

## Three-way GOP primary in Congressional District 3

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By Ben Brown

Whether Wilmington realizes it, two congressmen represent it in the nation's capital—one a Democrat, one a Republican. Until the redraw of congressional district lines after 2010 U.S. Census, New Hanover County was all in Democrat Rep. Mike McIntyre's District 7; today, a quarter of the county's population—and 60 percent of Pender's—falls in Republican Water Jones' District 3.

District 3 covers eastern North Carolina, generally, from the Virginia border to as far south as New Hanover County. Map source: N.C. General Assembly.

Unlike McIntyre, Jones is running for another term in Congress. If successful, he will reach a new level of seniority. But the long-established representative from Farmville, whose service began in 1995, faces challenges from two candidates in his own party, both of whom say it's time for new blood, and that the primary election on May 6 could bring that about.

The first of two GOP challengers is New Bern's Taylor Griffin, a former media coordinator in the George W. Bush White House. More recently, he ran a public policy consulting firm in D.C., from which he sold his stake to return to North Carolina last year. He says his experiences, which also include work under U.S. Sen. Jesse Helms, give him the strength and reference to help his home district. It's the first time he's run for office.

The primary ballot's third name is Albin "Big Al" Novinec, a retired Marine living in Jacksonville who says he doesn't want to see the same band of officials elected again and again, and that his training means he's not intimidated by the establishment. Novinec said he has run for office once prior, in a 2012 California congressional race (against Republican Rep. Darrell Issa), so he could gain campaigning experience.

Below are profiles of each District 3 Republican primary candidate based on interviews conducted by Port City Daily.

(Jacksonville Democrat Marshall Adame was the only member of his party to file for the seat and does not face a primary.)

### **Walter Jones**

“I felt, truthfully, with the very difficult budget problems facing our country—which will impact just about everything across the board—I felt like this was an important election for me to run in again,” Jones said when asked why he’s seeking an 11th term.

But he first discussed the seniority he’d achieve.

“If I get re-elected,” Jones said, “I will be number two on the Armed Services Committee, which is a very important committee to the district that I represent.” It includes Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune and Air Station Cherry Point, for instance, and Jones said the elevated seniority would put him and his staff in a stronger position to “start negotiating the future of our military and the future of our bases. That’s one of the reasons that I decided I should run.”

He said he’s also eyeing the nation’s climbing debt, and that he hasn’t voted for a debt ceiling increase since 1997. “The debt at that time was \$5.7 trillion,” Jones recalled. “Today, as you know, it’s over \$17 trillion. It’s growing by the second.”

Every time the debt ceiling is allowed to increase, he said, “it just allows the administration to borrow more money so that the administration and Congress can continue to spend and grow the government on borrowed money.”

On a similar level, Jones today opposes American participation in foreign wars or crises. “I know that people in my district ... are sick and tired of America borrowing money from foreign governments to prop up other countries, build their roads and their schools when we can’t even do it here in America,” he said.

Asked why he’s a Republican (Jones, previously a N.C. House member, was a Democrat until 1994), he referred to his Christian faith. “I happened to be a convert [from Southern Baptist] to Catholicism. I thank God first that I have the health to be able to tell you this: I’ve never missed a week of mass.”

He said he joined the GOP because, at the time, that party was “very proud to advocate the Judeo-Christian values that I think have made America strong.”

Goals for an 11th term include working across political lines to end trade agreements that he said are harming U.S. workers; and continuing advocacy for his district’s coastline, which runs all the way to the Virginia border. (New Hanover County’s three beach towns all fall in District 7.)

“Because of the budget shortfalls, we don’t even have adequate money to do beach renourishment,” said Jones. Asked how coastal towns can maintain their beaches and inlets otherwise, he said the federal government should reduce stringency for locally or state-funded beach and inlet projects that are ready to proceed.

