

THE CHRONICLE

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New bill shackles black voters into 2 wards

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

If N.C. House Representatives Donny Lambeth and Debra Conrad have their way, some drastic changes could be on the horizon for the Winston-Salem City Council and the citizens of the Twin City.

Last week Lambeth and Conrad filed a bill that would move three of the eight council seats to at-large districts, give the mayor the right to vote in city council matters, and change the way the council fills vacancies.

In a press release issued on Friday, March 29, the state lawmakers say House Bill 519 will "bring city elections more in line with other municipalities across the state."

Currently the Winston-Salem City Council operates with eight council members who are elected by ward and only the mayor is elected at large. In the larger cities across the state, including Charlotte, Raleigh, Greensboro and Durham, the mayor and at least two council members are elected at large.

The press release from Lambeth's office reads, "It is fairly typical in the larger North Carolina municipalities for City Council elections to be a combination of at-large seats and district seats e.g., Charlotte, Cary, Durham, Greenville, Greensboro, High Point, Raleigh and Wilmington."

"... HB 519 is the first major reform in several years of the city elections process and brings the City of Winston-Salem's Council elections in-line with other large municipalities."

If Bill 519 is passed, the eight wards that we all know (North, South, East, West, Northwest, Northeast, Southwest and Southeast) will become wards numbered one through five. Citizens will vote for a representative in their ward and three at-large candidates, as well as the mayor.

While it may seem to give the voters more power on who's making the decisions around the city, a map of the proposed wards released last week raised serious questions from residents and members of the city council about the motive behind HB 519.

The map of the redrawn wards shows only Council members Jeff MacIntosh (Ward 1), John Larson (Ward 4) and James Taylor (Ward 3) in wards by themselves. Council members Robert Clark and Dan Besse are both drawn in Ward 5.

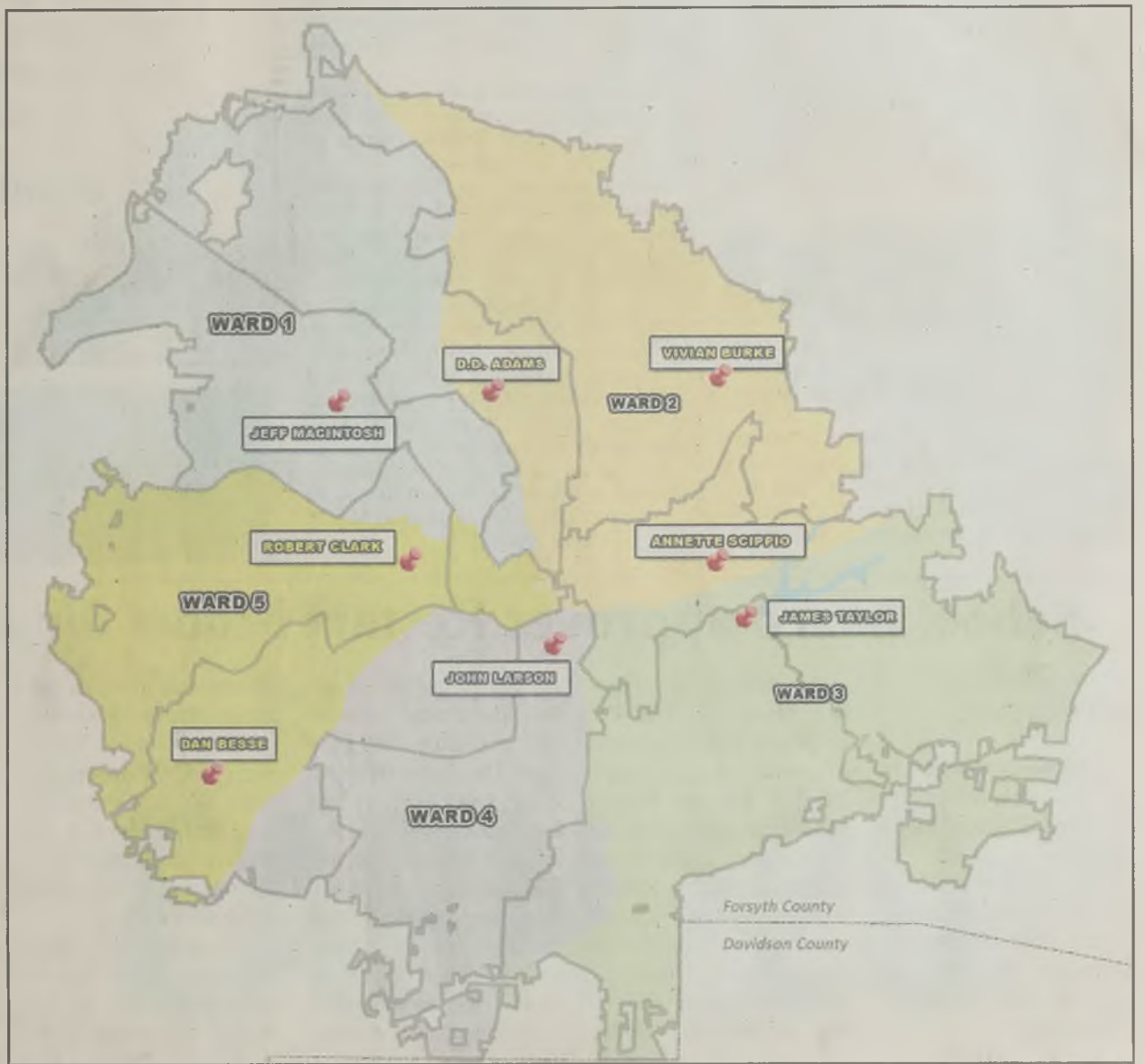
As news of the proposed bill began to make headlines, council member Besse took to Facebook to voice his frustration with House Bill 519 and another bill that would change the terms for Winston-Salem/Forsyth County School Board.

