

THE CHRONICLE

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Volume 46, Number 21

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C.

THURSDAY, February 13, 2020

BPAL educates community ahead of primary election

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

Over the past three weeks, the Black Political Action League (BPAL) and several other organizations have been doing their part to ensure voters are prepared for the upcoming primary election by hosting a series of forums where candidates in several local races had the opportunity to discuss their platforms and most pressing issues in the community.

The series of candidate forums began on Jan. 27 at the Central Library when candidates for mayor and Forsyth County clerk of

court met to discuss the issues. The second forum was held on Feb. 1 at the Delta Fine Arts Center and featured candidates running to represent the East Ward on the Winston-Salem City Council. The next forum held at the Winston-Salem Urban League highlighted the candidates running to represent the U.S. Congressional 6th District and N.C. State House.

The last forum, held on Monday, Feb. 11, was also held at the Central Library and included candidates running for District B on the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners and the South, Southwest, Southeast, West, and North

Wards on the Winston-Salem City Council.

During each forum, candidates answered three questions pertaining to their platforms: how they plan to spend their first 100 days in office, what they believe is the most pressing issue in the community, and how they plan to engage the community.

Reginald McCaskill, president of the BPAL, said when they decided to partner with other organizations, including the Winston-Salem Black Chamber of Commerce, local NAACP, Ministers' Conference of Winston-Salem and Vicinity, and The Chronicle to host the



Photos by Tevin Stinson

Eunice Campbell, a candidate for the North Ward on the Winston-Salem City Council, talks about her platform during a recent candidates forum.



Reginald McCaskill, president of the Black Political Awareness League speaks during the candidates forum held on Monday, Feb. 11.

forums, the plan was to create one venue where candidates could share their views with the public. McCaskill said he wanted to make it easier for candidates and the community

"The main reason was to bring the forums under one umbrella so we wouldn't have one thousand forums," McCaskill said. "This concept makes it much easier for our candidates and the community so people won't be running around. And what normally happens is, you have the same people attending forums anyway."

McCaskill mentioned that the BPAL and the other partners have already planned to hold forums ahead of the General Elec-

tion as well. The BPAL will also participate in the Souls to the Polls event scheduled for Saturday, Feb. 22.

The BPAL was founded in the 1980s by several leaders in the community, including Mayor Pro Tempore Vivian Burke, with the purpose of providing educational resources regarding the political process. After being inactive for a few years, McCaskill and others decided to reignite the initiative earlier this year. McCaskill said he felt it was important to bring the BPAL back to educate black voters in the community.

"I felt the need to bring it back because there is a need to educate our Afri-

can American citizens. Everything we do is geared toward the concept of education," McCaskill said. "So we just wanted to make sure we reach those people and that they are educated about the political process."

Early voting for the 2020 primary election in Forsyth County begins today, Feb. 13, and ends on Feb. 29. The primary election is Tuesday, March 3. For more information on the primary election and early voting sites, visit the Forsyth County Board of Elections website.

For more information on the BPAL, visit "Black Political Awareness League BPAL" on Facebook.

Forsyth County becomes latest Second Amendment Sanctuary after 4-3 vote

BY TEVIN STINSON
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The Forsyth County Board of Commissioners recently voted 4-3 to approve a resolution supporting the protection of the Second Amendment, joining hundreds of other cities and counties across the country that have been declared "Second Amendment Sanctuaries."

The resolution brought before the Forsyth County Board of Commissioners was introduced by Commissioner Gloria Whisenhunt. In response to proposed gun reform by Democrats, Republican lawmakers across the country have passed laws and resolutions to prohibit

or impede the enforcement of certain gun control measures such as universal background checks, high capacity magazine bans, assault weapon bans, and others.

Prior to voting on the resolution on Thursday, Feb. 6, the public had the opportunity to share their thoughts on the resolution during a public hearing. During the hearing, the room seemed to be split down the middle with supporters of Whisenhunt's resolution on one side and those in support of an alternate resolution introduced by Commissioner Fleming El-Amin supporting the entire Bill of Rights on the other. As he stood at the podium facing the Board of Commissioners, John Cox, a retiree from the Forsyth County Sheriff's office, asked everyone in support of the first resolution to stand, at which point half the room stood up.

Those in support of Whisenhunt's resolution argued that the Second Amendment is under attack.

Melvin Pempell, who also spoke in support of the resolution, said those who believe that the Second Amendment isn't under attack are wrong. He said "Somebody here stated that the Second Amendment is not under attack. He is so far wrong that he's almost living in Disneyland."

Pempell said he agrees that criminals should not be allowed to purchase or carry firearms, but they have them and will continue to get them.

"Take all the guns away, they're going to get them. That will leave some of us unable to defend ourselves and that in itself is wrong," Pempell said.

Amy Jones urged the board to vote against the resolution supporting the Second Amendment resolution. Jones said the resolution is a symbolic gesture and holds no legislative power. She said, "Fear is a powerful thing and seems to be the main motivator for such resolutions." Jones noted that the resolution follows in the footsteps of similar resolu-

tions passed in Davidson County and Virginia. She mentioned the only law that has passed in Virginia, where lawmakers have been presented several different bills related to the purchase of guns, is universal background checks. "Does that warrant all these declarations?" Jones asked.

"Those who are truly concerned with their Second Amendment rights should be less worried about passing needless, redundant resolutions such as this one presented today and more concerned about those people who become emboldened by such measures to cause harm and fear," Jones continued. "No one is going to take your guns; those rights are guaranteed by the Constitution and by those elected to uphold it. If that is in doubt, consider the fact that innocent people are killed every day because of guns; no one comes for your guns."

Longtime community activist Al Jabaar said it is a shame that the public has to come before the

Board of Commissioners to discuss protecting an Amendment that's already protected. Jabaar, who is a Army veteran, who earned three Purple Hearts while fighting in Vietnam, said he finds it difficult to listen to people push against stricter gun legislation when children are being gunned down with weapons he used while in combat.

"It is a shame that we have to come before you and discuss protecting an Amendment that's already protected," Jabaar said. "If we continue to let people walk around with weapons such as these, we're going to continue to have mass destruction of our people."

Before voting, the board had the opportunity to share their comments on the resolutions. Commissioner Tonya McDaniel, who is a Democrat, said the first resolution was unnecessary.

"There's no need to think that we're taking something away from you," McDaniel said. "In my opinion, option one is unnecessary. What are we

saying today? Are we saying the other Amendments don't matter? So that's one of the things I think we should consider."

Before reading the resolution supporting the Second Amendment, Commissioner Whisenhunt said she understands those who fear that their right to own firearms is under attack. She said, "I do understand that there's differences here in this county and there's some fear in this county."

"Some folks do not understand your fear and I do not understand other folk's fears, but I do share your concern for the Second Amendment."

When it came time to vote on the resolution, the four Republican Commissioners, Whisenhunt, Richard Linville, David Plyler and Don Martin, voted for the resolution supporting the Second Amendment. McDaniel, El-Amin and Ted Kaplan, voted against making Forsyth County a Second Amendment Sanctuary.

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