

FORUM

A pep talk for progressives



Rob Schofield

Guest Columnist

fight for a better, healthier and more just nation and world? What truths and motivating thoughts can we hold onto? What in the hell do we do tomorrow and in the weeks and months ahead?

Here are a few thoughts on each of those questions — especially for folks in North Carolina:

How to carry on and stay engaged

This ought to be the easiest of the challenges we currently face. Sure, the situation at the national level right now is dreadful in many ways. Our new president-elect is pledged to enact a raft of regressive and destructive policies that have the potential to bring misery to millions, endanger our personal freedoms and collective security and cause enormous harm to the planet.

That said, such was also the case with numerous past presidents; Nixon, Reagan and the second Bush come to mind. Sure, Trump is less polished and more personally abrasive and offensive in many ways than those men. And Trump has no doubt brought along a louder and more provocative base of supporters in some ways. There's no doubt that it's profoundly discouraging.

But what are you going to do? Quit?

That's not what people did in 1969, 1981 or 2001. Instead, they got back to work and did their utmost each and every day to inform the debate, shape public opinion, influence the new leader, blunt the worst of his efforts and plant seeds for the future. Sometimes it worked and sometimes it didn't, but there can be absolutely no doubt it was always worth the effort and almost always paid dividends at some point.

As things stand, it will



only take three Republican Senators to stop a bill from receiving the 50 votes necessary to pass a new law in the new Congress (assuming Vice President-elect Pence as a tie-breaker). Trump has more enemies than that in the GOP caucus and no experience at all in crafting actual legislation. Surely there is a path forward under which he can be forced in many circumstances, to compromise and, as he might put it, "cut deals."

In such an environment, progressives can make a lot of hay. As conservatives have rediscovered during the Obama years, it's often a heck of a lot easier to stop things than pass them. Surely, progressives can return the favor now.

Hopeful thoughts to keep in mind

There are actually several.

*The North Carolina situation — Here in North Carolina, of course, it's all but certain that Democrats have, despite the Trump wave, captured two of the three main branches of government that they did not previously control — the Governor's office and a majority on the state Supreme Court. With Roy Cooper in the Governor's Mansion and a fairer and less ideological majority running the court, the

power — especially when and if the president in question gets off to a slow start. Progressives need to be planning now to seize the initiative in 2018 so that they can push back aggressively against conservative gerrymandering in anticipation of the 2020 election that will decide who draws the political maps after the next Census.

*Trump's conciliatory acceptance speech — Granted, the standards are pretty low when it comes to assessing Donald Trump speeches, but on Wednesday morning, at least for one day, the rancor and bullying of the campaign were missing as Trump was, for him, almost gracious. Perhaps now that he has won, he has at least some intention to ratchet down the bombast and vitriol.

What's next?

The obvious answer here is twofold. First, of course, comes the organizing and advocacy alluded to above. Progressives have many tools and millions of motivated citizens standing ready to push back against regressive proposals and, at a minimum, demand conversation and compromise in policymaking — "deal making," if you will.

As D.D. Guttenplan wrote in *The Nation*, yesterday [Nov. 9]:

"The stakes are also too high not to be strategic. Not all of Trump's impulses were wrong; not all of his support comes from racial or sexual fear or resentment. A trade policy that puts not just American manufacturing but American workers first would be a worthy goal for any president. And though his mixed signals on foreign policy defy easy interpretation, the rejection of American imperialism that earned Trump the disdain of the foreign-policy estab-

lishment might well deserve critical support from progressives — and anyone else fearful of our current plunge into a new Cold War."

And last, but far from least, is the matter of recommitting ourselves to fighting and winning the battle of ideas. Progressives will not prevail in the great national debate in which they find themselves by devoting their time and treasure to focus groups, poll-tested messaging and sanitized, Wall Street-approved candidates. Trump should have taught us this.

The key to real and lasting policy victories lies in redoubling our commitment to engaging and organizing real people of all races and backgrounds and empowering them with coherent ideas and policies driven by solid research and a deep-seated commitment to genuine systemic change in the nation's increasingly stratified economy.

