

Race Heats Up Congress Contest

Candidate unhappy with endorsement

By **CLEVE R. WOOTSON JR.**
Assistant State & National Editor

A white candidate for U.S. Congress is brushing off accusations by his black opponent that he was unfairly endorsed by a racial political action committee.

In the race for new congressional District 13, the 45-member Raleigh-Wake Citizens Association endorsed state Sen. Brad Miller, D-Wake, over state Sen. Bill Martin, D-Guilford, on Aug. 15.

The association was founded in 1932 by ministers to voice racial issues to politicians and other leaders. Over its 70-year history, the association has included white and Hispanic members, although it primarily has been com-

posed of black members.

Hardy Watkins, treasurer and former president of the association, said Miller's selection had nothing to do with race. He said members chose Miller because he championed black issues on a local level.

"The defining point was that we knew Brad based on what he did in Wake County," Watkins said. "It's pretty hard to turn your back on someone that you've been working with locally."

"In terms of our relationship in the past — the way we've worked with him — I don't think we had a choice," he said.

But in a letter to the RWCA's president last week, Martin said Miller and some key members of the organization manipulated the meeting's vote to serve their private ends. Martin also stated that he did much for blacks in North Carolina.

Martin had not returned phone calls as of press time.

Watkins said no one was pressured to vote a particular way in the organization's secret ballot, although Miller said he did call many members before the vote to ask for their support.

But Watkins said the organization endorses politicians who are in line with its purpose — regardless of their color. "The organization does not endorse people because they are African-American," Watkins said.

Miller denied that any manipulation had taken place or that he hijacked the endorsement.

"The main way (Martin) thinks of hijacking is to work for (the endorsement) and to campaign for it, and if that's the case, I hijacked that one and many before it."

Miller also stated that he has good rapport with members of the association based on years of service.

"Almost everyone that was in the room at the RWCA was someone that I know personally and that I had worked with before and ... I personally asked for their vote," he said.

Miller said that he has not always voted in line with the interests of the organization but that for the most part

he has worked to benefit them.

"I think that if my record with the African-American community were bad, then I wouldn't have gotten this endorsement," Miller said. "They know what they're getting. There's a history of working with me."

But Miller said that in reality, race does influence how people perceive their leaders as representing them.

"I am aware that race still matters, and I think it is important that there be black congressmen and black leaders in the state," Miller said. "But at the same time, I think there is a great value in having leaders that have campaigned to diverse groups of people."

He said he thinks the association's decision was the right one.

"Many people believe they could not be represented unless they were represented by someone just like them," Miller said.

"There is great value in having people in politics ... that have to understand the lives of people who are not just like them."

The State & National Editor can be reached at stntdesk@unc.edu.

Deep Dish Does Lots With Little in 'Lesson'

'A Lesson Before Dying' runs until Sept. 7

By **BRIAN MILLIKIN**
Assistant Arts & Entertainment Editor

Sure, it's housed in University Mall, and its theater is the size of a boutique — but the Deep Dish Theater Company's production of "A Lesson Before Dying" aims for the stars.

And it's pretty on-target.

Adapted by Romulus Linney from Ernest Gaines' National Book Award-winning novel, the play far outshines its mall surroundings. A tale of Deep South race relations, capital punishment and religion, it's a bold choice to kick off Deep Dish's second season.

Set in 1948 in a fictional town in Louisiana, the breezily paced play doesn't waste any time pulling the audience into the drama-charged tale. College-educated teacher Grant Wiggins (Leonardo DeLaine) wants to get out of his hometown and pursue better jobs and more money. But an old benefactor forces him to visit Jefferson (Torrey Lawrence), a past student who's now on death row.

As Wiggins, DeLaine wins over the audience with his desperation to do both what's expected of him and what he wants to do — to be loyal and to break away once and for all. Earnest and charismatic, DeLaine is in every scene of the play, a marathon torch he more than carries.

Lawrence is all emotion as Jefferson,

whom we meet in a catatonic, defeated state — resigned to his fate and acting like the animal the jury took him for. It is Wiggins' task to rescue Jefferson's dignity, and watching Lawrence slowly reveal his character's layers is equally gripping and heartbreaking.

Deep Dish's stripped-down presentation of "Lesson" is bare and all the better for it. It feels raw and immediate, haunted and stirring. The simple set is claustrophobic and confining, only amplifying Jefferson's plight and Wiggins' entrapment. From the cast and crew on down, the entire production is a commercial for getting the most out of what seems so little.

Don't let Deep Dish's University Mall location scare you away, because when the talented cast takes the stage, it's tough to imagine being anywhere other than Louisiana 50 years in the past, which was an impossibly tragic and uplifting place. Productions with better theaters would be hard-pressed to do any better.

"A Lesson Before Dying" shows are at 8 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays and Sunday afternoons at 3 p.m. until Sept. 7 at Deep Dish Theater at University Mall. Tickets are \$12 or \$10 for students and seniors.

The Arts & Entertainment Editor can be reached at artsdesk@unc.edu.

Anthrax Suspect Says Blood Test Will Free Him

The Associated Press

ALEXANDRIA, Va. — The biowarefare expert under scrutiny in the anthrax attacks says the FBI has accepted his offer to undergo a blood test he says will prove his innocence.


"I am not the anthrax killer," Dr. Steven J. Hatfill said Sunday. Hatfill lashed out against Attorney General John Ashcroft for calling him a "person of interest" in the investigation.

Hatfill said he has waived privacy rules to allow the release of the results of the blood test. He said he has also offered to compare his handwriting to

that appearing on the anthrax letters, but the FBI has yet to accept that offer. Neither the FBI nor the Department of Justice would confirm Hatfill's offers or whether they would regard the tests as reliable. Federal officials have said the FBI is not ready to clear Hatfill in the attacks that killed five people and sickened 13 others even though investigators have no physical evidence linking him to a crime.

Last week Ashcroft would not say whether authorities have identified a suspect in last fall's anthrax mailings but said Hatfill remained "a person of interest to the Department of Justice."

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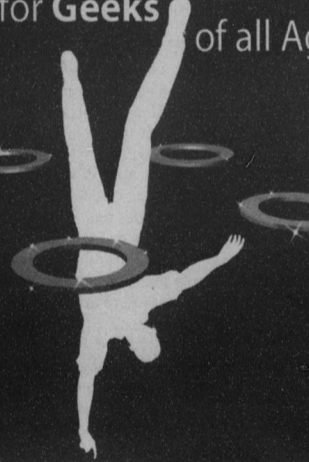
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