FORUM

Support small business day after Black Friday and year-round

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Gregg Thompson
Guest Columnist

The National Federation of Independent Business is America's leading small business advocate. We are proud to represent 350,000 small, independent business owners nationwide, including over 7,000 in North Carolina. We are also very proud to cosponsor the 2016 Small Business Saturday promotion with American Express.

According to the U.S. Small Business Administration, small businesses account for most of the jobs in this country. They have provided 66 percent of all net new jobs since the 1970s. They represent 99.7 percent of all U.S. employers.

Most Americans don't know an owner of a big department store, but there's a good chance that many people know small-business owners. They're our friends and neighbors. They're among the most generous supporters of civic groups, local charities, youth sports, schools, and virtually every other form of community activity.

Nov. 26, the Saturday after Thanksgiving, is Small Business Saturday. It's intended to encourage Americans to support small business not just one day a year, but whenever they go shopping.

Black Friday, the traditional start of the holiday shopping season, is when families wake early, sit in traffic, compete with other drivers for mall parking spots, jostle with crowds, and stand in line to buy things they could find much closer to home.

Small Business Saturday offers a much different experience. Shoppers who visit locally owned businesses will find almost everything they could get at the mall and plenty of items by local artisans, designers, bakers, chocolatiers, brewers, and tinkerers that can be found only on Main Street.

In terms of service, Americans who "shop small" likely will be dealing directly with owners who know that happy customers usually come back.

The campaign to "shop small" on the Saturday after Thanksgiving started in 2010. It has grown every year. Last year, more than 95 million Americans visited local businesses on Small Business Saturday, and they spent more than $16 billion.

We hope that even more Americans participate this year. Small Business Saturday is a great way to start the holidays, support local communities, and boost the national economy.

Gregg Thompson is North Carolina state director of the National Federation of Independent Business. He lives in Raleigh.

Four strategic recommendations for dealing with a Trump presidency

Photo provided by NC Policy Watch

David Zonderman
Guest Columnist

Four strategic recommendations for dealing with a Trump presidency.

We have been somewhere near here before – Reagan in the 1980s; Bush the Second in the 2000s.

Donald Trump is certainly more crude and cruel than these past presidents, but he is also far less ideological. He has no apparent core values, so who knows how much he actually believes all the hateful rhetoric, crazy conspiracy theories, and unrealistic policy proposals he spewed out in his toxic campaign.

His instability is certainly cause for grave concern for all of us, especially anyone in vulnerable communities; but that very inconsistency also means that he changes his mind and his message with the winds, and always professes a willingness to make a deal.

So, as someone who has studied and taught American History for more than three decades, and spent my entire "voting life" – all 40 years – as a proud independent, I offer four modest proposals for progressives in these coming years of living dangerously under Donald Trump.

*One: National political reporter Salena Zito of The Atlantic said it very well: We should "take Trump seriously, not literally." Yes, we need to call him out when he makes "un-presidential" statements or, even worse, takes actions that demean the office and undermine our basic standards of civil liberties and democratic governance. But we do not need to hyperventilate over every damn stupid and offensive tweet, as ugly as they may be. Save your outrage for the important issues, we will have many big fights on policies that could reshape the nation for a generation or more.

*Two: Speaking of policymaking and legislation, we should take a lesson from the conservative playbook but try to be even smarter and more strategic. Progressives need to resist as vigorously as possible bad legislation that strips medical insurance from millions of Americans, or denies the reality of climate change. But we also need to be open to genuine compromises if this guy really wants to make deals, rather than mindlessly opposing every proposal with the name Trump on it. He has said he wants to spend money on infrastructure, protect Social Security, and question foreign interventions. Who knows if he means any of these things, or if he will cave to political pressure in his own party? But we lose nothing by calling on him to put real proposals on the table.

*Three: Progressives need to push for new political leadership in this nation. We need people with passion and the ability to show all the disaffected in our nation – regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation – that the way forward is to unify first around the demand for clean politics and effective government. The Progressive Party more than a century ago understood that you cannot reform society until you reform politics and government itself, which can then pass the necessary legislation to move the nation forward.

We also need to talk loudly and boldly about economic policies – yes, it is still the economy stupid – that have a track record of actually fighting poverty: higher minimum wages, paid family leave and sick days, and the right to form unions and collectively bargain. Certainly these ideas are not new, but they need to be put front and center and spread all over the nation to every struggling community and household.

*Four: The legendary labor activist Joe Hill said it best a century ago when he faced a firing squad in Utah after his conviction on a trumped up (yes, pun intended) charge of murder: "Don't waste any time mourning. Organize!" Build on the strong networks – social and otherwise – that already exist among those committed to social justice in its myriad forms.

Keep pressure on Democrats, especially in the U.S. Senate, to hold their ranks and put forward genuine enlightened alternatives to reactionary policy proposals; we don't need any more "triangulation" to the mushy middle. Keep asking the Trump administration: Have you delivered on any of your grand campaign promises? The Republicans now own this President and Congress; hold them accountable for their actions and make them pay for their mistakes

History teaches us that political reactions often occur when movements for social and economic justice become stronger and frighten those who consider themselves to be privileged. We are still strong now and we can build on our strengths, even in the tough times ahead, through both strategic resistance and a willingness to keep envisioning and articulating a better world for everyone.

David Zonderman teaches American labor history at North Carolina State University. His opinions are his own.