Besse, who ran against Lambeth in the 2018 General Election for his seat on the House of Representatives, said instead of focusing on the real issues, Lambeth and Conrad are "playing political games."

He wrote, "... Instead of working to protect the lives of over 10,000 Forsyth County citizens who lack health care, these legislators have chosen to spend their time playing partisan political games with two local elected boards." Besse continued, "They may offer excuses for why they have chosen to launch these partisan attacks now, but there is no conceivable justification for doing so without public debate or consultation. In the case of Winston-Salem, they have even included in their bill a pre-drawn gerrymandered map of the new council districts."

"If anyone believes these bills are not motivated by raw partisan power politics, I'd like to offer you an excellent bargain on some swampland in Florida."

Bill 519 could also be bad news for the only women on the city council. On the redrawn map, Ward 2 combines what we currently know as the



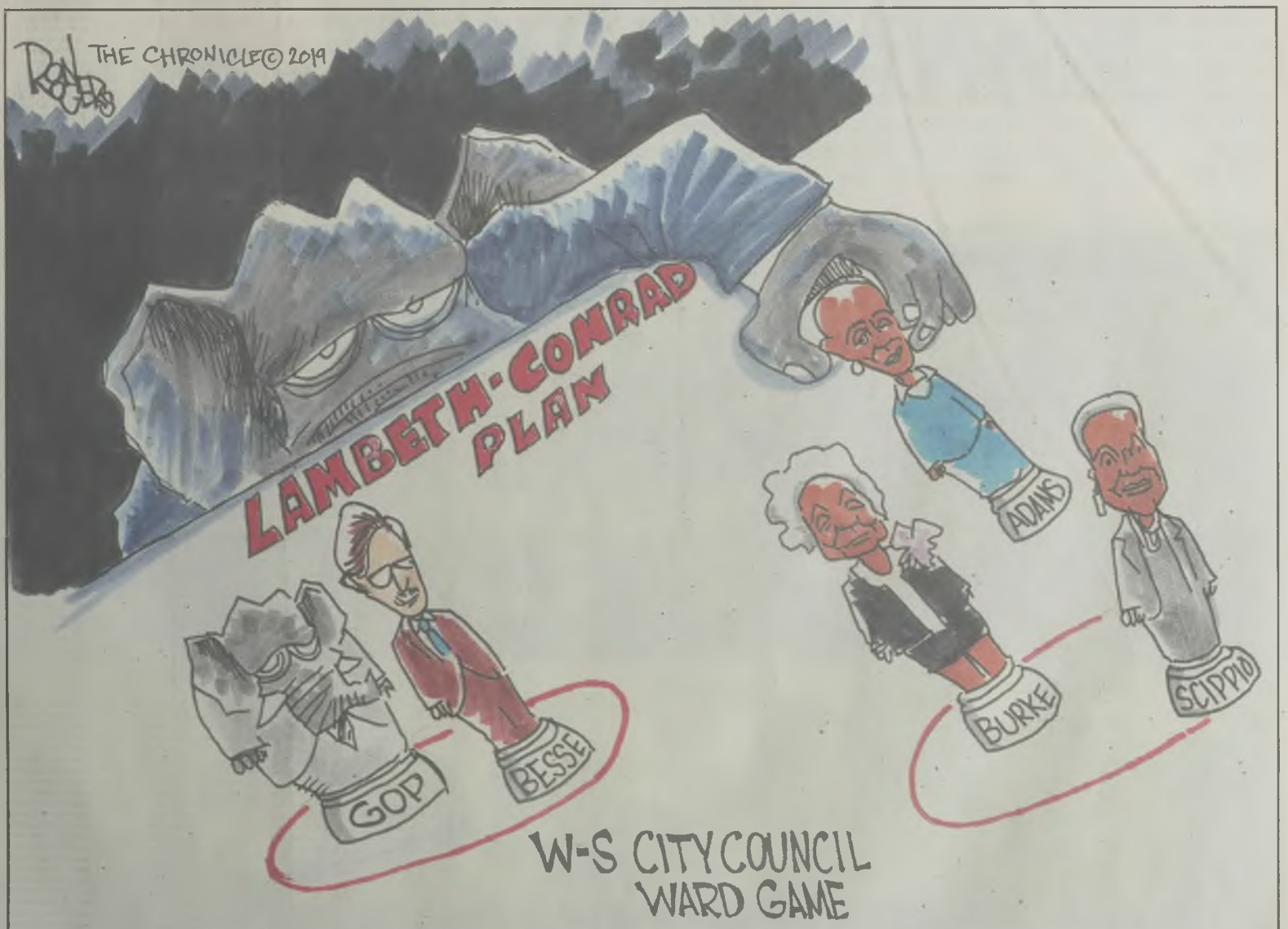
Here is a proposed map of what the redrawn wards would look like if Bill 519 is passed. The bill was endorsed by N.C. House Representatives Donny Lambeth and Debra Conrad.

of the city. If the bill is approved as is, Ward 2 will be nearly 65 percent black and less than 20 percent white, which is shocking considering African-

removal of Bill 519. President of the local NAACP Rev. Alvin Carlisle said they will not stand idly by while thousands of voters are silenced. He said,

can communities. The Winston-Salem NAACP, will not stand idly by while the voice of the people is silenced."

ged three black women on the city council and drastically diminished the voice of the black electorate, state and national leaders immediately began



East, North, and Northeast Wards, which are represented by Annette Scipio, Denise "D.D." Adams, and Mayor Tempore Vivian Burke, all who just happen to be black.

When looking at the numbers, Ward 2 doesn't reflect the racial make-up

Americans only make up about 34 percent of the total population, according to a recent U.S. Census.

In response to the redrawn districts the Winston-Salem Chapter of the NAACP and the Winston-Salem Urban League have called for the immediate

"This piece of legislation is typical of the kind of wrangling that we have come to expect of this extremist controlled legislature."

"They consistently seek to garner unearned power by circumventing the will of African Ameri-

President and CEO of the Winston-Salem Urban League James Perry said, "Reps Conrad and Lambeth have put forth a bill that could have the same chilling effect on Winston-Salem that HB2 had on North Carolina. Upon learning that HB 519 tar-

contacting me with talk of a Winston-Salem boycott."

Attempts to reach Rep. Lambeth and Rep. Conrad were unsuccessful at the time of publication. If Bill 519 is approved, it will go into effect in 2020.

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