up for grabs.

County Commissioner Everette Witherspoon said he will run for Womble's seat.

Witherspoon said he would champion the causes of health and human services, poverty and early education and fight for adequate funding across the University of North Carolina system, paying special attention to Winston-Salem State University. Witherspoon said he has discussed his decision to run with Womble at length, and that the veteran legislator's support is an integral part of his campaign.

"A lot of times when you have younger elected officials, people always ask the question, 'Are they ready?'" said Witherspoon, who is just 33. "But when you have the support of Rep. Earline Parmon and Rep. Larry Womble - the two legislators in the House - how can anybody question whether you're ready or not?"

City native Jimmie Bonham says he will be running for Parmon's House seat.

Bonham, who made an unsuccessful bid for a District 1 Board of Education seat two years ago, said he will be running a grassroots campaign. Bonham also said he discussed his decision with Womble and Parmon, though Parmon has not officially endorsed a successor yet.

If elected, Bonham said he would focus on "insourcing" jobs by bringing them back to the U.S. and to North Carolina, securing affordable healthcare for state citizens and upholding some of the chief legislation Womble and Parmon helped to create, including a compensation program for victims of the state Eugenics program and the Racial Justice Act.

"The time is right for me to serve in the House seat as a voice for the people," said Bonham, owner of Hair by Jimmie. "...I'm looking at speaking out and up for the least of these. I'm going to Raleigh not to look for a job but to do a job."

City Council Member James Taylor, who like Parmon is a Democrat, had previously announced that he will run for the 32nd Senate District. The seat, which was recently shuffled in a controversial redistricting move, is now held by Sen. Linda Garrou, who will not seek reelection.

Despite the unfortunate circumstances that led to her Senate bid, Parmon said the move represents a new opportunity for her and for the community she serves.

"We've not had a black senator from Forsyth County in many years," she pointed out. "...so it is humbling for me to run for this seat."



Womble



Bonham

Firefighters

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Sowell belongs to an elite group. She is one of only about a dozen black female firefighters who have ever served the Department in its history. Only three African American women - Sowell, Shirese Moore and Angie Richardson - are currently serving the department as firefighters. The three women were honored for their exemplary service to the WSFD Friday, alongside Barbara White and Kira Smith, the only black female firefighters ever to retire from the department, during the WSFD's annual Black History Month Celebration at Goodwill Industries' Self-Reliance Hall Auditorium.

"We respect our public safety people who go out each and every day," said Mayor Pro Tempore Vivian Burke, chair of the city's Public Safety Committee. "It's a difficult job and we know that, and we appreciate you."

Sowell said she was humbled to share the spotlight with Smith and White, two of her mentors.

"It's exciting," she remarked. "I hope I can set an example like these young ladies set for me."

Fire Chief Antony Farmer said Moore, Sowell and Richardson represent the Department well.

"Their character really lends itself to the type of job they're doing," he declared.



Fire Chief Antony Farmer (second from left) and Battalion Chief Leroy Davis (far right) pose with pioneering firemen Willie Carter (left), Rob Grier (second from right), Roy Thomas (bottom row, left) and Raphael Black.

"When they're out in front, we're looking good as a department, so we're proud of what they bring to the table."

Dignitaries on hand at the ceremony also took time out to feté Raphael Black, Willie Carter, Rob Grier and Roy Thomas, who are legends within the Department because of their pioneering work as firefighters at the city's first black firehouse, Engine Four.

"It's not often that we are fortunate enough to have history near you, but today we do," declared Farmer. "We would be remiss if we did not mention them."

City native Barbara White was the first black female firefighter to be hired by the Winston-Salem Fire Department when she took the job in 1984.

Being a double minority was not without its challenges, but White said being a woman was the biggest obstacle she had to overcome. As a female firefighter, White said she had to earn the respect of her male counterparts.

"(It was difficult) just as a woman, having to show you could do the work," she recalled. "They thought I would be in and out."

White said she considered turning back only once, while on one of her first calls as a rookie.

"It was so cold out there. I started to knock on the door and say, 'Lady, can I please come in and call my mama to come and get me?'" she quipped. "After I made it through that night I was there to stay."



Current firefighters (front row, from left): Shirese Moore, Angie Richardson and Angela Sowell pose with WSFD vets Kera Smith (back row, left) and Barbara White.

The mother of two says her colleagues soon warmed up to her and she settled in to build a career that would span more than a decade and produce many happy memories.

"You had some that were standoffish at first ... but

once you make that bond, you can't ever break it. We have a great group of people that work at the fire department," said White, who retired in 1997 for medical reasons. "I really enjoyed it and I miss it, too."

White, who is now a grandmother, said she was touched by the brief ceremony.

"I just feel blessed and proud, thankful that I'm still here to be able to appreciate it," she said with a smile.

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