

= Vernon Jones =

Vernon Jones (born October 31 , 1960) is an African @-@ American Democratic politician from US state of Georgia . Jones served as chief executive officer of Dekalb County , Georgia , from 2001 until 2009 , and in the Georgia House of Representatives from 1993 to 2001 . As Dekalb County CEO , Jones presided over the Board of Commissioners , oversaw a 7 @,@ 000 employee county workforce , and managed a \$ 2 @.@ 6 billion county operating budget . He unsuccessfully ran for the US Senate in 2008 .

= = Early life and business career = =

Born in Laurel Hill , North Carolina , Jones grew up on a farm in rural North Carolina . His father was a veteran of World War II who worked in a mill ; his mother and siblings worked on the family farm . Jones was the fifth of six children , with four brothers and a sister . He attended North Carolina Central University in Durham , NC and became a member of the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity there , before graduating with a B.A. in business administration in 1983 . Jones is a graduate of Harvard 's John F. Kennedy School of Government 's Executive Program .

Jones began his career in the telecommunications industry , first working with MCI Communications (now MCI Inc .) and later BellSouth Corporation . At BellSouth , he was part of a team that established wireless communications in Montevideo , Uruguay . Jones served on the DeKalb Board of Health , the Atlanta Regional Commission , the DeKalb Library Board , the DeKalb Pension Board , and the Board of Visitors for Emory University and North Carolina Central University .

= = Political career = =

= = = Political positions = = =

During his 2008 Senate campaign , Jones described himself as a " conservative Democrat " who favors " tough immigration laws and fiscal responsibility " as well as " supporter of gun rights and a staunch environmental advocate " . During his 2008 campaign , he stated that he opposed same @-@ sex marriage . OnTheIssues.org rated Jones as a " Moderate Libertarian Conservative " . Jones stated that he voted for George W. Bush in 2004 , and supported Barack Obama in 2008 . Jones donated \$ 2 @,@ 464 in two separate donations to the Georgia Republican Party in 2001 . In a 2014 press release , Jones characterized himself as an " advocate for limited government , security and protections for all citizens , balanced budgeting , ethical and efficient elections , [and] job creation " .

= = = Georgia House of Representatives = = =

Jones was elected to the Georgia House of Representatives in 1992 , representing District SH 071 , succeeding Sidney Pope Jones , Jr . . Jones served from 1993 to 2001 , during which time he was a member of the Appropriations Committee , the Insurance Committee , and the Health & Ecology Committee , as well as the Banking Committee , and a special Judiciary Committee . Jones also chaired the Chairman of the Health Professions Subcommittee . Among the proposals Jones sponsored or co @-@ sponsored in the Georgia House was a bill to remove the Confederate battle flag emblem from Georgia State flag , and a bill that would have banned minors from purchasing music with explicit lyrics . Jones did not stand for reelection in 2000 , instead running for DeKalb County CEO , and was succeeded in the Georgia House by Ron Sailor

= = = DeKalb County CEO = = =

He was elected as chief executive officer of Dekalb County , Georgia in 2000 , winning 64 % of the

vote , and was re-elected in 2004 with 54 % of the vote . Jones is the first African American to serve as CEO of the county , and the youngest ever elected in the county . In April 2001 , shortly after Jones became CEO , he voted , along with five other DeKalb County Commissioners , to offer life and health insurance benefits to the domestic partners of gay and unmarried County employees . DeKalb was the first county in Georgia to offer such benefits . During his administration , DeKalb County established the first local Homeland Security Office in 2001 . Under Jones , DeKalb County approved creation of a new senior center , increased funding for roads , libraries , and park improvements while maintaining a balanced budget , and increasing the County 's credit rating to AAA . As CEO , Jones promoted and achieved passage of a \$ 125 million bond referendum that allowed for the acquisition of 2 , 735 acre expansion of the DeKalb County 's green space , increasing the county 's parks and green space by 70 % . He requested and received Congressional designation of Arabia Mountain as a National Heritage Area . Jones was also primarily responsible for creation of DeKalb County 's first economic development department , which generated \$ 4 billion in new investments .