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How to scrap the Electoral College

John La Forge
Guest Columnist

Sixteen years ago, as the 2000 presidential election recount in Florida transfixed the nation, the newly elected Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton spoke directly to the likelihood that Al Gore would win the popular vote and still lose the election:

"I believe strongly that in a democracy, we should respect the will of the people," Mrs. Clinton said, "and to me that means it's time to do away with the Electoral College and move to the popular election of our president," the New York Times reported.

If Mrs. Clinton had worked as hard over the last 16 years to abolish the EC as she worked to win the Democratic nomination, she would be moving back into the White House in January.

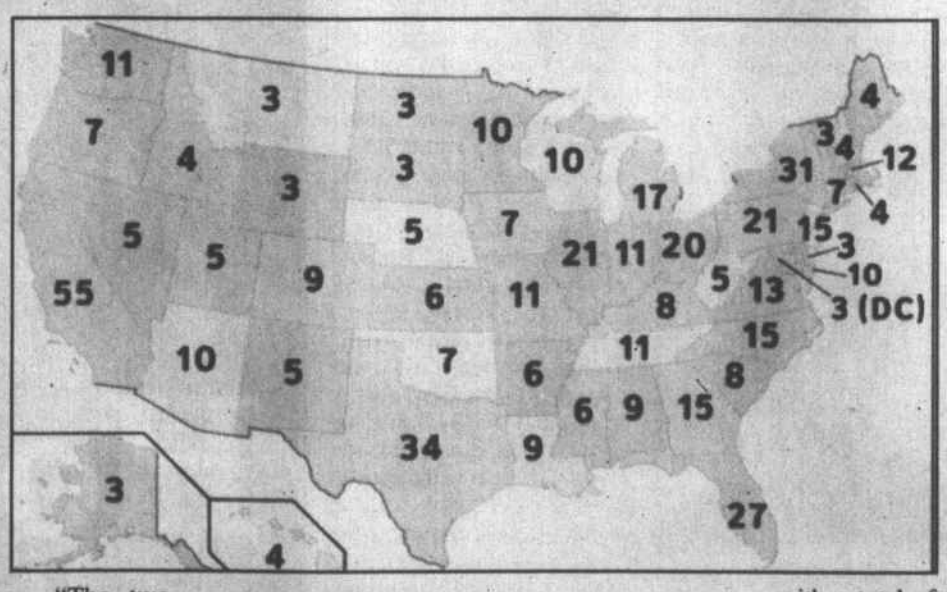
Five times in U.S. history and twice this century the popular vote winner has "lost" the presidential election because of the slavery-tainted Electoral College. (Counting enslaved people as almost-persons increased the official populations of slavery states – and in-turn boosted their Electoral College clout.)

Secretary Clinton, by winning more votes than Donald Trump – between 1 and 1.5 million more, Politifact says 800,000 more – would in any other country in the world be the President-elect. But because of the Electoral College's absurd winner-take-all rules, Trump snaps up every electoral vote in Pennsylvania, Michigan and Wisconsin (giving him his EC margin of victory), even though he won by a mere 1 percentage point in all three states.

Ralph Nader called again Nov. 10 for elimination of the Electoral College.

"Hillary Clinton won the election," Nader said. "We've gotta get rid of the Electoral College," he said, because it "makes the U.S. a mockery of the world" – the same way America's handgun violence, climate change denial, death penalty and astronomical healthcare costs do.

"Nowhere else on Earth can someone win the popular vote and lose the election," he said.



"The two major parties don't own all the votes" Nader said, referring to the fact that "electors" in the "college" are nothing but officials from the two major parties, elected office holders, or funders with vested interests who always vote blindly for their party's nominee based only on their single state's final tally – regardless of the will of the nationwide majority.

"Hillary Clinton won the election. We've gotta get rid of the Electoral College."

–Ralph Nader

The National Popular Vote bill

One answer to this anti-democratic election rigging is the National Popular Vote bill. The law would guarantee the presidency to the candidate who receives the most popular votes nationwide. The bill has already been passed into law in 11 states; states that control a total of 165 electoral votes. The law will take effect nationally when it is enacted by states with a total of 105 more electoral votes. Most recently, the bill was passed 40-to-16 in the Republican-controlled Arizona House; 28-to-18 in the Republican-controlled Oklahoma Senate; 57-to-4 in the Republican-controlled New York Senate; and 37-to-21 in the Democratic-controlled Oregon House.

The Electoral College is based on state law, so when enough additional states pass the National Popular Vote bill – enough to add up to the 270 electoral votes needed to win the White House – then the "electors" would be legally bound to vote for the popular vote winner and never again steal an election from the top vote getter.

Even Trump himself has criticized the Electoral College. Just before the 2012 election, in a Twitter post that looks astonishingly factual today, he called the EC "a disaster for a democracy." For months this year he railed against the "rigged election." But like all Democrats and all Republicans before him, rigged elections are only a problem when they lose.

For more details about how to abolish the Electoral College, check out nationalpopularvote.com. (On May 14, 2007, the North Carolina Senate passed the National Popular Vote bill (SB 954), nationalpopularvote.com says.)

John LaForge, syndicated by PeaceVoice, is co-director of Nukewatch, a peace and environmental justice group in Wisconsin, and is co-editor with Arianne Peterson of "Nuclear Heartland, Revised: A Guide to the 450 Land-Based Missiles of the United States."