

## **NEWS**



*Former Florida Lt. Gov. Jennifer Carroll addressed the Duval County Coalition of Black Republicans on Thursday, July 25, 2024 in Jacksonville's San Jose community. Her remarks focused on faith, family and freedom ahead of the 2024 presidential election. | Will Brown, Jacksonville Today*

# **Black conservatives look to grow their ranks in Jacksonville**

By [Will Brown](#)

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A Black woman may be leading the presidential ticket of a major political party for the first time, but for Jacksonville's Black conservatives, political values trump a candidate's personal identity.

The Coalition of Black Republican Americans held "faith, family and freedom forum" – three pillars of Black communities for decades – on Thursday evening in Jacksonville's San Jose area.



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More than 100 people gathered for the Republican Party of Duval County-affiliated event at the Epping Forest Yacht & Country Club to listen as former Lt. Gov. Jennifer Carroll, Jacksonville City Council members Terrance Freeman and Ken Amaro and former Congressman Allen West talked about political participation by Black conservatives.

In addition to discussing the top of the ticket, the forum also attracted candidates for local office who aim to appeal to conservative voters, like District 3 Duval School Board candidate Becky Nathanson and District 5 School Board candidate Reggie Blount.

School board is the most important race on the ballot, former Congressman West told the assembled crowd.

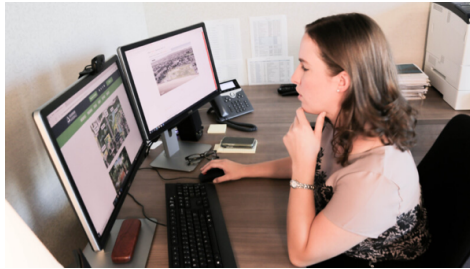
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“At what cost have we lost the value of the family?” asked Shamari Lewis, president of Duval County’s COBRA, the Coalition of Black Republican Americans. “At what cost, at what cost are we sacrificing freedom?”

“We have to pull in the reins. We have to say, ‘I’m sorry, I didn’t like the windows bashed in Washington, but someone had to hold you to account. I wouldn’t have gone into the building, but somebody had to do it because these folks have run amok,” Lewis said, referring to the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol insurrection that erupted after then-President Donald Trump lost his reelection bid to Joe Biden. “As the lieutenant governor said, ‘the government prints money, they don’t earn it.’”



*Former Florida Lt. Gov. Jennifer Carroll addresses the Duval County Coalition of Black Republicans on Thursday, July 25, 2024, in Jacksonville’s San Jose community. Her remarks focused on faith, family and freedom ahead of the 2024 presidential election. | Will Brown, Jacksonville Today*

Thursday night, former Lt. Gov. Jennifer Carroll told attendees that government works for the people but has become unwieldy and unresponsive.

“We should not have any allegiance to anyone – Republican, Democrat or anyone we elect to office – if they are not doing their duties...and if their positions are not benefitting the American people, their butts need to be out of office,” Carroll said. “We need to be stronger stewards of that.”

Carroll, the first Black lieutenant governor in state history when she was elected in 2011, returned home to Northeast Florida after resigning under investigation two years later. Federal prosecutors had tried to tie her to a gambling ring but dropped charges against her the same year. In 2015, the Florida Commission on Ethics cleared of wrongdoing.