Such a project, planned and funded, awaits approval in Dare County. Jones said he along with U.S. Sens. Richard Burr (R) and Kay Hagan (D) last week asked federal regulators to meet with Dare officials so it can move ahead with permitting and engineering. A model should be in place, Jones added, to let funded beach projects play out with minimal federal slowdown.

As for federal funding in the mix, “The federal government is in bad financial shape,” said Jones. “No one can argue that point.”

Jones faced a primary in 2012 as well, pulling through with 42,644 votes to challenger Frank Palombo’s 19,166. In the general election that year, Jones defeated Democrat Erik Anderson 195,571 votes to 114,314 (although New Hanover County itself gave far more votes to Anderson, according to election records).

During his interview with Port City Daily, Jones also pointed out that The Hill, a newspaper focused specifically on Congress, in 2010 ranked him 17th on its “[25 Hardest Working Lawmakers](#)” list. That was out of all 535 members of the House and Senate.

More about Jones is at <http://www.walterjonescommittee.com>.

## **Taylor Griffin**

“I’ve been fortunate enough—or unfortunate enough—to have had a front row seat to what’s going on in this country over the past decade or so,” said Griffin, referring to a career in Washington, D.C. that included work under Sen. Jesse Helms and at the U.S. Department of the Treasury, as well as in the George W. Bush White House and in running a public policy consulting firm called Hamilton Place Strategies.

All the while, he said, he would routinely visit his home state of North Carolina—and frequently Wilmington, where he said his parents owned property. He and his brother still keep a boat, here, he added.

“I never intended to be in Washington as long as I was, but I had some incredible opportunities, and the reason I went to Washington in the first place is the reason I’ve come back,” he said. “I went to Washington to serve North Carolina.”

Asked about his interest in U.S. House versus any other public office, he said it’s most closely aligned with his experience. He also said it needs turnover.

“I feel like when members of Congress get elected, they make it a career, and they no longer focus on what the baseline of the job is, which is to represent the people that elected them,” he explained.

He nodded to Jones after discussing the “power of incumbency and name ID,” which he said enables those lengthy political careers.

“When you have a politician who’s been in Washington or in politics as long as Walter Jones has—my opponent, who makes it a career and sees it as a career—the only priority is just every two years making sure that he gets re-elected,” Griffin argued.

He said he could set a standard for the district that political time should be limited.

Asked to respond to Jones’ position on seniority, Griffin contended Jones lacks political clout to accomplish much for eastern North Carolina. (In 2012, Jones characterized himself to Port City Daily as a man of strong relationships attributable to his time in office – [click here for that story.](#))

Griffin said he, on the contrary, has the Washington experience and connections to “actually get some things done and offer a fresh perspective on the issues as well and be responsive to the people who elected me.”

As for his priorities, repealing the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare, is at the top, as is addressing “the disaster of federal spending and the mounting debt, which is going to take some really tough choices.”

On the topic of Social Security and Medicare, Griffin noted that people are living longer than the system was designed to address. “The amount of people who are paying into the Social Security and Medicare system are fewer and fewer and the retirees are more and more, and two-plus-two has to equal four,” he said. “So we’re going to have to make some changes,” like raising the retirement age.

Griffin also pointed out the federal government’s impact on the coast.

“You have a lot of the beaches controlled by the federal government, a lot of restrictions with endangered species, for instance,” he said. Noting, like Jones, that Dare County is ready to support its own shoreline project, Griffin decried federal regulations that weigh down processes.

He also noted that North Carolina doesn’t have representation on the House Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs, despite the scale of this state’s fisheries.

For economic development, Griffin envisioned a four-lane U.S. 17 through eastern North Carolina, which he acknowledged has “been on the books for years.”

Completing it “would create a coastal corridor connecting Norfolk [Va.] and Charleston [S.C.] right through eastern North Carolina,” he said. “It would create an amazing boom in economic development.”

