

## **Sheriel Perkins declared first female and first African-American Mayor of Greenwood, MS**



As the city's new mayor, former Greenwood City Councilwoman Sheriel Perkins says she plans to stress quality-of-life and crime issues. The Greenwood Election Commission on Thursday certified Perkins as the winner in her battle against longtime Republican incumbent Mayor Harry Smith.

Perkins, a Democrat and wife of state Rep. Willie Perkins, became the city's first black and first female mayor. She received 3,135 votes to Smith's 2,843 in official returns, according to the Greenwood City Clerk's office.

Smith was declared the winner of the first election in 2005, but Perkins, who thought she had won that election, challenged the results. A new election was ordered because of questions surrounding ballots cast.

"I'm so thankful this day is here," a hoarse Perkins said. "I'm so overjoyed the people of Greenwood elected me."

Smith, mayor since 1993, didn't return calls Thursday, but said Wednesday he would likely challenge the outcome of the election if Perkins were declared the winner based upon some challenged ballots.

Perkins said with the election behind her, she plans to bring the city together from the rift in the community that was evident in the heated race. Greenwood, once known as the jewel of the Delta, is divided physically and culturally along racial lines.

"I will also stress new jobs, recreation for young people and housing will be a strong issue," Perkins said. "Of course, crime is an issue. I will boost up the Police Department."

Greenwood resident Tina Jones said she wants more retail businesses and restaurants in the city. When asked if she believes Perkins will be a good mayor for the city, Jones said, "I can't tell, everything is so divided here."

During the campaign, Perkins said, "I'm going to bring a positive image and energy to this city so that everybody will feel comfortable in working and bringing ideas." The Greenwood Election Commission spent all day Wednesday and Thursday morning counting ballots before declaring Perkins the winner. It's unclear when Perkins will take office. Mississippi secretary of state spokesman David Blount said that unless a date was specified in the court order setting the special election, Perkins could be sworn in as soon as the Greenwood Election Commission declared her the winner.

Perkins, 51, appeared to be the winner on June 7, 2005, with unofficial election results showing a 201-vote lead over Smith. A day later, the city election commission declared 200 votes undercounted in a predominately white ward and added several ballots filed by affidavit that placed Smith, 65, on top by six votes. The Greenwood Election Commission then declared Smith the winner with 2,489 votes to Perkins' 2,483.

*By Jimmie E. Gates - Clarion Ledger*