

# Social worker kicks off alderman campaign

By Sarah Glen  
City Editor

Michelle Johnson starts every morning with a session of meditation on her kitchen floor.

As a part-time yoga instructor and a full-time social worker, Johnson said practicing yoga while opening her private practice has enabled her to see people as holistic beings.

"It has completely transformed me physically, mentally, and emotionally," she said. "We have to understand that our thoughts impact how we live, move and breathe."

Now that her practice has taken off, Johnson is ready to accomplish a new goal: joining the Carrboro Board of Aldermen.

Johnson, who announced her candidacy on Friday, said talks of opening a CVS Pharmacy down the street from her 302 Weaver St. office piqued her interest in becoming an alderman.

"I started attending hearings and noticed in the process that CVS has not been willing to cooperate with resident interests," she said. "Residents want a walkable, bikeable mixed-use space there that really fits the downtown."

Aside from downtown development, Johnson said she is also interested in promoting the local arts scene, human rights issues, and accessibility of services.

"What I understand is how power works and how systems work," she said. "I can look at details and make a plan and think,



DTH/ERIN HULL

Michelle Johnson, a social worker, sits in her office in Carrboro. Johnson announced she will run for a seat on the Carrboro Board of Aldermen.

"How will this be in three years?"

Alderman Randee Haven-O'Donnell, who is up for re-election in 2013, said she thinks the board's greatest issues in the next term will be economic development, budget constraints and launching more town programs.

Haven-O'Donnell said an alderman candidate should be approachable, open-minded, and a good listener.

"Anyone interested in running for office in Carrboro really needs to know Carrboro — downtown, around town and beyond town," she said. "Being a creative thinker who approaches things from outside the box is what works."

Aldermen Joal Hall Broun, Lydia Lavelle and Dan Coleman

all have terms that expire this year but have not declared whether or not they will run for re-election.

Johnson's husband, Jeffrey Herrick, who she met while they both volunteered as disc jockeys at the Duke radio station WXDU, said he thinks his wife makes a great candidate because she can assess information well and come to smart solutions.

"She's been on numerous boards and is really interested in what's going on" he said. "We normally watch the meetings on TV so we can heat up dinner at the same time, but lately we've been going in person."

Contact the City Editor at [city@dailytarheel.com](mailto:city@dailytarheel.com).

# Legislators propose to alter voting rules before 2012

By Meghan Gilliland  
Staff Writer

A flurry of efforts by Republican state legislators to alter voting procedures has been viewed by some as an assault on voting rights in the state.

Several pieces of voting legislation have passed one chamber of the N.C. General Assembly and are being deliberated in committees. The bills would ban straight-party ticket voting on ballots, shorten the early voting period by one week and require a form of state-issued photo identification at polling places.

The voter ID bill, also known as "Restore Confidence in Government," has received the most criticism from voting rights advocacy groups.

The groups say the bill will inhibit low-income, minority and elderly residents that are more likely to lack driver's licenses from voting. A report by the state's Fiscal Research Division found there are 885,537 registered voters without valid driver's licenses or non-operators ID cards.

Republican sponsors of the bill say the ID requirement is a necessary measure to deter voter fraud. Adam Sotak, organizing director for Democracy North Carolina, a nonpartisan organization that advocates for civic engagement, said the claim by Republican legislators is unsubstantiated.

"I'm still waiting for them to show me some proof on this widespread voter fraud," he said. "The facts tell us that it's extremely rare

in N.C. You're more likely to be struck by lightning."

But Susan Myrick, an elections analyst at the John W. Pope Civitas Institute, a conservative policy organization in the state, said voter fraud is not limited to cases that are reported.

"Fraud is supposed to be secretive," she said. "Nobody really knows if there is voter impersonation fraud primarily because there are no specific rules against it."

Critics of the Republican-backed bill also say it is a thinly-veiled measure to ensure a Republican presidential candidate earns the state's electoral votes in the 2012 election. President Barack Obama won the state by less than 15,000 votes in 2008.

If the bill is signed into law, N.C. would become the eighth state in the country to require voters to provide a photo ID in order to cast a ballot.

Damon Circosta, executive director of the N.C. Center for Voter Education, said the bill still "needs a lot of work" in committee if it will be successfully implemented before the 2012 elections. The \$500,000 provisioned for voter education programs will be insufficient to properly inform voters about the changes, he said.

"Whenever you make a voting change of this magnitude — and make no mistake, this is the single largest change of voting procedure in decades — you need to let people know about it," he said.

Myrick said the potential ban on straight-ticket voting could

## VOTING LEGISLATION

Lawmakers at the N.C. General Assembly have proposed a number of bills that would affect voting in the state:

- **H351:** House bill titled "Restore Confidence in Government" would require a form of state-issued photo ID.
- **S411:** Senate bill titled "Vote for the Person, Not the Party Act" would eliminate straight-party ticket voting.
- **H658:** House bill titled "Change Early Voting Period" would permit voting no earlier than the second Thursday before an election.

actually be an aid for voters. Many voters do not realize that the straight-ticket option does not include the presidential candidates, she said.

"If you look at the number of voters and then look at the number of presidential votes, there's a significant drop," she said.

Chris Mackey, press secretary for Gov. Bev Perdue, said the governor opposes efforts by legislators to limit voter accessibility.

Mackey said Perdue would not comment on whether she would veto any of the bills because they are still in committee.

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