

Round 2 "Let's Get Ready To Rumble"

Written by Boney and Roberts
Friday, 09 December 2011 00:00

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WILL THE BLACK COMMUNITY SHOW UP TO MAKE HISTORY?

ANDREW C. BURKS AND KRISTI THIBAUT,
CITY COUNCIL AT LARGE POSITION 2 CANDIDATES

JOLANDA JONES AND JACK CHRISTIE
AT LARGE POSITION 5 CANDIDATES



Will the Black Community Show up to Make History?

by Jeffrey L. Boney and Eryn Roberts

Forward Times Staff Writers

We are only a few days away from knowing who the remaining four Houston City Council members will be after the votes are tallied for the December 10 runoff election.

"Round Two" of the runoff election has already started, as early voting kicked off last week, and each candidate is doing their best to get their base voters and new voters to the polls. This has already been a historic election cycle, in that two new district seats were added. Another interesting and potentially historic dynamic that could come from these elections, is that for the FIRST TIME EVER, the City of Houston could have six black elected officials serving on city council at the same time.

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Wanda Adams (District D), C.O. Bradford (At-Large Position 4) and Larry Green (Newly created District K) have already cemented their place on council. In three of the four races being contested on Dec. 10, there is a black candidate in those races.

Alvin Byrd and Jerry Davis, both black, are vying for District B, which will automatically take the city council count to four, which is the number of black elected officials that currently serve on council.

Two-term Incumbent Jolanda Jones is in a tough, hard-fought re-election battle for the Houston City Council At-Large 5 seat with Jack Christie, the same opponent that she squeaked out a runoff election victory in the 2009 elections. She will need a strong showing of support from her base, in order to pull out yet another victory, which would increase the city council count to five.

Then there is the race that has many in the black community scratching their heads.

Andrew Burks, Jr. who came out as the frontrunner in the Houston City Council At-Large race in the general election in November, has found himself having to defeat his runoff election opponent, Kristi Thibaut, but also having to fend off an unlikely opponent, other black elected officials.

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The City of Houston is primed to have, an unprecedented, six black elected officials sit on Houston City Council at one time. However, the streets are ablaze, concerning the six black State legislators and a former Houston City Councilwoman who have come out in support for the white candidate (Thibaut) over the black candidate (Burks) in the race for Houston City Council's At-Large 2 seat.

Last week, residents in many black neighborhoods across Houston starting receiving a mailer with the pictures of these black elected officials, expressing their support for Thibaut over Burks.

The mailer, which states, "Kristi Thibaut is our candidate for Houston City Council," has the pictures of the Hon. Alma Allen, Hon. Ada Edwards, Hon. Garnet Coleman, Hon. Harold Dutton, Hon. Rodney Ellis, Hon. Ron Reynolds and Hon. Senfronia Thompson. There is one picture that is noticeably missing from the picture, however, that of Kristi Thibaut.

Many in the black community have stated that they feel her picture was deliberately left off to confuse and possibly deceive black voters and mask the fact that she is a white candidate.

George Gray, former precinct judge of Precinct #198, spoke with the Houston Forward Times to share his thoughts.

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"They have the guts to come out in support of this white woman , but don't have the guts to support a black woman that is not afraid to use her (Jolanda Jones) voice, being attacked ruthlessly by this white man," said Gray. Gray was referring to the scathing attack mailer sent by Jack Christie, where he uses quotes from the Houston Chronicle and other sources to belittle her.

"You can have your convictions on who you want to vote for or not vote for, but he (Burks) has been a supporter of the black community and the Democratic Party for years. You can't afford to just throw him away like that," Gray continued. "It's a shame when we turn our back on the people that brought us to the table. We must dig down deep and realize how we came to the table."

Others are not so quick to throw them under the bus, but are interested in hearing their reasoning for taking such a strong advocacy position for Thibaut.

State Representative Garnet Coleman said, "I served with Kristi in the legislature and I think she will make a better council member than Andrew Burks. I've known Andrew for a long time and I understand that he wants to be a member of council. I haven't supported him times before and that's the reason I'm not supporting him now, because I don't believe he's the best candidate. I like Andrew. I have a great deal of respect for him. I've known him probably 17 years. I also know how I've stood right there with Kristi and I know her sense of commitment to communities of color. She has a commitment to people who need government and she has experience from

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seeing what kinds of issues come in front of the legislature that affect cities, and we need people with experience who can jump right off. When you look at who's endorsing Kristi, especially those of us who have worked with her, it's because we know her values are right and we know she is going to do a good job representing Houstonians. Electing people just to sit there isn't working. We need people who really engage."

State Senator Rodney Ellis expressed, "Kristi has a proven track record as an effective community organizer and as a dedicated advocate for her constituents. We both believe in progressive causes and governing. Kristi shares more of my philosophy on uplifting the downtrodden, the neglected and those left behind. I valued her as an ally in the Texas State House and I support her in her race for Houston City Council."

Newly elected State Representative Ron Reynolds said, "I'm endorsing Kristi Thibaut because she is a former State Representative that has the education and experience to effectively represent Houston very well. I have a lot of respect for Andrew Burks, but believe that Kristi is more qualified to represent our community. Kristi is supportive of African-American and minority-owned businesses and Rev. Burks has stated that he will not support the current MWBE program. As past President of the Missouri City NAACP, I'm as pro-Black as they come. However, I refuse to endorse a candidate just because they are African-American."

The Houston Forward Times tried to reach the Hon. Alma Allen, Hon. Harold Dutton, Hon. Ada Edwards and Hon. Senfronia Thompson, but were unable to get a response.

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The Houston Forward Times also contacted Andrew Burks Jr., to get his thoughts on his runoff election chances and the lack of support from these black elected officials.

"When I found out, I was devastated," said Burks. "I didn't want to believe that people that knew me and that I supported and gave my all to, would turn their back on me like this."

Burks, who has been a Houston business owner for 29 years, is concerned about Thibaut's commitment to the black community

"If she (Thibaut) doesn't respect the black community enough to put her picture on her literature to let the black community know who she is, then how can they trust her to be who she is if elected?," said Burks. "This has nothing to do with the fact that Thibaut is white, but she has come in and has deliberately kept her face off her literature as if she is ashamed to be white. I put my picture on all my literature. I'm not ashamed to be black. I won't send one thing to one side of town, and then send a completely different thing to another. On the other side of town, she sent out a mailer with her and her family on it, but sent the black community a piece of literature with nothing but her name on it and the pictures of the black elected officials who I still consider to be my friends. I don't believe the black elected officials expected her to do this type of marketing to the black community."

Concerning the MWBE program concerns, Burks expressed that only a few African-American businesses in Houston currently receive contracts and that he doesn't want to end the MWBE

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program, but want to revise the program to ensure more African-Americans are able to participate in the process.

Burks is no stranger to running for public office, but this by far has been his strongest showing, having been the frontrunner coming out of the general election. He wants the citizens of Houston to make him their choice, but Thibaut is sure to give him a run for his money.

"I'm asking the citizens of Houston to beware and don't be deceived," said Burks. "If you don't know this lady, do your research and don't just vote for somebody because some people put their picture on a flyer and told you vote for her."

The Houston Forward Times will be sure to share the results of this historic Dec. 10 runoff election and we **STRONGLY** encourage you to make your vote count and be a part of history. The runoff election takes place on a Saturday, so be sure to make that one of the first things you do no matter what{jcomments on}.