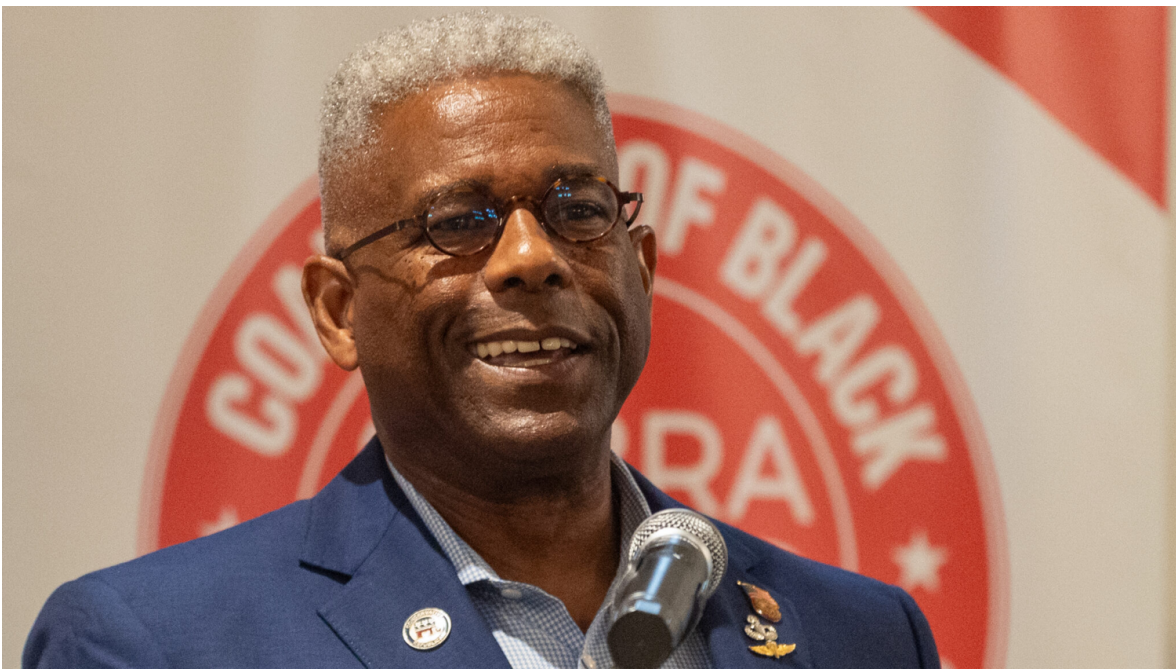
Carroll's remarks came less than a week after Vice President Kamala Harris became the presumptive presidential nominee of the Democratic Party. Harris' name was not often directly invoked throughout the evening.

"It's not about party, it's about the form of government and type of government," Carroll said. "In a republic, the minority and majority should have a voice in governance. "We've gone so far away from that. These elites that have the power and have the money they dictate – and (in President) Biden we saw how that played out. They can control how we think, who runs for office. They can control what we do and what we say. That is not a republic. Your rights should not supersede my rights."

Harris' presence as the frontrunner has energized Democrats and left-leaning Black voters, whose support for President Biden was flagging.

Monica Caple is not one of them. She is a longtime Jaxson and Navy veteran who believes it's more important for people to vote their values and not blindly support a political party. On Thursday, Caple said, "I was raised where God is our foundation and we take care of each other. Politics have played into everything, where it confuses people."

Angela LeMaster sat a few rows in front of Caple. She moved to Jacksonville in 2002 to serve as a teacher and transitioned into a career in banking. LeMaster believes Black turnout will be hugely important in this election, which is why she enjoyed the opportunity to listen to Carroll and West so she can energize others to vote.



*Former Congressman Allen West addresses the Duval County Coalition of Black Republican Americans on Thursday, July 25, 2024. West focused his message on faith and reducing what he believes is government overreach in education, society and culture. | Will Brown, Jacksonville Today*

The Black conservative movement is growing in Duval County, the county with the highest percentage of Black voters in the state of Florida. Since the year of the 2022 midterms, the number of Black Republicans grew in Duval from 6,646 in June of 2022 to 7,531 this June, while the overall Duval County electorate shrank from 644,000 voters to 629,000.

Still, only 4% of Duval County's 170,480 Black voters are registered Republicans, while 76.3% are Democrats. And Thursday's event was targeting all Black voters who may resonate with a conservative message of faith, family and community, including the more than 28,000 politically unaffiliated Black voters in Duval County.

LeMaster said she can't wait to share that message with others ahead of the elections.

"You have more ammunition to project a voice instead of social media," LeMaster said. "You can speak to your points on freedom and faith. It seems as though people have an ear when you do that."

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**Will Brown**

*Reporter*

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Will Brown is a corps member with Report for America, a national service program that places journalists into local newsrooms. He previously reported for the *Jacksonville Business Journal*. And before that, he spent more than a decade as a sports reporter at *The St. Augustine Record*, *Victoria (Texas) Advocate* and the *Tallahassee Democrat*. Reach him at [will@jaxtoday.org](mailto:will@jaxtoday.org).



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By *Mark Basch - Jacksonville Daily Record*

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