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Mayor stands by ad critics view as racist

Political spot invokes images of attack dogs, water hoses

By [ERNIE SUGGS](#), [and MARIA SAPORTA](#)

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Atlanta Mayor Shirley Franklin said Thursday that she doesn't regret her role in a controversial eleventh-hour campaign spot that raised the specter of black voters once again "fighting off dogs and water hoses" if a Republican candidate were elected to the Fulton County Board of Commissioners.

In the ad for Democrat John Eaves, who won countywide election Tuesday to chairman of the board, Franklin said the civil rights work of Martin Luther King and Coretta Scott King, Hosea Williams and Maynard Jackson would be lost if Republicans were elected.

"That's why we must stand up, and we must turn out the vote for the Democrats on election day," Franklin said in the ad.

Her lines were right after the more pointed remarks of U.S. Rep. John Lewis (D-Ga.): "You think fighting off dogs and water hoses in the '60s was bad? [Now we] sit idly by, and let the right-wing Republicans take control of the Fulton County Commission."

Civil rights stalwart Andrew Young also spoke in the ad, saying Republican rule would "turn back the clock on equal rights."

Lewis closed with: "Your very life may depend on it."

Eaves is an African-American Democrat; his opponent, Lee Morris, is a white Republican.

Bloggers, conservative radio and letters to the editor have labeled the ads as racially inflammatory.

In a luncheon speech to Commerce Club members Thursday, Franklin said she stands by Lewis and Young and apologized only for the ripples her comments might have sent out, not for the content of what she said.

"If you were offended by something I said, I apologize. But I'm actually infuriated by some of the partisan and divisive politics I've seen in the past five years. What I said in that ad, I said right-wing Republicans, I didn't give them any gender or race. I happen to believe that right-wing Republicans have made some big mistakes in America, and I said exactly what I thought.

"John Lewis spoke of his experiences. Andy Young spoke of his. I know I wouldn't be standing here if it hadn't

been for Andy Young and John Lewis. The bottom line is that I don't know of anybody in my position who wouldn't stand with Andy Young and John Lewis."

Young said Thursday that he, too, has no regrets about taking part in the ad.

Franklin said the ad was in a response to a mailing by Fulton Republicans that said Democrats win elections by lying and stealing.

"Sometimes you just have to fight back," she said.

Mike Dvorscak, chairman of the Fulton County Republican Party, said Thursday that he had been unaware of any such ad.

"The people on my side of the fence view this as racist," Dvorscak said of the ad. "To talk about rolling back civil rights is preposterous. I'm calling on them, and John Eaves, to publicly apologize to the citizens of Fulton County."

Lewis said the ad was not racist.

"I don't think there was anything racially inflammatory at all," Lewis said this week. "The ad was straightforward. Anyone who saw it as race-baiting failed to see the ad."

Eaves said he was shocked that people have reacted negatively to the ad.

"Race-baiting was not our intent," he said, adding that they simply wanted to get out the vote.

Eaves said his campaign staff wrote the ad and provided the text to Young, Franklin and Lewis, who obviously approved it and delivered the audio for the ad.

Morris said he was saddened by the ad but figured it had little impact on the results of the election.

It's unclear whether the ad was placed on the radio, or whether it was simply posted on Eaves' Web site Monday. Morris said the recorded ad was telephoned to some voters.

Eaves earned about 55 percent of the vote, beating Morris in the race to control the Fulton County Commission.

But reaction to the ad reached beyond Fulton County.

Geoff Resnick of Acworth sounded off in a letter to the editor.


"I actually like the mayor very much and think she's done a great job," he said. "I thought she was above this kind of stuff. But the content basically blasted anybody who was a Republican. For John Lewis to say 'your very life may depend on it' □ oh, come on. That's really below the belt. It was really offensive."

Despite the talk swirling around his comments, Lewis stood his ground. "When I said 'Your very life may depend on it,' I meant that," Lewis said.

Staff writers David Markiewicz and David Pendered contributed to this article.

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