

A Vignette of My Election to Roanoke City Council (1988–1996)

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In 1988, I was elected to the Roanoke, Alabama City Council, marking a historic moment both personally and for the community. Alongside Councilman Mack Arthur Bell, I became one of the first African Americans ever elected to the council. This milestone came after the city transitioned from an at-large voting system to district-based elections—a change brought about by a successful legal challenge. This new system provided candidates like me the opportunity to be elected by our own neighbors and peers.

After defeating two other candidates, I earned the distinction of becoming the first elected official to represent District One. My swearing-in ceremony remains one of the most meaningful moments of my life. Surrounded by my parents, my wife, and loved ones, I made a special effort to ensure that my grandfather, Bob Joiner, was present to witness the occasion. His presence made the moment even more significant.

During that very first meeting, I was deeply honored to be nominated by Councilman Mack Bell and subsequently elected by my fellow council members to serve as Mayor Pro Tem—another historic first for an African American in Roanoke. I vividly recall the nervous anticipation I felt as I prepared to preside over my first council meeting.

While my responsibilities extended to the governance of the entire city, my primary allegiance remained with District One. Over the course of two terms, I worked diligently to improve the quality of life for my constituents. I often joke that District One may have received more funding than any other district, though I have never sought to verify that claim.

One of my earliest personal commitments was to construct a sidewalk along Chestnut Street, stretching from Gulf Street to Seymour Drive. Today, it brings me pride to see residents safely using that sidewalk—something that was once unavailable, forcing pedestrians to walk in the street alongside traffic.

I also take pride in successfully advocating for the paving of nearly all unpaved streets within the district. Only one street remained unpaved due to an unresolved property dispute. Additionally, the installation of numerous streetlights significantly improved safety in areas that had long suffered from inadequate lighting.

Beyond infrastructure, I worked closely with the Roanoke Utility Board—an independent entity—to push for improvements in the sewer system, particularly in areas where soil conditions made septic systems unworkable. I also extended my efforts to support initiatives involving the School Board, Public Safety, and the Recreation Departments.

Looking back, I remain deeply proud of my contributions to the city I love, Roanoke, Alabama. I am especially grateful to the Alabama Democratic Conference (ADC) and to all those who worked tirelessly to ensure that I, and others like me, had an equal opportunity to serve. I extend my sincere thanks to every citizen who placed their trust in me through their vote.

Above all, I give thanks to Almighty God for making this journey possible.