

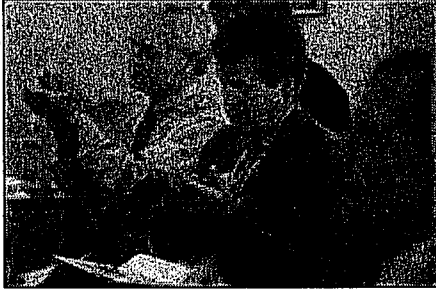
# TENNESSEAN

Every day matters. .com

This is a printer friendly version of an article from the **The Tennessean**. To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

< < Back

## Blacks may tilt mayor race 'Tennessean' analysis shows Clement may get Gentry votes



Bob Clement, left, and Karl Dean, rivals in the Sept. 11 mayoral runoff election, participate in the Green Hills Action Partners meeting Thursday in Nashville. DIPTI VAIDYA / THE TENNESSEAN

By MICHAEL CASS  
and SHEILA WISSNER  
Staff Writer

Published: Monday, 08/20/07

### Elections 2007 | Nashville mayor

African-American voters could be a key swing vote in Nashville's mayoral runoff election, and former U.S. Rep. Bob Clement might hold an edge over former Metro Law Director Karl Dean, election data show.

Vice Mayor Howard Gentry, who finished a close third to Dean and Clement in the Aug. 2 general election, won 58 of 169 precincts, more than any other candidate. Gentry is African-American, and he won in many predominantly black areas.

Gentry said Sunday he does not plan to endorse either candidate.

Clement finished second in 53 of the 58 precincts Gentry won.

Clement received 5,489 votes at those polling places, well ahead of Dean's 3,062 votes, according to a *Tennessean* analysis of election data. Gentry received 15,079 votes in those areas and more than 23,000 countywide.

The numbers from Gentry's best precincts indicate black voters are more likely to back Clement than Dean, and that could give Clement a significant advantage in the Sept. 11 runoff.

Carol Swain, a professor of political science and law at Vanderbilt University, said many black voters remembered Clement from his 15 years representing Nashville as a Democrat in Congress.

"Clement has the edge just because he has more name recognition," Swain said. "It seems to me he has a clear advantage, and Dean will have to work hard to overcome that."

But Dean said his message of reducing dropout rates, improving public safety and enhancing economic development — and the connections between those three goals — should appeal to people of all races.

"I think we have a message that's going to be embraced by the entire city, and I'm confident we can get it across to all sections of the community," he said. "I'm going to work hard to do that."

### 'No limit' with Clement

Parrish Godchild came up with a slogan for his new favorite candidate as he was talking one day to some fellow volunteers in Clement's mayoral campaign.

"We want to let African-American voters know that if you want change, there is no limit with Bob Clement," Godchild recalled telling the other volunteers before they started calling potential voters.

A variation on that theme is now part of Clement's campaign as the former congressman reaches out to black voters, most visibly with a satellite campaign office on Jefferson Street. Godchild, who volunteered for Gentry's campaign in the Aug. 2 general election, now praises Clement for listening to good ideas and talking about education, truancy and "juvenile joblessness."

But Donna Wooden, a black woman who owns the new Stillwaters Cafe on Jefferson Street, said she was leaning toward voting for Dean because she appreciates his agenda.

"I like the fact that Karl Dean is focusing on keeping kids in school and helping them get a good education," Wooden said Friday, the day after Dean attended a networking event held by an African-American business group at Stillwaters.

Wooden said she was disappointed that Clement declined her invitation to the same event. But Clement spokesman Ben Hall said Rachel Clement, one of the candidate's two daughters, attended on his behalf while he was giving an interview.

### **Clement has history**

Some African-American civic leaders have thrown their support to Clement, saying he has more leadership experience than Dean and has been there for the black community before. Clement's district office was on Jefferson Street throughout his 15 years in Congress.

"When he was in Congress, he really stayed in touch with Nashville," said outgoing Metro Councilwoman Brenda Gilmore of Bordeaux, who also is a state representative. "He didn't forget his roots, and he made it personal. I think he will do the same thing as mayor."

Clement's credibility with many black voters is enhanced by the reputation of his late father, former Tennessee Gov. Frank Clement, who was a moderate on race while some other Southern governors took hard-line segregationist stands in the 1950s and 1960s.

"People remember his dad was a good governor, and they remember that he was a good congressman," Gilmore said. "Those are things that will resonate."

The Rev. Enoch Fuzz, pastor of Corinthian Baptist Church in north Nashville, said he hasn't decided who is the better candidate. But he said Clement had "proven to be a friend" with his excellent constituent service while in Congress.

"He would always write back to you," Fuzz said.

### **Defender role aids Dean**

Some other black leaders are supporting Dean, who was the Davidson County public defender for nine years, just as vigorously. Bishop George Price, pastor of Bethesda Original Church of God in Bordeaux, said Dean would "show more diversity in hiring" for Metro government positions.

"He'll be more favorable to the things that are important," Price said, listing education, public safety and economic development.

Price said Dean had been "out among us" at churches and had shown an impressive humility.

"He knows he doesn't have all it takes to run City Hall. He's open to ideas and suggestions."

The Rev. James "Tex" Thomas of Jefferson Street Missionary Baptist Church, another prominent black congregation, also is supporting Dean. Thomas said he first met Dean at the Metro jail when both were visiting inmates there.

"I watched Karl Dean as the public defender, how he worked with people in our community and defended them," he said. "And I think he's the best person to bring this community together."

Price said Clement's Jefferson Street campaign office was "insulting."

"I don't think it's going to be there as a neighborhood city hall after he's elected," he said. "It's just a Band-Aid."

## Gentry draws praise

Dean and John Ray Clemmons, a co-chairman of Clement's campaign, insisted they weren't targeting black voters with any special message.

Dean praised Gentry, however, for running a campaign that "brought light to issues of homelessness and poverty" and said he would try to win over Gentry's backers. He said the moves of two top Gentry advisers to his campaign last week should be "a good sign" to those voters.

Clemmons also complimented Gentry for his "distinguished public career." In an interview at the Jefferson Street office, he said Clement would stress accomplishments in Congress that benefited all Nashville residents.

"Bob feels very strongly that Nashville as a whole can't improve until every community in the city improves," he said.

Elaine Ganick, a communications executive who supported Gentry, said his supporters would be looking for a candidate who is inclusive and willing to listen to "the average Joe."

"The people who were there around Howard's table, they looked like the city of Nashville," said Ganick, who is white.

Swain said the candidates' credibility probably will make the difference in the end.

"What I think will matter is how well the black community trusts each candidate. If they're pandering, it's easy for voters to see through that."

Swain, who is black, said she expects many black voters to be interested in issues such as education, jobs, immigration and codes enforcement. She said she hopes African-American voters will push Clement and Dean a bit over the next three weeks.

"Black people are increasingly savvy voters, and they would do well to make the two candidates work for their votes," she said. "I hope the black community will not sell its votes cheaply."

Published: Monday, 08/20/07

---