

# More southern Blacks run for office as Republicans

ATLANTA (AP) - More Black Republicans are running for office in Georgia this year than ever before, and Black candidates in other Southern states are also finding that declaring for the GOP is more accepted than it was just a few years ago.

It is a small shift that Republican activists say could pay big dividends if it continues.

"It doesn't mean the majority of Blacks will be voting Republican anytime soon," said Atlanta GOP pollster Whit Ayres. "But if you can move the percentage of Blacks who vote Republican from 5 percent to 15 percent, you will change the outcome of a lot of close Southern elections."

That may be why the Republican National Commit-

tee has an office dedicated to courting Black voters and candidates, and has several Blacks running in high-profile races.

In North Carolina, Winston-Salem City Councilman Vernon Robinson is running for Congress with campaign mailings likening himself to the state's arch-conservative icon: "Jesse Helms is back! And this time he's Black."

In Georgia, a record 14 Black Republican candidates are seeking legislative seats. Among them is Willie Talton, who is running unopposed for the House and plans to take office in January as the first Black Republican lawmaker in the Georgia Legislature since Reconstruction.

Georgia's slate also includes Dylan Glenn, a young Black political operative with

ties to President Bush. Glenn is running for Congress.

Alabama gained its first Black Republican since Reconstruction when state Rep. Johnny Ford changed parties last year.

Two Black Republicans are on the ballot in Tennessee this year. And in Florida, Rep. Jennifer Carroll of Jacksonville became that state's first female Black Republican legislator when she was elected in 2003.

What is driving some Blacks to abandon the party most closely associated with civil rights to join the more conservative party?

One reason given is the improving economics of

Black households.

In Georgia, for example, Black household income still trailed that of Whites in the 2000 census. But the median income in Black households rose faster than that of White households over the past three decades — 655 percent to 469 percent.

Herman Cain is a well-to-do Black businessman with a strong belief that the Democratic Party that Blacks embraced during the civil rights struggle has swung too far to the left. That is why he is running for the U.S. Senate this year as a Republican.

"It's not just people who've already moved into the middle class, but people

who are trying to move up economically who are deciding that they are better aligned with many of the Republican candidates," said Cain.

Another factor is that to many younger voters, the civil rights struggle is just something they have read in history books, said William Boone, a political science professor at historically Black Clark Atlanta University.

"Look at the age category of these folks. Many of them are folk who are several generations removed from the civil rights movement and have a different view of what the world is all about," he said.

For some Blacks, there is

a sense that Democrats have taken them for granted for years.

LaRon Bennett Sr., a Black businessman from Glynn County who is running as a Republican for county commission, said Democrats "used fear and intimidation to keep Blacks in the party, painting the picture that, in essence, they were the only alternative. You don't have any place to go."

In the Republican Party, "there's a great willingness and eagerness to have good, solid, sound minority candidates," Bennett said.

The party's civil rights record might not be flawless, (See *Republicans*, Page 12)

## Chamber

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ney Tom Peterson.

"Today is one of the most exciting days of my life," said Hannah Brown, president of the UCC. "We have been planning on this groundbreaking and working on this EDA grant application process for quite some time now. It's really exciting for me because we are the first African-American group to prep a building of this magnitude to benefit our community."

"We want the building to serve a purpose for the growth of the community and businesses who cannot afford to build a stand-alone process," Brown said. "We will be providing these individuals an opportunity to pay a reasonable rent because our building will be paid for and not have any debt. We want to be able to provide them whatever support we can to enable them to thrive and be successful."

David Bearden, deputy assistant secretary for Economic Development and chief operating officer for the U.S. Department of Commerce in Washington, D.C., presented the check to the UCC as more than 100 guests witnessed this historical event.

"On behalf of President Bush, the administration and the Department of Commerce, I'm pleased to present to you a check in the amount of two million dollars," Bearden said. "Wow, what a privilege it is to be here. I am proud of all the business partners, community partners, board members of the Urban Chamber and the staff coming together and translating this idea into a concrete vision that has finally culminated through the efforts of many."

"This type of collaboration allows for people to come together to reach a common objective," Bearden said. "It is clear to me that beyond the casual conversation that the spirit is there to move this project on and not being taken for granted. You would be surprised to see the number of projects across this country that gladly would consider receiving the wide variety of support that this project is receiving. That is a very strong testimony to the work that you are doing here in Las Vegas."

## HUD

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home — downpayment and closing costs.

"Affordability is a difficult issue but HUD's American Dream Downpayment Initiative allows communities to help people where down payments are an issue," said LoBene.

With more than 100 booths, Saturday's Expo will help potential buyers tackle tough questions like "I'm a single parent, how can I afford a home?"

"My credit is pretty bad, can I still buy a house?"

Free classes will be held throughout the day that will answer those questions and more: *Growing Your Money*; *Repair Your Credit*; *10 Steps to Homeownership*; *Your Credit Score and You*; *Energy Conservation*; and *Getting Ready to Buy*.

For more information, log onto HUD's website at [www.hud.gov](http://www.hud.gov) or [espanol.hud.gov](http://espanol.hud.gov) or call (702) 388-6500.



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