

Democrats target 2018 midterms

BY CASH MICHAELS
FOR THE CHRONICLE

Two months before President-elect Donald J. Trump even takes the oath of office, activists and Democrats are already looking past their election 2016 defeats toward the 2018 midterms, hoping that they have learned enough lessons to gain some ground.

But with recent Republican victories in both the state House and Senate, as well as the U.S. Congress, any ground not gained now will be much, much harder to get in two years, thanks to redistricting, even though, theoretically, the party not in power in the White House usually does well during midterms.

In 2018, every state lawmaker and congressperson just elected or re-elected will be up for another two-year term. Depending on how either a Gov. Pat McCrory or Gov. Roy Cooper are doing here, or President Donald Trump is doing in Washington, will deter-

mine how successful the 2018 midterms will be.

To Rev. Dr. William Barber II, president of the N.C. NAACP, the fight for fair policies must continue seamlessly from this year.

"We have to," the civil rights leader said during a post-election day telephone conference, noting that there are key battles in Congress activist groups are seeking to win.

"We have to fight for the Voting Rights Act to be restored. We have to remember that in our history, when we first got the VRA, we didn't have the people elected in Congress with a plan to do it. We created a context where they had to do it, through marching, through civil disobedience and speaking out."

Barber continued, "We're going to continue to organize, to push out. We have seen what 23-24 percent of the electorate can do. We're going to try to get that to 30 percent, plus Latinos."

Eric Ellison, Forsyth County Democratic Party chairman, certainly

laments the loss of Hillary Clinton for the White House, and the party's failure to crack the Republicans' super majorities in the state House and Senate two weeks ago. But he knows how important the 2018 midterms are, and the 2020 general elections after that, and his people



are getting started now.

"There is no time to take a break," Ellison told *The Chronicle*. "Our office has been open since the election, and folks are coming in left and right, calling left and right, sending emails, wanting to get back to work. On Dec. 1st, we're going to start getting ready for the 2018 midterm elections. And as Democrats learned in 1994, if this president does not produce, and does not come out with the charge of his Republican support-

ers, people are going to have something to say about it at the polls."

"In Forsyth County, and I speak for Forsyth County Democrats, we're going to start a consensus building of our targeted precincts, we want to hear what are their concerns; we're going to expand our base, and bring in those folks who feel disenfranchised," Ellison added.

If there is one goal Democrats have as a top priority, it is to regain majorities in the N.C. and U.S. Houses by 2020, the next presidential year, in order to control redistricting. The party in power at the start of each decade redraws the voting maps in their respective states and congressional districts, thus making it tougher for the opposing party to unseat the majority.

Since Republicans took over the state House in 2010 and redrew North Carolina's voting districts to essentially protect their legislative majority in 2011, the GOP has been able to confidently push its conservative agenda,

reversing, many Democratic critics say, whatever social progress had been made by the Democratic majority in previous years.

Thanks to a successful federal lawsuit against North Carolina's 2011 redistricting plan alleging racial discrimination, the N.C. General Assembly will be required to redraw its map for the remainder of the decade.

That lends some hope for the 2018 midterms in North Carolina, and Chenita Barber Johnson, a former Forsyth county school board candidate, told *The Chronicle* that Democrats don't have time to wait.

"Besides preparing qualified candidates, the Democratic Party must create diversity at the top of the Party nationally, statewide and locally. They must shore up the African American voters, get feet on the street through grassroots efforts and knock on those doors stay relevant and not wait until Fall 2017."

But it really all boils

down to one thing, says Forsyth County Democratic Sen. Paul Lowe, and that's Democrats making it their business to come out in 2018, and vote.

Unlike presidential elections, African-American and other communities of color don't traditionally turn out in large numbers for midterm elections, and the challenge is even seen as being greater now.

"Our people have to vote," Lowe told *The Chronicle* Monday. "Our people have to turn out and vote during the midterm elections if they want to see things different. There's no way to get away from that."

"Poor people, people of color, women have the most to gain if they participate in the process, and the most to lose if they don't," Lowe adds. "So we can't allow midterm elections to get by, and we don't participate, because we're voting on those things that will affect us, in most cases."

High Court

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ward with a plan to add two political appointees to the composition of the Supreme Court in response to the election of Justice[-elect] Michael Morgan."

