

Carteret County News-Times Election Guide: Primaries 2016

Democratic race for NC Commissioner of Labor

MAZIE BUTLER FERGUSON



Age:

In the words of my aunt Ellen Haire, who died at age 112, "a woman who will tell her age will tell anything." I decline.

Hometown and current residence:

Sumter, S.C., and currently Greensboro.

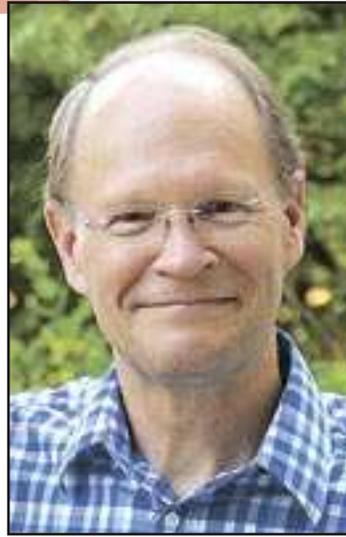
Education and occupation:

B.A. South State University, Juris Doctor from the University of South Carolina, Lutheran Theological Seminary Southern, Shaw University Divinity School and several fellowships and certificates. Currently a teacher, lifetime advocate for workers and attorney.

Political experience:

My entire life has been a political experience – worked for the passage of the first 20th century Voting Rights Act and Civil Rights Act, advocated and helped write the Model Cities Grant, and elected board chairman for several Greensboro organizations, among accomplishments.

CHARLES C. MEEKER



Age: 65

Hometown and current residence:

Raleigh, currently: 324 S. Boylan Ave., Raleigh, N.C. 27603

Education and occupation:

College at Yale University, 1972, and law school at Columbia University, 1975.

Political experience:

Eight years on the Raleigh City Council, 1991-95, and 10 years as Raleigh's mayor, 2001-11.

MAZIE FERGUSON

Contact information:

On Facebook at "Mazie Ferguson, Democratic Candidate NC Labor Commissioner"

CHARLES MEEKER

Contact information:

charlesmeeker.org or charlesmeeker@parkerpoe.com.

What sets you apart as a candidate?

The positions through which I worked, as a volunteer or as an employee, were not for the salary, but for the opportunity to serve and make a difference for those coming after me ... My work has not been about salary. It has been about making a difference for the people with whom I share this little piece of unreal estate called Earth.

How can the Department of Labor better ensure workplace safety?

Workplace injury costs. This question gives me an excellent opportunity to share my basic beliefs about this commission created to protect the worker of our economy from the powerful overreach of their employers, i.e. protect workers acting out a need to provide for their families from overreaching employers driven by the quest for higher profits at the least cost. The bottom line for corporations is the increasing ratio of profit over cost. Keeping costs low to the detriment of those who are hurt on the job. Sufficient worker compensation benefits...and redefining jobs by reassigning valuable workers to safer work places where they and the company can benefit from the relationship.

What steps can you take as commissioner of labor to guarantee employers are fol-

lowing the law?

As commissioner of labor I would give strict scrutiny to allegations from workers about employer violations that come before the commission ... Where workers complain of not being fully paid for the work they have completed, and upon inquiry, employers are found keeping or refusing to properly pay employees, I would propose punitive and/or triple damages to encourage compliance.

Additionally, after a worker's prima facie showing that an injury was caused by management error or omission, I would place on management the burden of proof about safety omissions and/or failures to determine if, on balance, simple efforts might have been made to prevent injury to the worker.

If elected, how can you as an official on the Council of State advocate for job growth in Eastern North Carolina?

As a member of the North Carolina Council of State, I would introduce AND support policies that would make broadening the economic base of Eastern North Carolina a statewide priority. Our whole state is only as strong as its geographic parts ... Eastern North Carolina is a long-neglected diamond waiting to be mined.

*This submission was trimmed for space.

What sets you apart as a candidate?

Teamwork is what gets things accomplished in the public sector, as well as the private sector. My collaborative approach to leadership assisted the City of Raleigh in revitalizing its downtown, expanding its parks and greenway systems and implementing a number of sustainability initiatives.

How can the Department of Labor better ensure workplace safety?

The Department of Labor should focus on education for employers and training for employees. Many workplace accidents occur during the first month or two of an individual's employment. The Commissioner of Labor needs to make workplace safety a top priority, including meeting with the Safety Advisory Board on a regular basis. North Carolina's record of having 128 worker fatalities in 2014 needs improvement.

What steps can you take as commissioner of labor to guarantee employers are following the law?

The Commissioner of Labor needs to see to it that the Wage and Hour Division of the Department of Labor enforces existing laws on minimum

wages, overtime and the correct classification of employees. The commissioner also needs to make it a priority to see to it that all employees are paid wages owed, including filing lawsuits if necessary. Under the current commissioner's tenure, the Department of Labor has not been active enough on any of these efforts.

If elected, how can you as an official on the Council of State advocate for job growth in Eastern North Carolina?

If elected, the Council of State members, including the Commissioner of Labor, should take an active role in promoting economic development in midsized cities and rural areas throughout North Carolina, including Eastern North Carolina. This includes personal involvement of the Council of State members in identifying and assisting with opportunities that are good for Eastern North Carolina. Oyster farming is one such opportunity, as is better distribution and marketing of North Carolina's agricultural products. Additional plants for the processing of agricultural products should also be encouraged.