

OPINION

Winston-Salem Greensboro High Point

THE CHRONICLE

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Black business group void should be filled

The Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce's president, Gayle Anderson, made the mistake of all mistakes - assuming that all minorities have the same problems, concerns and issues - when she and others created a minority arm of the chamber including all minorities.



Anderson

However, she did the right thing by acknowledging that the proposal may not have been the right thing for African-American businesses at this time. We agree. However, we cannot condemn Anderson for a mistake that had some merit.

The East Area Council had gotten a little stale and redundant. Attendance was down and not a lot of enthusiasm was present. That set of problems, however, required a different kind of fix. Some minority businesses actually cannot gain much from membership in the chamber. Others, though, have a great deal to gain by being associated with an organization that represents the best interests of all businesses. It then becomes the individual business's goal to get what it can from the chamber that specifically benefits that business.

A good example is getting to know majority business owners who might need your business or service. It is much easier to do business with people you know as opposed to someone you do not know. The key here is to maximize whatever the chamber has to offer but be willing to give something in return.

Also, there is nothing wrong with African-American businesses creating a chapter of the National Black Chamber of Commerce. In fact, we encourage minority businesses to do that. However, if you are going to be lukewarm about it, sooner or later you will find yourself in the same situation - being a part of something and not getting anything out because you have not put anything in.

Hey! Let's get together and do some business. Why don't we start by doing business with each other?

Correction

In The Chronicle awards tabloid, Marion Pittman-Couch should have been described as the first African-American female chairperson of the Arts Council board.



Don't get hung up on prepaid local phone service

From Attorney General Roy Cooper

Most of us view local telephone service as a necessity, not a luxury. So why are some consumers being suckered into paying extravagant prices for something that is actually affordable?

We all know how quickly bills can pile up. Imagine this scenario: you miss a couple of payments on your local phone bill and the phone company cuts off your service. That is when prepaid local phone service providers swoop in. These companies, such as

Comm South, EZ Tel, and Smoke Signal, charge about \$50 a month just to provide you with a dial tone. The same service from your local phone company would cost you about \$20 a month.

It is almost always better to settle up with your local phone company than to use prepaid local phone services. They are in the business of buying service from that same local phone company and reselling it at inflated prices to consumers who have fallen behind in their local phone service payments.

The consumer protection division of the Attorney General's Office asked the state Utilities Commission to change a rule in a way to better protect consumers, and since that rule change local

phone companies can no longer cut off your local service if you owe money for long distance charges. That means if you've lost your dial tone, you can get it back by paying off only your local bill (not any long distance charges you may owe) and a deposit.

So digging yourself out of debt may not be as difficult as you think. Local phone companies typically cut off your local phone service after only a month or two if you don't pay.

To get your local phone service back, you must pay off any unpaid local phone bills. You may also be asked to pay a deposit of as much as two months' service. This deposit is refundable and earns interest at 8 percent a year.

When you add it up, getting back your local service from your old phone company is probably a better buy than prepaid local phone service. Think twice before you drop \$50 a month for prepaid local phone service. Drop some change in a pay phone instead and call the consumer protection division of the Attorney General's Office at (919) 716-6000.

Attorney General Roy Cooper and his staff want consumers to know that they have choices when it comes to getting local phone service. We are here to be of service when you need us, but through consumer education efforts like these columns we hope to help consumers avoid problems from the start.

Liberal Libby eyes Senate

Armstrong Williams Guest Columnist

Elizabeth Dole, former presidential candidate and current candidate for the U.S. Senate seat from North Carolina, is a celebrity, not a politician.

The distinction - becoming ever less subtle since the inception of televised debate - is the difference between being intelligent and just being famous.

Libby Dole is the latter, largely because she embodied something that no other candidate in the 2000 presidential race could - womanhood. That is to say, she suggested a saccharine, well scripted alternative to a dense Republican field.

When the press demanded that she provide more than the mere suggestion of an alternative, she promptly surrendered.

For this rousing feat, Dole achieved name recognition. Now, wherever she goes, cameras click, suggesting significance of some sort. In a political system where complex issues are routinely dumbed down into television images and sound bytes, that sort of name recognition can be enough to carry the day.

This rousing point has not been lost on the Republican leadership, which is propping up Dole's campaign. A friend of mine in the Republican press office recently dubbed her "the Riordan of North Carolina." So far, the celebrity treatment has helped spot Dole to an early lead in the opinion polls.

As for her actual qualifications as a politician, one notices a certain penchant for flip-flopping. As a presidential candidate, she argued for the banning of assault weapons. As a senatorial candidate in North Carolina - a predominantly rural area that plainly likes its guns - Dole is toting a different tune. "We do not need new restrictions on those who already observe the thousands of gun laws on the books," she said recently. Dole also has flopped on protectionism issues, depending upon which administration she was working for. It is further



Dole addresses a crowd at the 1996 Republican Convention in San Diego.

telling that she has at various times been registered as a Democrat, independent and Republican, respectively.

I mention this in the spirit of an August 2001 statewide analysis by The Polling Co., which reported that the N.C. voting populace considered the most important quality in a politician - even more important than the candidate's position on the issues. According to the report, N.C. voters want a candidate who will stand by his or her principles unequivocally - a sentiment perfectly embodied by Sen. Jesse Helms, who dominated N.C. politics for the past decade. As the Polling Co. observed: "Character, in North Carolina, seems to be intertwined with some notion of principled political consistency as much as it is equated with political morality, sticking to their beliefs."

That does not bode well for Dole, who flops more often than a drunken acrobat.

The other major finding from the Polling Co. is that the N.C. voting populace is socially con-

servative. By contrast, Dole has spent much of her public life stealthily ducking the abortion issue, leading Time Magazine to famously dub her a "closet liberal."

Certainly, all of her Republican primary opponents are far more socially conservative than she. Conceivably, the same could even be said about one of the Democratic hopefuls - state Rep. Dan Blue.

Her opponents also boast established roots in the state. These roots are important because they help facilitate close, interlocking relationships with important community figures such as ministers, teachers, entrepreneurs and union officials. In such a manner, Dole's opponents - on the Republican and Democratic sides - have all established conduits to the issues that N.C. citizens care about most.

This is not New York, where Hillary Clinton recently ascended to the U.S. Senate on name recognition alone.

North Carolina is far more conservative and familial in ori-

entation. That's why it's worth noting that Dole hasn't taken a sustained sniff of N.C. air in 40 years - save some periodical visits to her 100-year-old mother, whose Salisbury residence Dole is now claiming as her own.

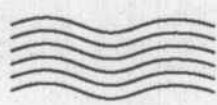
This lack of familiarity with the state was painfully obvious during a recent campaign stop in Robbinsville, where Dole effused that she was "glad that there will be an education bill that the president will sign soon." As the Salisbury Post reported a day before, Bush had already signed the bill.

To Scott Falmlen, executive director of the state Democratic Party, Dole's misstep proves two things: "One, she doesn't keep up with the issues important to North Carolinians. Second, she doesn't read her 'hometown' paper."

Intrepidly, the carpetbagger carries on, no doubt convinced that the citizens of North Carolina will vote her into office simply because she has spent some time in the public view.

Sadly they just might.

www.armstrongwilliams.com



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