

Black Leaders Say Yes!

Did Eddie Knox Betray Charlotte Black Supporters?

By Jalyne Strong
Post Staff Writer

During this election year blacks registered to vote in record numbers and they banded together, rallied behind and gave their support to the candidates they believed most worthy.

Early in the year, in the Charlotte area, black support was almost one hundred percent behind Jim Hunt for Senator and Eddie Knox for Governor. Blacks believed these two politicians stood with the majority of blacks in opposition to the right-wing conservatism of Senator Jesse Helms and President Ronald Reagan.

Now in retrospection, Knox for governor turned out to have been a mistake that blacks have to contend with. Though, currently, his name has been practically ostracized from the lips of the black community, the Knox situation should not be ignored or forgotten. It perhaps is the most consequential occurrence that has affected Charlotte blacks in the election year of 1984.

It is now common knowledge that Knox betrayed the Democratic Party. But more importantly and yielding much more damage is Knox's betrayal of the black support that was too readily offered to him.

Did blacks too blindly give their support to Knox? There were early signs of Knox's unsteady stand on concerns that were pertinent to the black community. In 1979, when he ran for mayor against Harvey Gantt many considered tactics used by Knox displayed racial overtones. But that was to be forgiven.

When his later race for governor began, more discrepancies from Knox's political past surfaced. Propaganda alluding to Knox's support of Georgia Governor George Wallace, who was once a leading segregationist, were passed out. But this did not swerve black support from Knox. Kelly Alexander Jr. of the NAACP was to dismiss these messages in a Charlotte Post editorial on May 3, 1984, stating, "This is a blatant attempt to undermine support for Eddie within the black community."

Alexander's support of Eddie reflected the feelings of a large number of black leaders of the Charlotte community who also unflaggingly endorsed the former Charlotte mayor. Among them was Mayor Harvey Gantt who supported Knox in political ads claiming, "Eddie Knox has always demonstrated compassion and understanding for the needs of the black community. He is my friend." With such outstanding and popular black officials in the forefront campaigning for Knox, masses of black Charlotte voters were soon to follow suit.

All this prompted Knox to reveal in a Charlotte Post article dated May 3, 1984, "We've built a good coalition in the black community, and tried to earn respect." The reporter of this article went on to elaborate, "Knox claims endorsements by Gantt and black community leaders across the state inform people...of his good record."

However, Knox's good record was soon to turn sour. After he lost in the gubernatorial run-off to candidate Rufus Edmisten, circumstances changed rapidly, first apparent in the surprise endorsement by his wife and brother of Senator Jesse Helms. Though Eddie Knox did not appear with the right-wing Republican Senator as did Frances and Charles Knox, many blacks believed that his approval of their actions was lurking in the background.

Blacks immediately voiced their concern. The headline of the story appearing in The Charlotte Post, July 5, 1984, read, "Black Leaders Deplore Knox's Decision." The article, submitted by the Tuesday Morning Breakfast Club of black elected officials stated in part, "Many of our members wholeheartedly supported Eddie and Frances by his side with our money, time, talents and with deep commitment because we believed him to represent the issues and concerns for which we stand. We feel betrayed."

An editorial in The Post appearing this same date expounded, "In what appears to be acts of sour grapes and a poor loser, Eddie's wife and brother...have thrown good judgement to the wind and crossed over Party lines to endorse Jesse Helms."

This editorial concluded, "Only future history will tell us, but it appears that the Knox political family, or parts thereof, will be used by the Republicans." As if that writer was looking into a crystal ball, the prediction was to soon become truth. On October 8, Knox boldly stood with Helms and Reagan in Charlotte, announcing that he was leading the campaign for Democrats for Reagan.

With Knox's support of the two politicians, Helms and Reagan, whom the majority of blacks wholeheartedly were in opposition to, blacks admitted once and for all that Knox had "heartlessly turned his back" on the community that had so emphatically campaigned for him.

States Clara Williams, a member of the Political Action Committee of the Black Elected and Appointed



Eddie Knox
.....Disappoints supporters



Bob Walton
.....Points out crux of the problem



Kelly Alexander Jr.
.....Dismissed propaganda

Officials, "I am very disappointed. Knox sold out a lot of black people who believed and trusted in him." Rev. Bob Walton, County Commissioner, and once a staunch supporter of Knox, admits, "I was a very strong supporter of Eddie Knox. But in no way can I sanction or approve what Eddie and his family have done regarding the endorsement of Republicans."

"I feel to a substantial degree that it was a slap in the face," Walton adds.

Knox's duping of major black leaders and the majority of the black populace in Charlotte is not an isolated incident. It illustrates all too clearly the predicament that blacks continually face in the U.S.'s political process. That is, having to pick white candidates who may in fact use the black vote to achieve his

own selfish ends. Knox cruelly drove this point home for not only did he use the black vote in the beginning but when things did not work out to his advantage he abandoned the black cause altogether.

Williams predicts the chance of Knox ever again obtaining black support is nil. She claims, "We are very trusting people but we are not stupid." Then she adds, "Fool me once shame on you. Fool me twice shame on me."

But Walton contends, to be fooled once is enough to wreak a certain amount of havoc. He points out the crux of the problem stating, "Knox's actions only substantiated the claim that many blacks concede to about the political process. Blacks often say," explains Walton, "that they are not going to get involved because all of them (white politicians)

are like that." "This was a tenacious situation," Walton concludes. "It will affect the thinking process and lives of blacks for generations to come."

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