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The Carolina Times

THE TRUTH UNBRIDLED

VOLUME 93 - NUMBER 13 DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA - SATURDAY, APRIL 5, 2014 TELEPHONE (919) 682-2913 PRICE: 30

GOP has a built-in advantage in fight for US House

By Stephen Ohlemacher
WASHINGTON (AP) - Even if Democrats recruit great candidates, raise gobs of money and run smart campaigns, they face an uphill fight to retake control of the House in this year's congressional elections, regardless of the political climate in November.

The reason? Republican strategists spent years developing a plan to take advantage of the 2010 census, first by winning key state legislatures and then redrawing House districts to tilt the playing field in their favor.

In states like Ohio, Michigan and North Carolina, Republicans were able to shape congressional maps to pack as many Democratic voters as possible into the fewest House districts. The process, called gerrymandering, left fertile ground elsewhere in each state to spread Republican voters among more districts, increasing the GOP's chances of winning more seats.

Geography helped, too, in some states. Democratic voters are more likely to live in densely populated urban areas, making it easier to pack them into fewer districts.

The first payoff came in 2012, when Republicans kept control of the House despite Democratic support that swept President Barack Obama to a second term. The next payoff is likely to come this fall.

Gerrymandering has a long history in the United States, pursued enthusiastically by both Democrats and Republicans. But the GOP's success at it this decade has been historic: In 2012, Republicans achieved a 53-seat majority in the House, even though GOP candidates as a group got 1.4 million fewer votes than their Democratic opponents.

It was only the second time since World War II that the party receiving the most votes failed to win a majority of House seats, according to statistics compiled by the House Clerk. Democrats gained eight seats but were still a minority.

"The fact that Republicans controlled redistricting (after 2010) meant that they were able to build up a wall, stopping a lot of the tide from running out," said Justin Levitt, a law professor and redistricting expert at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles. "They were able to shore up a lot of the districts that had been won by, in many cases, tea party freshmen or other Republican freshmen."

The Republicans' advantage will fade as the decade wears on and the population changes. In the meantime, Democrats control the White House and the Senate, while Republicans control the House, giving the GOP powerful leverage to block Obama's second-term agenda.

How did Republicans gain their advantage? It all started with the party's sweeping victories in 2010 and a plan called REDMAP.

The 2010 election was a disaster for Democrats. Republicans picked up 63 seats to win control of the House. They also gained seats in the Senate, though Democrats kept a majority.

Perhaps more important, Republicans won control of state legislatures in crucial states, giving the party the edge that is still paying dividends.

Every 10 years following the national census, states redraw the boundaries of House districts to account for population

changes. Some states gain seats and others lose, so the overall total remains 435. In most states, the legislature and the governor draw up the new districts, which is why political parties pay special attention to elections at the start of each decade.

"I think Democrats made a terrible mistake. They did not put nearly enough attention or resources into legislative races at the state level," said Matt Bennett, a former aide to President Bill Clinton. "A bunch of these legislatures slipped by very narrow margins, and some of them flipped for the first time since Reconstruction in the South."

For Republicans, it was a combination of luck and planning. The political winds were in their favor, but they also had been plotting for years to take full advantage of redistricting.

REDMAP, which stands for Redistricting Majority Project, called for targeting races in states that were expected to gain or lose congressional seats. GOP strategists reasoned that redistricting could have a greater impact in these states because there would have to be more changes to district boundaries, said Chris Jankowski, former president of the Republican State Leadership Committee.



President Barack Obama bids farewell to Pope Francis following an audience at the Vatican, March 27. (Official White House Photo by Pete Souza)

James Sansom Named Interim M&F Bank President, Saunders Steps Down

Kim Saunders to remain as President and CEO of the parent company

M&F Bancorp, Inc., announced that Kim D. Saunders has resigned as the president and CEO of M&F Bank effective as of the close of business on March 18. Saunders will continue to serve as President and CEO of our parent company M&F Bancorp, Inc. for the immediate future. She will provide leadership and guidance toward helping the Board achieve key long-term strategic goals for the Company, which includes developing its capital-raising potential, sustaining its community, regulatory and governmental relationships and exploring expansion of its CDFI capabilities. She also will assist in ensuring a smooth transition process for her ultimate successor. As designated in the Bank's Succession Plan, Mr. James E. Sansom will serve as Interim President until a search committee can identify a new Chief Executive.

