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Purgason Wins Runoff, 2 to 1

By Ray Gronberg
Carolina Journal News Editor

UNCC students turned out in record numbers last week to elect Polly Purgason next year's student body president.

Purgason, a junior biology major, defeated Henry Gatling in the runoff election by a count of 1007-503.

In another race, Charles Simms won his race for UPB chair over Robbie O'Neal, 821-567.

The 1510 votes cast in the presidential election are a record for any student government election here, and were particularly surprising considering the fact that turnouts for runoffs are usually low, in the 800-1000 range.

This year's general election set the previous record, with 1417 people casting votes. Prior to that, the 1979 election was the largest, with Karen Popp.

Purgason, when asked for her explanation of the size of the turnout, had this response: "Controversy."

"I'm really glad we raised student interest in this election. But I'm not sure that interest was raised by a positive thing," she continued.

Gatling attributed his loss to one major factor. "The thing was, really, we were just outnumbered. Race had something to do with it. My color had an affect on a lot of things," he said.

Later, he said, "It's going to still come down to race. I don't care how qualified you are, I don't care how much good intentions you have, the race issue is going to stick out in people's minds. 'Well, the reason I voted for her is because, blase' blase', but when it comes down to it, race is going to play a role. Race definitely played a role in my defeat."

"I tried my best to keep race out," he continued, "but unfortunately it just came in at the wrong time."

In response to further questioning, he said the *Carolina Journal* bore at

least part of the responsibility for injecting the issue. "The *Journal* was my demise. The unfair coverage that I had. For example, the runoff. Why wasn't my picture in the runoff. I was one of the fortunate candidates to make the runoff, and my picture was nowhere in the paper," he said.

(Gatling's photo did not appear in the March 26 issue of the *Journal*, which featured the results of the general election. It did, however, appear in a box on the front page of the March 30 edition.)

Continuing, "There were some misquotes in the paper. Take for example one of the statements the *Journal* used: 'The runoff between Henry Gatling and Polly Purgason boils down to one thing: can Polly Purgason's ability to bring out the residence hall vote withstand Gatling's 250 sure black votes, from the black voters on this campus, who are always politically active.'"

"Which manipulated race. It was black versus white."

"Everything was a stacked deck, from the *Journal* on up. There was no way I could win under the circumstances."

Black Student Union president and Gatling supporter Mike Kemp was more explicit on the point. "Facts show that she (Purgason) manipulated every facet of the Student Association in order to win." In this charge he included the *Journal*, Student Legislature, which he and Gatling both said was stacked in favor of Purgason, the student court (of which Purgason is chief justice), and, "to some extent, even UPB."

As an example of this manipulation, Gatling cited the example of defeated presidential candidate Mike Derby. "Derby had told me he wasn't going to endorse any political candidate. At the last minute he comes on and endorses her. A stab in my



Photo by Debbie Miller

Purgason gleams as she holds a victory cake.

amended to clear up any ambiguity regarding who may serve when and under what circumstances on the Elections and Publicity staff.

Barry Brown said afterwards that he, Debbie Brown and Dellinger would appeal. "I came in a spectator and walked out fined \$10," he said, going on to claim their rights had been violated.

Purgason agreed that the campaign had racial overtones. "I think it started off okay but unfortunately it started turning into a 'skin race.' It was inevitable."

As to the charge of manipulation, she responded, "That is totally absurd. If the Student Association backed me, it was because I have been involved and they know I'm qualified."

All involved in the election agree that the most critical issue facing Purgason when she takes office will be campus race relations. Purgason has promised that she will establish a biracial committee to try to help with the problem.

Gatling said his defeat had both negative and positive aspects—negative in the sense of the manipulation charge, positive in that it will, he says, "bring all the minorities on campus together. It can make them more conscious of some of the concerns that affect them."

When asked what affect Purgason might be able to have on the problem, he said, "The only way she can help relieve some of this tension, is that she is going to have to start being very straightforward, and look objectively, and realize there are some very serious problems that affect all minorities on this campus."

"If she starts trying to do some things for the other minorities, trying to get them voices in government, and trying to really say, 'I care, we care about what happens to you on this campus,' then the tensions will cease."

As for Purgason, she says "I am completely open and ready for it. There will be no problem."

Tom Chumley, who managed Purgason's campaign, said "It was a tremendous victory, the 1007 was awesome and widespread. The victory can be attributed to dedication and hard work by our campaigners."

Henry ran a good campaign, but was hurt badly in the runoff by some of his overzealous supporters. The turnout was very surprising.

"I believe the original election fueled voter interest. The students wanted to finish the job of selecting a president and did so in record numbers," Chumley said.

back."

"The other candidate, Mr. Knox, I tried to negotiate with him, I told him that I wanted him to be a part of my administration, but, same thing. He turned his back on me." I tried to get fair, honest representation in, but he turned his back on me."

A further example of manipulation, according to Gatling, was the contestment, by Knox supporter Boo Roberts, of the general election results. "It was preconceived, wasn't going to go through anyhow," he said.

Roberts' charges were heard by a student court panel consisting of Nelson Minnick, Bo Matthews and Regina Barbee. She contended that elections chair Karen Stout violated the Elections and Publicity Act by appointing elected officials, namely Attorney General Deb Dellinger, legislature chair Barry Brown and Student Bank president Debbie Brown, to the staff of her committee.

Stout said the three served as volunteers, so that two people were at each of the polling places at all times, as is also required by the Act. The panel, however, found that the Act had indeed been violated.

Roberts argued that the fact of the violation mandated that the election results be thrown out and the entire thing be run over again. The panel rejected this argument, saying that no evidence was presented showing that the election outcome had been affected, and that the number of candidates (75) precluded the abrogation of the results in the absence of said evidence.

Stout was fined \$15, while the others were each fined \$10. The panel also recommended that the Act be

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-Henry Gatling

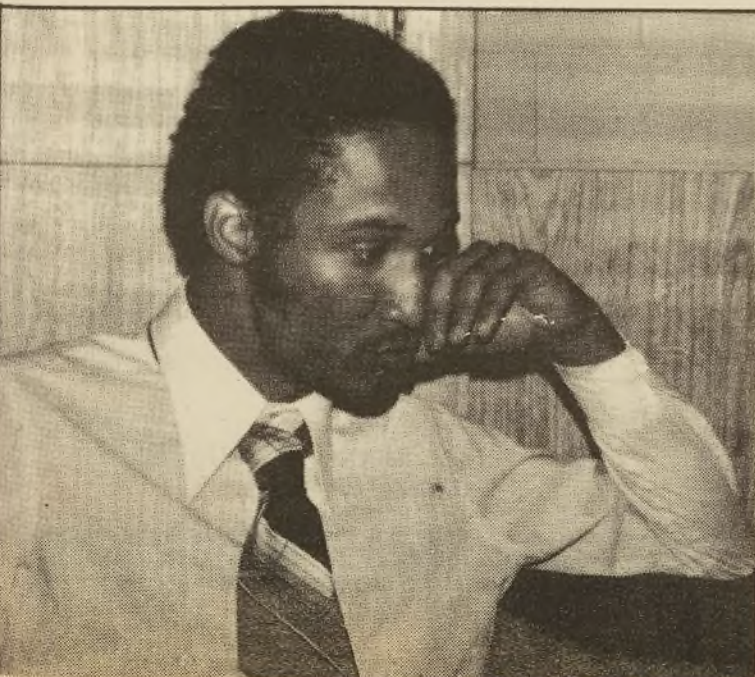


Photo by Bob Henderson