Simply put, progressives must build the lasting, multi-racial coalition that President Obama started, but, unfortunately, couldn't sustain. And the key there involves real, different and even radical ideas — not just another new scheme to merely garner 50.1 percent of the electoral vote. Let's get back to work.

Rob Schofield, director of research at N.C. Policy Watch, has three decades of experience as a lawyer, lobbyist, writer, commentator and trainer. Contact him at rob@ncpolicywatch.com or 919-861-2065. Follow him @Rob_Schofield

URL to article: <http://www.ncpolicywatch.com/2016/11/10/pep-talk-progressives/>
Copyright © 2016 NC Policy Watch. All rights reserved.

HB 2 anger motivates split-ticket voters in governor's race



Joe Killian

Guest Columnist

North Carolina was a legitimate swing state this year, having gone narrowly to President Barack

Obama in 2008 and narrowly to his Republican challenger Mitt Romney in 2012.

The state leaned conservative this year, part of a series of swing state Republican flips that put presidential candidate Donald Trump over the top in the electoral college.

But that doesn't tell the whole story. "The split-ticket voter is apparently live and well here in North Carolina," said Dr. Michael Bitzer, a professor of political science and history at Catawba College.

In an interview with Policy Watch's Chris Fitzsimon, Bitzer pointed to a series of Democratic wins in the state — most prominently Attorney General Roy Cooper, who finished election night about 5,000 votes ahead of Gov. Pat McCrory in the gubernatorial race.

Democrat Josh Stein also beat out Republican Buck Newton for Attorney General. Newton, a central proponent of the controversial House Bill 2, was one of a number of Republicans who struggled to overcome opposition to the law.

Democratic Supreme Court candidate Mike Morgan also unseated Bob

Edmunds, the Republican incumbent, by almost 10 points — one of election night's big surprises. Though that race is officially non-partisan, the political left and right saw it as an important political battleground.

But with national attention on McCrory and his status as America's most vulnerable governor, the gubernatorial race was one of the most watched in the nation.

Though many assumed a Trump win would carry McCrory, the governor took 62,902 fewer votes than his party's presidential candidate statewide. That would suggest a number of Trump voters chose Cooper over McCrory — which is borne out in the county breakdowns as well. Cooper took all of the counties Clinton did but also won Granville, Jackson, Nash and New Hanover counties — all ground Trump took in the presidential contest.

But large, urban counties appear to have given Cooper the real edge, Bitzer said.

"I think certainly you have to look here in Mecklenburg County and Charlotte to see he lost a significant amount of votes to Roy Cooper," Bitzer said.

"The combination of the I-77 toll roads in the northern part of the county, a very Republican part of the county, combined with HB 2 in the heart of deep blue Charlotte were the motivating factors to move Mecklenburg County so much against Pat McCrory," Bitzer said.

McCrory has yet to concede — waiting



Gov. Pat McCrory appeared with Donald Trump in the final days of the campaign.

for provisional and absentee ballots to be counted and suggesting he may request a recount. By the end of Wednesday, about 44,400 provisional ballots had been reported in 69 counties, according to the state board of elections. But county election officials across the state say that with a margin of 5,000 votes, those ballots are unlikely to make much of a difference.

"If Pat McCrory needs 5,000 ... that's a lot of votes to find in a statewide race," said Kristin Mavromatis, Public Information Manager for Mecklenburg County Board of Elections. "People think 'Oh, five thousand votes isn't that much statewide.' But his opponent is likely going to get the same percentage of the vote he got previously — so, we're going to have to talk about a lot of votes."

Mavromatis, who has been in elections since the early '90s, said in her experience a change that big due to provisional or

absentee ballots would be so extraordinary as to be suspicious.

"That doesn't mean it can't happen," she said. "We've all been surprised by results before. But statistically speaking, if the dynamic changes that much, somebody did something wrong. If it changes that much, one of my peers won't have a job because something was wrong."

Joe Killian, investigative reporter, joined N.C. Policy Watch in August of 2016. His work takes a closer look at government, politics and policy in North Carolina and their impact on the lives of everyday people. Before joining Policy Watch, Joe spent a decade at the News & Record in Greensboro, reporting on everything from cops and courts to higher education.