"We appreciate and thank Kim for her leadership through some of the most difficult and complicated situations that this institution has faced," said Board Chair James A. Stewart. "She's been instrumental in sustaining our profitability through the recent recessionary period, and guiding us through our first acquisition and non-organic capital infusion in the last several decades. Although she will be stepping down from control of day-to-day operations, Ms. Saunders will continue to support us in very important ways during this transition. We believe that the Bank is poised to step onto a much bigger platform, and to operate more aggressively and competitively than before."

"Serving as M&F Bank's President and CEO has been extremely rewarding for me. I look forward to focusing my efforts on key initiatives that will position the Company for its future," said Saunders.

Speaking on behalf of the Board and management team, Stewart expressed confidence that the Bank will meet its current objectives and that current projects will be completed according to plan. "This institution has operated in a stable and profitable manner for more than 106 years, surviving and thriving regardless of the circumstances. Our shareholders and customers know we will carefully manage this transition and continue to move forward, as we have always done."

GOP districts isolated from demographic changes

By Stephen Ohlemacher

WASHINGTON (AP) - Some demographers call it the browning of America. Fueled by immigration and higher birth rates among Hispanics and blacks, the U.S. population is becoming less white.

These changes, however, have largely bypassed congressional districts represented by Republicans, adding to divisions between the GOP and Democrats on issues like immigration.

National GOP leaders have been urging Republicans in Congress to reach out to Hispanic voters on immigration, well aware that Hispanics are the nation's fastest-growing group.

Those calls have fallen flat among many House Republicans, who have been unwilling to advance legislation that would provide a pathway to citizenship for an estimated 11 million immigrants who are in the U.S. illegally.

Meanwhile, President Barack Obama and Democrats in Congress have made immigration overhaul a priority.

Demography helps explain the divide. Following the 2010 Census, Republican legislators in key states redrew congressional districts in ways that favored their candidates.



Dr. William Brown Has A New Distinguished Professorship in Economics At FSU in His Honor

By AP and Wire Reports
Fayetteville State University has named a new Distinguished Professorship in Economics for retired Fayetteville educator William T. Brown.

Brown has served on the FSU Board of Trustees and the University of North Carolina Board of Governors.

Brown, 85, is currently trustee emeritus at FSU. W.T. Brown Elementary in Spring Lake is named for him.

In a press release, FSU Chancellor James A. Anderson said Brown "is an ideal candidate for the honor because of his dedication to the university, the community and the state of North Carolina."

"Dr. Brown is one of the most revered individuals in education on the local and state levels," Anderson said.

Of the honor Brown said "It's wonderful," he said. "I feel blessed."

The professorship was made possible by a gift of \$500,000, according to FSU. Half of the gift came from the C.D. Spangler Foundation Inc. and half from a matching state grant.

FSU said the purpose of the endowed chair is to attract a distinguished professor who is a renowned scholar and who will play a critical role in developing an economics program that is academically sound and nationally visible.

Assad Tavakoli, dean of FSU's School of Business and Economics, said the school is being reorganized to provide an increased emphasis and focus on entrepreneurship, even as it continues to offer traditional business degrees and training. He said the school hopes one day to offer a doctorate program in entrepreneurship.

He said the professor who's recruited to the new Brown chair will help the school in these areas, along with two professors now in endowed chairs at the school. Tavakoli said he expects to start recruiting for the job in the fall.

Brown began his career teaching chemistry and physics and later served in administrative positions in the public schools. He said economics is a good fit, given the number of budgets he worked on as a school administrator and as a member of various boards.

"I've done some of all of it," he said. Brown, a native of Durham, earned his bachelor's degree from North Carolina Central University and a master's degree from Columbia University. He also holds honorary doctorate degrees from FSU and Shaw University.

He taught in Summerville, S.C., before moving to E.E. Smith High School in Fayetteville, where he later became an assistant principal. He was principal at Ferguson-Easley Elementary School, Washington Drive Junior High School, and E.E. Smith. He became an assistant superintendent, then an associate superintendent for the Fayetteville City Schools. When the city's school system merged with the Cumberland County school system in 1985, he again served as associate superintendent until his retirement in 1992.

In 1993, the Cumberland County Board of Education named its first year-round school in his honor.

Brown also served as assistant to the chancellor for outreach at FSU. Meanwhile, besides the FSU trustee board and UNC Board of Governors, Brown served on numerous other local boards over the years. In the 1970s, he was chairman of the Cape Fear Valley Medical Center board of trustees.

Brown's family has a history of education accomplishment. His brother, Dr. Walter M. Brown, Durham, whose Ph.D. in education from North Carolina College in 1955 marked the first time in the United States a Ph.D. was conferred by a Historically Black College or University.