Saying he’d fight for eastern North Carolina’s fair share of gas tax revenue (which he said goes more often to projects in western North Carolina,) “That’s a role that a congressman can play in helping to advocate for his district.”

More about Griffin is at <http://www.taylorgriffin.org>.

## Albin ‘Big Al’ Novinec

“Our big problems are at the federal level, and if we fix the federal political arena, it will actually start fixing the state political arena,” said Novinec, who noted he’s not necessarily dissatisfied with Jones’ work, but does believe it’s high time for new talent.

“We need to get new blood in there, and we need to get new thoughts and new information, and we need to rotate,” he said. “[Jones has] been there 20 years. I think he’s earned his retirement. ... I think he’s done a good job.”

Originally from Cleveland, Ohio, Novinec retired from the Marines in 2007 after about 35 years. In 2008 he became a Realtor selling in San Diego, but he said he always kept a nurtured interest in public service.

“When I was younger, my dad used to go to all the city council meetings and get out there, basically voice his opinion, stuff like that. He wasn’t a politician; he was a steel worker, but he felt that we had to be proactive and know what was going on,” Novinec explained. “So, basically, when I retired, with all the stuff’s that’s going on—being around the world in the military, you notice it. When you get back to your own country, you notice it even more.”

Novinec rolled out a plan to structure his education, taking a master’s degree program in public administration and organizational management. He said he’s currently pursuing a doctorate in public administration and leadership. It’s all on a path toward office, he explained, as was a past congressional run two years ago in California’s 49th District—that one more of an exercise, he said.

It was on an independent ticket and against relatively longtime House incumbent Darrell Issa, a Republican who won with more than 60 percent of the vote against three competitors. Novinec, who said his campaign was entirely and intentionally self-funded, got about 1.5 percent. But the point was to gain the experience of running.

“I ran just knowing I wanted the information,” he said.

Asked why his sights are set on Congress in North Carolina—his District 3 home today is in Onslow County—he said the high government is the source of our problems. “We have a \$17.5 trillion debt,” he said for instance. “We spend over \$1 trillion a year on welfare.” (That’s a figure [reported by the Cato Institute](#) but [challenged by some outlets](#)).

His priority is to reduce spending. “It just baffles the imagination that we’re in this much debt,” said Novinec. By his numbers, two-thirds of the government’s welfare spending is infrastructural, to run the programming—and that it shouldn’t cost more than 10 percent to run. He discusses his views on welfare spending [here](#).

“It’s amazing how much money we spend that we don’t even know about,” he said.

Novinec, who did three tours of duty in Iraq, also laments the low number of congressmen with military experience. Only about 17 percent have served, he said before suggesting a correlation with shortcomings in care for veterans and other military funds.

“We deserve more benefits and we don’t deserve the federal government taking away our benefits after we’ve been promised them,” Novinec said [in a video directed at fellow veterans](#). “Why does it take a month to get an appointment to go get a checkup?” he added.

In coastal District 3, Novinec said the issue of federal funding for beach and inlet maintenance could have an answer in how much the U.S. spends on welfare programming. Improvements to that system could, he said, create multiple billions of dollars in savings.

“Should not some of these people’s taxes come back to them and support things like [coastal projects]?” he posed. “Yeah, it should.”

“I’ve always believed that the Crystal Coast of North Carolina [from Cape Lookout to the New River] is the best place in the whole world to live,” Novinec said. “Of course, when the economy dropped, we lost a lot of business and a lot of vacationers and stuff like that, but we need to build that back up and bring the money and the revenue back into the coastal areas.”

Novinec said he’s “a believer” in turning the federal government around.

“What we really need are a few good men, like we say in the Marine Corps. A few good men, and the rest will follow.”

Although he’s a registered Republican, he said party lines won’t confine him.

“It’s not our side against your side, it’s not Democrats and Republicans, it’s not our way or the highway,” he said. “We’re up there to represent not only the people in our districts, but the people overall in the United States.”