

Coleman gears up for new campaign

BY CHANEL DAVIS
THE CHRONICLE

North Carolina residents may have a sense of déjà-vu next November when it's time to go to the polls.

Democrat Linda Coleman has announced that she will face current Lt. Governor Dan Forest again in the 2016 race. She said that she's excited to run again.

"I'm running to give North Carolinians, especially the middle class, a fighting chance. Things are just not going well in Raleigh. We just need a change in Raleigh and I believe that I'm that change," she said.

In 2012, Coleman ran against Forest in a tight race, a difference of 6,858 votes out of the 4.3 million cast, backed by the State Employees Association of North Carolina. The newbie won that race becoming the second Republican since 1897 to be elected to the seat.

"It was excruciating close. A little over 6,000 votes separated us. I believe this time I will have more time to run. Last time I got in the race late so I've gotten out there early this year," she said. "Hopefully that's going to give me an opportunity to reach out and connect with voters and middle class people so we can get the message out about what's going on in

Raleigh to educate them and make sure they understand why we need the change."

Coleman will focus on the middle class families during her campaign, along with the underprivileged and underserved. She said that most people, usually those who make between \$30,000 to \$70,000, identify with and say that they're in the middle class.

"Those are the people who are getting left behind today. They're the people who've had the earned income tax taken away from them, they're the people who've had educational opportunities snatched from under them, they're the people whose salaries are not going up while the commodities are increasing and these are the people whose state income taxes are going up.

These are the people who are bearing the brunt of taxing the middle class and making sure that the rich are profiting from it. The rich, wealthy and big corporations are profiting from it while the middle class people and the underclass are really bearing the brunt of all of these tax breaks," she told The Chronicle.

The Greenville, N.C. native earned her bachelor of arts from N.C. A&T State University before earning her masters in public administration from the



Coleman

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University of Pittsburgh's Graduate School of Public and International Affairs.

She's served on the Wake County Board of Commissioners for four years and worked as human resources management director at the state departments of Agriculture and Administration and as a personnel director for the Department of Community Colleges. Before that she was a teacher. That experience explains why she's passionate about providing education for everyone.

The Lt. Governor serves as the president of the state Senate, serves on the Board of Economic Development and is a voting member of the state Board of Education and on the N.C. Community College Board.

Two of the platforms Coleman vows to run on is education and the economy.

"There is so much going on with education. Our teachers salaries are not going up, the General Assembly has pitted our seasoned teachers, or those who have career status, against new teachers by increasing pay, they're increasing the classroom size, and they've cut the teacher budget so that teachers don't have the resources that they need for students to learn and achieve. Education has been that key that's opened the doors to opportunity for so many people and without it our folk just don't stand a fighting chance. Education in North Carolina has been that beacon of light that has made up a shining example in the South," she said.

She emphasized that the economy is what has the power to keep people in the middle class or kick them out.

"The jobs that have been recruited to North Carolina are minimum wage jobs, they are not even living wages jobs. We have got to change the economy around. We've got to have an economy that works for all people not just for the wealthy. We've got to make sure we get the earned income tax back and the small busi-

ness tax incentive."

On her website Coleman said that she "wants to help build a North Carolina that gives opportunity to all its citizens, not just the privileged few." She certainly has the experience.

In 2004, she was elected to the state House of Representatives for three terms before being appointed by the governor as the Director of the Office of State Personnel in 2009. She held the position until 2012. Coleman believes that the current minimum wage is not designed for one to live off of.

"Minimum wage jobs are \$7.25 an hour. For someone to be able to make a living wage, they need to be making between \$12-14 an hour. Commodities have gone up. Having been the state personnel director in the (Gov.) Bev Perdue administration, I can tell you that there are people who make under \$30,000 a year who barely make ends meet, and really can not make

ends meet on that wage," she said. "There are literally thousands of people working two or three jobs to put food on the table, keep a roof over their families head and clothes on their children's back. If we want to promote families we have to make sure that parents can spend time with their children without being at that second and third shift job."

She applies that dedication to fair and equal pay for women, saying that the current General Assembly won't recognize it as an issue that impacts North Carolina families.

"We've got to recognize that when you help women, you help families because whatever is good for women is good for families. This is the kind of thing that would promote the family structure and that we all know would create a better quality of life and help our state," she said.

To join the campaign or to donate, visit www.lindafornc.com.

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