However , Jones term as DeKalb County CEO was also known for controversies and accusations of improprieties . Shortly after taking office Jones went back on campaign pledge to keep the homestead exemption sales tax in place . Jones was criticized for vetoing pay raises for police officers . In January 2005 , the Georgia State Ethics Commission sanctioned Jones for campaign contribution limit violations in 2004 reelection campaign . Under a Consent Order , Jones returned all excess contributions and personally paid a \$ 7 , 500 civil penalty . Jones apologized and stated that changes in campaign finance laws between the initial election and the run-off election the reason for his acceptance nineteen improper campaign contributions . He was also accused of illegally using campaign funds to promote the 2005 bond referendum , but the State Ethics Commission " found no reasonable grounds " for the complaint .

Jones was also accused excessive spending , questionable real estate transactions , and was sued for racial discrimination (see Controversies section below) .

== 2008 United States Senate campaign ==

Jones ran for the US Senate in 2008 , but was defeated 60 % to 40 % in the 2008 run-off for Georgia 's Democratic US Senate primary .

On March 23 , 2007 Jones announced he was running for the United States Senate against incumbent Republican Saxby Chambliss . Jones was criticized by his chief rival Jim Martin over his more conservative politics and past support for George W. Bush . Jones ' campaign was also marred by two new controversies . Jones sent out a flier in which he appeared in a digitally altered picture next to Democratic presidential candidate Barack Obama with the words " Yes We Can . " However , Obama himself stated he not only never posed with Jones , he did not endorse Jones or any other candidate for the Democratic nomination for Senate . In response , Jones blamed his " liberal opponents backed by the liberal media " for trying to ruin his campaign . Jones also received criticism for the appearance of the tagline " Vote Vernon Jones for GA Senate " on tickets , produced using county funds , for the DeKalb County Blues and Jazz Festival . The company who printed the tickets , supporters of Jones ' campaign , took responsibility for the incident ; saying that they were unaware campaign finance laws made such an action illegal .

In the July 15 , 2008 Democratic primary election , Jones won a plurality of votes in the Democratic primary . However , Georgia law requires a majority ; if no majority is reached by a candidate , the two top vote-getters must face one another in a runoff . On August 5 , 2008 Jones lost the run-off election to Jim Martin by a margin of 20 points . Jones unexpectedly lost to Martin in his home base of DeKalb County . Jones had lost support within the black community before the runoff election , and only captured two-thirds of the black vote in the head to head match up against Martin . The black turnout in the run-off was also substantially lower than the initial primary election , further hurting Vernon Jones ' chances in the runoff .

== Unsuccessful races ==

In 2010 , Jones launched an unsuccessful campaign for the U.S. Congress , representing GA Fourth Congressional District . In 2014 , Jones ran unsuccessfully for Sheriff of DeKalb County , GA . He was defeated by incumbent Sheriff Jeff Mann , 76 % to 24 % .

= = Controversies = =

= = = Official spending and real estate = = =

Two grand juries found Jones \$ 250 @, @ 000 per year taxpayer funded security detail excessive , and recommended it be decreased , but found no violations of the law . Jones was accused of a questionable real estate transaction involving a house and a 55 @-@ acre tract of land near Arabia Mountain that he purchased for \$ 550 @, @ 000 in 2003 in anticipation of a then active quarry becoming part of county green space project that he initiated . In summer of 2007 , Jones sold the site and made a \$ 220 @, @ 000 profit . On January 20 , 2013 , a special purpose grand jury , enpaneled to investigate corruption in DeKalb County , found widespread " incompetence , patronage , fraud and cronyism " dating to the beginning of the administration of Vernon Jones . The report , which was not released until August 21 , 2013 , recommended further investigations of possible illegal acts by Jones , along with a number of other current and former senior DeKalb County officials .

