



All three incumbents cruise, return to General Assembly

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By [Josh McCann](#) | Independent Tribune

Published: November 5, 2008

HARRISBURG - All three Republican incumbents representing Cabarrus County in the General Assembly earned re-election by decisive margins Tuesday.

Sen. Fletcher Hartsell and Rep. Linda Johnson both won by more than 10 percentage points, and Rep. Jeff Barnhart prevailed by more than 9 percentage points.

Hartsell, a 61-year-old Concord attorney seeking his 10th term in the state Senate from the 36th District, defeated Democratic challenger Chuck Paxton by claiming 56.87 percent of the vote or about 42,218 votes.

Paxton finished with 43.13 percent or 32,015 votes.

Hartsell said he thought his experience and reputation helped to overcome a Democratic tilt in the political environment.

"I didn't know how to really gauge things," Hartsell said. "I'd like to think I've served in this capacity for quite some time and have been even objectively effective."

In recent years, Hartsell has focused heavily on the developing North Carolina Research Campus, a planned biotechnology hub being built in Kannapolis in partnership with several of the state's universities.

He is also chairman of the Judiciary II Committee and vice chairman of the Finance Committee. Hartsell plans to continue working to integrate the community in the research campus find other ways in which various fields can be harnessed for economic development.

"The real objective overall is jobs," he said. "We could very well be at the cutting edge of a variety of technologies."

Paxton, a 54-year-old owner of a Harrisburg real estate firm, was chosen in October by the party's county leadership to serve as a surrogate candidate for late Concord attorney Jim Johnson.

Johnson died in September, and his name remained on Tuesday's ballots.

Barnhart, 52-year-old CEO of Cabarrus Community Health Centers, earned a fifth term in the N.C. House from District 82.

He won with 54.8 percent or 21,167 votes. Democratic challenger Wayne Troutman had 45.2 percent or 17,458 votes.

A former county commissioner, Barnhart has also advocated for the research campus and said there needs to be a stronger focus on the state's dropout rate.

On fiscal policy, he said the state should look at the specific needs for programs in those areas with each budget cycle instead of re-budgeting funds for programs each year.

Spurred in part by inquiries from Johnson, some of the county's Democratic leaders alleged last month in a report to state officials that Barnhart planned to step down if elected.

The Democrats expressed concern that such a move could essentially disenfranchise voters because Republican leaders would then appoint a successor.

Barnhart responded by denying the speculation that he would step down prematurely and calling the report "completely false."

Tuesday, he said it was too early to predict what his political future might hold.

"It depends," he said. "We've got a lot of work to do."

Troutman, 62, runs Concord businesses Troutman Motors, Troutman Insurance and Troutman's Bar-B-Que, campaigned on a platform of transportation funding reform and competitive sourcing for government services.

In the N.C. House District 83, computer analyst Linda Johnson of Kannapolis secured a fifth term by defeating Democratic challenger Barry Richards of Concord.

Johnson won 62.42 percent of the vote or 22,000 votes, while Richards won 37.58 percent or 13,272 votes.

Johnson, 63, said she was surprised the margin of victory was so lopsided.

She plans to focus on education and appropriations issues in her next two years in Raleigh.

Her knowledge in those areas should prove useful in a time when the state is expected to face a budget shortfall.

"I do have the experience to know where and how to move money," Johnson said.

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