

# GOP post for Watts another step in interesting career

By Ron Jenkins

OKLAHOMA CITY (AP)—To his followers, he's J.C. Watts, a smiling, energetic orator whose move to a House leadership post is only the latest chapter in a movie-script biography.

To others, he's J.C. Watts, an ex-jock with a deadbeat past who can't balance his personal checkbook.

As a teen-ager, Watts left tiny Eufaula en route to stardom in big-time football and politics. Two weeks, he was picked as chairman of the Republican Conference, the No. 4 position in the House.

"It's a tremendous journey he's on and I don't think it's over yet," said Tom Cole, friend and longtime Republican political strategist. "He's a legitimate vice presidential possibility now and could be a presidential candidate someday. He's only 41."

In Oklahoma, Watts' detractors tell a different story about the GOP's only black House member, focusing on his past bad debts, failure to pay state and federal taxes, and his role as a state regulator in a federal bribery probe.

In the 1980s, two properties he owned were foreclosed and sold at a sheriff's sale. He has been the target of lawsuits and garnishment actions on debts ranging from doctor's bills to a \$25,000 oil and gas investment loan.

Through the years, state income tax liens were filed against Watts. As late as 1994, he did not declare the \$14,320

**"He's the greatest communicator in the Republican Party"**

— Tom Cole

his wife earned on his federal income tax return, a failure that was described by a campaign aide as "simply an oversight."

Watts and his aides have previously said the congressman's debts have been paid and discussion of them are a dead issue.

"For the past seven years, I have dealt with issues twisted and distorted by my political opponents regarding the Corporation Commission, my finances and a range of other bogus allegations," he said in a statement issued to The Associated Press through his Washington office late last week. "I have responded to or refuted questions raised by these attacks consistently and honestly."

"I regret that the demands of my transition into the office of chairman of the House Republican Conference do not allow me time to go over this ground again."

It is a given that Watts' gridiron heroism — he was named the most valuable player in University of Oklahoma Orange Bowl victories in 1980 and 1981 — has helped his career in this

football-crazed state.

"He executed the wishbone, kept the ball and scored touchdowns. What more could you ask in Oklahoma?" says Democratic state Rep. Jari Askins of Duncan, a Sooner alumna and constituent.

Friends and foes say Watts' political communications skills outweigh his football talent, which led him to six years as a quarterback in the Canadian Football League.

"He's the greatest communicator in the Republican Party," Cole says. "He's just phenomenal. If he does not keynote the 2000 Republican National Convention, I think the Republican Party is making a tremendous mistake."

Watts, a personable campaigner, honed his speaking skills as an ordained Baptist minister and is a favorite at GOP political conventions. He gave his party's response to President Clinton's state-of-the-union address.

Democratic officials in Oklahoma say Watts' talks are void of some facts, including his switch from Democrat to Republican just before making his first race for the Corporation Commission, plus his record of bad debts and other problems.

Watts' family includes staunch Democrats such as uncle Wade Watts, former NAACP chairman, and father J.C. Watts Sr., a former Eufaula city councilman who

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# Smith throws hat in magazine fray

**Special to Sentinel Voice**  
Former fashion model and host of the weekly syndicated TV show, B. Smith with Style, Barbara Smith has announced plans to launch a new magazine next year. Along with the TV show and magazine, Smith has already established the beginnings of an empire with three restaurants and a book.



BARBARA SMITH

Smith and her husband-business partner, Dan Gasby, have teamed up with American Express Publishing Corp. to produce publication. Smith will be editor and Gasby will be publisher. The magazine, with its easy to read style and multicultural bent, is seen as a competitive challenger to Martha Stewart Living.

The magazine, B. Smith

Style, will go up against stalwarts of the lifestyle publishing industry such as Traditional Home, Town & Country, Southern Living, Southern Accents and the champ, Martha Stewart Living.


Style will be targeted toward a more multicultural audience and will offer easy-

to-use advice and how-to tips. Readers have often complained that Stewart's directions are too complicated. Smith and Gasby said Stewart has continuously tried to thwart their efforts, using her weight in the industry to get executives to drop her show.

By 2000, the magazine should be published quarterly and then monthly. In the meantime, the first issue is scheduled to appear on newstands sometime around Mother's Day at a cover price of about \$2.95.

The magazine will drop again in the fall. American Express then plans to follow up with a direct mail solicitation to its card members and existing subscribers.

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