

Board of Elections hearings continue

By J. Andrew Curliss and Dan Kane, Staff Writers, Staff Writers

House Speaker Jim Black, a Democrat from Mecklenburg County, took the stand this afternoon as the State Board of Elections continued its hearings into possible campaign finance regulations.

The board spent the morning trying to determine who filled out the payee lines on dozens of incomplete checks from optometrists that went to lawmakers, including Black.

Elections officials heard from two key aides to Black -- Meredith Norris, his former political director, and Meredith Swindell, the speaker's executive assistant.

Norris and Swindell were asked to examine the handwriting on checks that went to the Black campaign.

On them, the handwriting on the payee line is different from the signatures and the writing that specifies the amount.



House Speaker Jim Black takes an oath before he testifies at the second day of the election board's inquiry into possible illegal campaign activity.

Staff photo by Takaaki Iwabu

Both Norris and Swindell testified that they did not recognize the handwriting.

Both also testified that they were not aware of an apparently common practice by optometrists of breaking their campaign contributions of, say, \$1,000 into individual checks of \$100 each.

The board on Wednesday heard from 12 optometrists who said they gave campaign checks to the N.C. State Optometric Society's political action committee that left blank the date they signed them and the line indicating the recipient.

More optometrists took the stand today and testified that checks they wrote appear to have been cashed -- instead of deposited into campaign accounts -- by former Rep. Michael Decker and Rep. Howard Hunter, a Hertford County Democrat.

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