



NC House District 74 hopeful John Gladman (left) and State Rep. Bill Faison (right) listen as Dr. Bruce Blackmon speaks.

## Gubernatorial candidates take part in local forum

BY LAYLA GARMS  
THE CHRONICLE

Political hopefuls convened at the Delta Arts Center on New Walkertown Road on Saturday to take part in a forum designed especially for candidates seeking statewide offices.

The African American Caucus of the North Carolina Democratic Party hosted the forum, giving candidates one of their last chances before the May 8 Primary to win over voters.

State Rep. Bill Faison gave an energetic speech taking his Democratic opponents in the race for governor to task on a variety of issues.

"The fundamental requirement is to get our state out of the toilet," declared Faison, who represents the 50th District, which includes Caswell and Orange counties. "...There are only three other states worse off when it comes to the economy. We have over 450,000 people out of work."

Faison proposed boosting small business growth by redistributing tax breaks that are currently afforded to big corporations. Such a move, he said, would lessen the tax burden and overhead for small businesses. He says he is the only gubernatorial candidate with a succinct jobs plan.

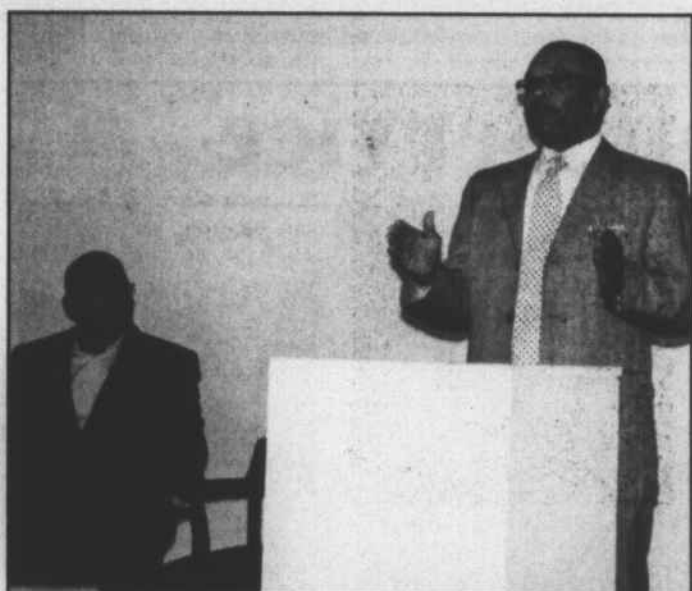
When AAC President Willie Fleming expressed concern that the African American vote would be cultivated by candidates, and then their concerns would be ignored once the election is over, Faison said he planned to repay the favor, by ensuring African Americans are well represented at the state level and able to push for the issues that concern them.

"As your governor, 40 percent of the appointments I make are going to be African American," intoned Faison, a supporter of the Racial Justice Act. "...If you're going to impact the system and seriously impact it ... you've got to be completely assimilated within the system. You've got to have people who are making decisions at every level."

Dr. Bruce Blackmon, another of the six Democrats who want to move into the Governor's Mansion, was also in attendance. The grandfather of 10 praised the younger candidates on hand for stepping up to the plate.

"I'm very impressed with the people that have spoken, the kind of people I'm going to work with when I get to Raleigh," said the 90 year-old. "I'm delighted to see some youth coming in. We've needed that for a long time. Bless your hearts."

Several familiar local faces turned out to speak as well, including Democrats State Rep. Earline Parmon and City Council Member James Taylor, who are vying for the North Carolina Senate District 32 seat. Democrat Wilbert Banks, who is also seeking the seat, was not in attendance. Two of the Democrats seeking the North Carolina House District 72 seat - Jimmie



Willie Fleming addresses the group as Jimmie Bonham look on.



Gwen Wilkins



Matt Newton

Bonham and Ed Hanes - were on hand. S. Wayne Patterson, also running for the seat, was not.

County Commissioner and House District 71 hopeful Everette Witherspoon was also in attendance; His Democratic opponent, Evelyn Terry, was not. John Gladman, who is running for House District 74, also attended. His Democratic opponent, David Moore, did not attend.

Matt Newton, an attorney from Charlotte who is challenging incumbent U.S. Rep. Mel Watt for his 12th Congressional District seat, gave an energetic address. If elected, Newton said he would focus on lowering college tuition rates and increasing funding for Title One schools. At 32, Newton, a self-described member of the "Obama Generation," is roughly half the age of his opponent, a fact Newton says will be an asset to him in the U.S. House.

"When you go to the polls on May 8, you have a choice," he declared. "You can keep voting for more of the same, or you can vote for someone like me, someone who is young, fresh and energetic and will go there to fight for you."

Robin Bradford, who is running for the newly-created NC House District 92 in Mecklenburg County, and Robert Ewing, the only Democratic contender seeking the open District Court 21 seat, were also on hand for the forum.

Gwen Wilkins, first vice chair of the N.C. Democratic Party, urged the audience to get out the vote and help defeat Amendment One, a controversial measure that would change the state con-

stitution to add language that would exclude same-sex marriages.

"We can't do what we do without your support," Wilkins said. "We need you to go to the polls, we need you to turn out your friends."

Fleming also stressed the importance of strong Democratic attendance at the polls this election season.

"We must get our candidates elected and make a change because we lost the legislature in 2010," he declared. "We cannot send a governor or president to fight for us if they've got no soldiers behind them."

For more information about the African American Caucus, visit [www.aacncdp.org](http://www.aacncdp.org).

## Robert W. Ewing



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