

Martin resolution passes by 5-4 vote

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Williams said the measure was a waste of valuable time.

"I have never been more frustrated in my life since getting on this board," Williams said. "I know I have only so much time in office and I want to make the best of it."

"I told Hoyle I respect you with your feelings, but this is not the time nor the place to bring it into this community. Hoyle has allowed (commissioner) Tom Bush to take that resolution and make it much bigger than Hoyle ever thought."

"We are being diverted. Since January I have been dealing

with this issue. I have stacks of mail, phone calls and faxes. It's amazing. I resent them even bringing this issue up. We already know about the divisiveness in this community. To promote this allows all those who are bigots to come out and say I don't support the black agenda. I got a letter from a guy saying 'I don't want any of my tax dollars going to anything that is black.'



Williams

This allows all those who are bigots and want to discriminate against other groups can say it's OK, the county commissioners say its OK."

Censorship is only part of the reason for his opposition, Williams said. He said the new process will only add to the workload of commissioners and county staff.

"It is a bad time to be bringing this kind of issue to our board...censorship is part of it. We have 122 volunteers to take time to understand what comes to Arts & Science Council," he said. "We are saying we are going to take the place of the council and decide who gets

funding out of all the arts groups. It will boil down to who can do the best song-and-dance as to who gets funding. Funding will be determined politically."

Political clout is expensive and elusive

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the county, only four are held by black women.

They appear to have the same difficulty winning appointments on advisory boards. Of the more than 500 positions available, only 35 are held by African American women. Currently no black women sit on the Board of Equalization and Review or Environmental Protection Commission. Nor are they on the Board of County Commissioners or on the School Board.

"Given the political climate in North Carolina, black women do have a double standard," said Wake Forest University politics professor Katy Harriger. "Conventional wisdom says that black women would have a double problem. They're often seen as a group of people who shouldn't be in politics."

"Normally, you see more black women in local politics and less as you go higher. In North Carolina, it's a little different."

According to Harriger, the key to running for office is the ability to win.

"People will run for offices they think they have a chance for winning," she said. You have to ask yourself, what is it in Mecklenburg County that keeps women from running and from winning. Candidates will say 'why bother.' There is no point in running."

Harriger adds that political parties don't properly support black women candidates and are slow to recruit them.

"What the Democratic Party has failed to do is work on multiracial coalition," Harriger said. "They often assume that whites won't vote for black candidates. (Former U.S. Senate candidate) Harvey Gantt got a substantial amount of white voters (in 1996). It shows that whites will vote for black candidates."

Harriger also says black women sometimes have more pressing issues to take care of.

"A big part of it for me, was I had other things in my life that needed to take precedent over running for public," said Superior Court Judge Shirley Fulton. "That's the sort of thing you do when your children are grown or off in school."

Fulton, the only black Superior Court judge in the Charlotte area, was a single parent when appointed to to complete a judgeship 10 years ago. She decided to run after her two-year term was up, winning an eight-year term.

"I decided I wanted to be a judge," Fulton said. "I guess it was just the right time."

Black women also face being firsts to hold positions, which presents special challenges.

"When it was first mentioned, I rejected the idea," Fulton said. "I did not have any role models of women who had been elected. It was a scary prospect. I kept asking myself would I get the money I need or will I get the support I need...and of course, will I get the money I need to run a good campaign."

Money, the mother's milk of campaigns, is especially difficult for black women to secure. Velma Leake, an unsuccessful candidate for county commis-

sioner in last year's election, knows first hand.



Leake

"I was sacrificed as a black woman," she said. "I feel I was sacrificed as a Democrat and as a black woman."

Leake said she "was left out" of several fund raising events and was told to "have fun," during the election. "People in power told me not

to run," Leake said. "I told them this was a democracy. I had a right to run."

"I had a Democratic white woman accuse me of telling people to vote for me at the expense of the party at a Democrat meeting at the Metro School. I didn't do it, but maybe I should have. It was embarrassing and difficult."

Neither Fulton or Stevenson are sure if they'll run again, but Leake promises she will.

"I will serve the people to the best of my abilities," she said. "You don't give up because you lose one time."

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