Morgan handily defeated incumbent Republican Justice Robert Edmunds on election night, thus giving the court a 4-3 Democratic majority when it reconvenes for another term. But it wasn't long before press reports circulated that Republican lawmakers would use McCrory's special session on Hurricane Matthew disaster relief planned for December to also add two more appointees to the state Supreme Court, thus changing it to 5-4 Republican, even though the court is supposed to be non-partisan.

"The concern is, in light of the fact that the voters have stated by their votes Tuesday that they reject the politicalization of our North Carolina Supreme Court,

[they] do not want the justices to have any political leanings, and the voters want to make sure that our highest court is perceived as being fair and impartial in every decision," Morgan said.

N.C. NAACP Pres. Rev. William Barber II, promising a legal fight, echoed Justice-elect Morgan's concern, saying that adding the two court appointees would be "wrong because it is a form of partisan scheming designed to go around the people, and a vote of the people."

With the McCrory-Cooper gubernatorial race still in unofficial limbo at press time Monday, there is mounting concern that the ultimate winner will be chosen by the Republican-led N.C. General Assembly. No one has denied that as a possibility, even though GOP leaders have denied contemplating expanding the state Supreme Court to address the Morgan victory.

"We have never really talked about it at all," Republican Rep. David Lewis of Harnett County, chairman of the House Rules Committee, told reporters last

week. Senate President Pro tem Phil Berger (R-Rockingham) said there had been "no [Republican Senate] caucus discussions" about the matter.

But Joyner, based on previous actions by Republican lawmakers who have held surprise votes on issues without public hearings or notice in the recent past, isn't buying their denials.

"These additions or the ill-advised effort to pack the court with Republicans will be seen for what it is: a political scheme to over-rule the vote of the voters which elected, by a large margin, Justice Morgan as the pivotal swing vote on a politically evenly divided court," the N.C. NAACP Legal Redress Committee chairman said.

"Our courts should always enjoy the highest level of support from citizens because it is fair, unbiased, impartial and worthy of respect. Adding two political appointees to the court, as it is presently constituted, would totally destroy the remaining faith that African-Americans and other racial minorities might have in the courts of this State."



Photo by Todd Luck
The county may soon invest \$1.5 million to restore this historic Boy's School at Old Salem, which is located on the corner of Main and Academy Street next to Salem College.

County may give \$1.5 million to rehab Old Salem school

BY TODD LUCK
THE CHRONICLE

County Commissioners are considering giving \$1.5 million to rehab the historic Boy's School at Old Salem Museums and Gardens.

County Commissioners were expected to review the proposal for the Boy's School at Old Salem Museums and Gardens this week, but commissioners aren't expected to vote until Monday, Nov. 28.

Built in 1794, the Boy's School is the oldest Moravian school building still standing and one of the oldest structures built for pre-collegiate education in the country. As early as 1897, it was converted into a museum, largely to house Wachovia Historic Society objects. In 1954, it again acted as a museum when it became the first building in Old Salem to open. By 2010, the building was in such bad shape, that Old Salem closed it.

The renovations would be the first time it's ever been restored as a school house. The restoration will cost \$2.45 million dollars in total.

"It arguably is the

largest and most transformative education restoration project we've ever undertaken," Old Salem President and CEO Ragan Folan told County Commissioners in a briefing on Thursday, Nov. 10.

The county would contribute \$1.5 million. The



Folan

rest has been raised during the Old Salem capital campaign. Folan and the commissioners said county money would be going to renovate the building, not to a capital campaign.

The renovations will turn it into a two-floor attraction at Old Salem, where visitors and school groups will get a tour of the building and be able to sit in school desks and partici-

pate in interactive historic activities. There will be hidden technology in the school for heating and air and that'll allow it to be used for teacher training workshops. It will also have the ability for distance learning for student groups that might be too far to visit.

The out buildings behind the school house will also be rebuilt with money raised by the residents who live in Old Salem. It will feature a modern restroom for visitors to use.

Comments from county commissioners were positive on the project.

"I think it's a good project, not only for tourism but for education as well," said County Commissioner Walter Marshall.

The renovation is a potential pay-go project paid for with money left over from last year's budget that's above the county's 14 percent fund balance, which it keeps as emergency funds and to help during times of low revenue collection.

Chronicle reporter Tevin Stinson contributed to this story.

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