= = = Accusations of racial discrimination = = =

On August 24 , 2004 , four senior current and former employees of the Parks Department , Becky Kelley (former Parks Department Director) , Michael Bryant (a Deputy Director of Revenue Management and Support) , John Drake (an Assistant Director) , and Herbert Lowe (former Deputy Director of Strategic Management and Development) , filed suit against DeKalb County , Vernon Jones (as CEO of the county) and three of Jones ' subordinates (Marilyn Boyd Drew , Richard Stogner , and Morris Williams) alleging either racial discrimination , or in the case of Lowe , retaliation for refusing to assist in racial discrimination . Kelly , Bryant , and Drake were white ; Lowe was African @-@ American .

Attorneys for the DeKalb County defendants moved for summary judgment on the grounds of qualified immunity as state officials . On November 10 , 2006 , District Court Judge William Duffey rejected their summary judgment petition , holding that the law does not allow " a public official defendant to engage in calculated racial discrimination costumed in a racially neutral garb of administrative actions so it can masquerade as a qualified immunity defense " . On November 21 , 2006 , Duffey ruled that the case could go forward to a jury trial . Jones and his fellow defendants then appealed the denial of their summary judgement motion . On July 31 , 2009 , the 11th Circuit Court of Appeals upheld the District Court judge 's rejection of the Defendants ' motion for summary judgment on the grounds of qualified immunity . Judge Gerald Bard Tjoflat , writing for the court , stated in the ruling that " DeKalb County , Georgia [had] embarked on a wholesale plan to replace its white county managers with African Americans " and that Vernon Jones had " devised the plan and monitored its execution " .

In March 2010 , the case was finally heard by a jury . During the trial plaintiffs ' attorneys called witnesses from across county government in an attempt to demonstrate a countywide policy of discrimination . Jones denied any discrimination against white employees . He testified that " I wanted the best and the brightest . That meant blacks , whites , Asians , Latinos , Republicans , Democrats , Independents , gay , straight , anybody who wanted to work for DeKalb County . I wanted everybody to have a seat at the table " . Other testimony revealed that during the first five years of Jones ' term in office , the number of white senior county managers had dropped from 61 to 57 , and the number of African @-@ American senior county managers had risen from 33 to 61 .

After seven days of testimony , on April 2 , 2010 the jury awarded damages to two of the four

plaintiffs , Michael Bryant (who had died before the trial) and John Drake . The jurors found that Jones , his former executive assistant , Richard Stogner , and a former parks director , Marilyn Boyd Drew were liable only for \$ 185 @, @ 000 in damages , much less than the \$ 2 million requested by plaintiffs . While DeKalb County was found liable for racial discrimination , the jury rejected those claims against Jones , but held that he had " created and maintained a hostile work environment " . Jones was ordered to personally pay \$ 27 @, @ 750 of the damages , but DeKalb County 's \$ 50 @, @ 000 liability insurance policy on its employees covered the part of the award personally assessed against Jones .

While , Jones and his attorneys initially hailed the verdict as a victory for the county because of the relatively low damages award , after the judge awarded the plaintiffs an additional \$ 1 @. @ 9 million in legal fees , DeKalb County ultimately agreed to pay the plaintiffs a total of \$ 1 @. @ 3 million for legal fees and damages in April 19 , 2011 post @- @ trial settlement .

= = = Involvement with Earl Paulk = = =

Jones was accused (in a lawsuit brought by Mona Brewer against Earl Paulk of Chapel Hill Harvester Church) of using money from a \$ 125 million green space bond sale to purchase a Decatur , GA church building from Paulk for \$ 2 @. @ 4 million , a sum claimed to be unjustifiably in excess of the land 's actual value . The County made no use of the property , and was the building was later leased to a start @- @ up cable network for a token sum of a dollar per year . During the ensuing court case , the plaintiff alleged that , as part of a questionable relationship , Paulk arranged for a sexual encounter between Jones and one of Paulk 's former mistresses . When deposed , Jones refused to answer questions relating to that incident , as well as a number of other questions involving his dealings with Paulk . That case was ultimately withdrawn by the plaintiff 's attorney , Louis Levenson , who felt that the judge in the case was biased against his client . The case was subsequently refiled and drew a different judge .