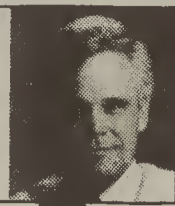


Who'll control state House of Representatives

D.G. Martin



Who is going to control the North Carolina House of Representatives?

The inside state political junkies have been wearing out that question since the recent election that gave the Republicans an apparent 61-59 majority. It is far less than their 68-52 majority in the last session. But it is still a majority, and many people outside of the political junkie group wonder what all the speculation is about.

The Republicans have the power to control if they stick together.

If they stick together, and don't let anybody get sick. Or get hurt in an accident. Or go to the bathroom during an important vote. Or go home for a wedding anniversary, or birthday, or child's soccer game, or closing on an important business transaction. Or get in trouble with the courts. Or die.

These kinds of things always keep some legislator from voting on almost every important issue. But this year there will be an extra premium on the contending parties keeping their members healthy, alive, out of trouble, and present.

Recognizing the difficulty of organizing the house, you ask, "How will it be done?" There are several possible scenarios:

First, the iron hand model. Under this model the 61 Republican House members agree to stick together on everything. They further agree to decide every important matter by a majority vote among themselves in their caucus meetings — and then be bound by the caucus decision when it comes to a formal house vote. Since there will be no room for defection they will have to agree never to stray from a decision of the caucus.

The senate Democrats were able to discipline themselves this way during the last session when they had only a 26-24 majority. But it will be much more difficult in the house where there are more than twice as many people to manage.

Second possibility, a loose relaxed organization. Under this model the Republicans would stick together to elect speaker and control the leadership. But they would not attempt to control every issue. Party members would be free to stray from the "party line" more often. Temporary coalitions could form around various issues.

Third, the Republicans might try recruit a few Democrats to join a coalition — that would have more staying power than the 61-59 majority.

I doubt if this can be done on any formal basis. There is too much remaining bitterness about a multi-party coalition several years ago.

But an informal understanding might be arranged. "Work with us when you can," the Republicans might tell a few Democratic members. "We won't embarrass you. And we will give you a place of real influence on committees. And we'll pay attention to the needs of your local community in the budget." It would be called "bi-partisanship" rather than "coalition."

Fourth, the Democrats could try to steal control from

the Republicans. (If you follow these things, it would be done the same way

Willie Brown, the famous speaker of the California house, did it two years ago.)

It would only happen if a Republican member or two, for one reason or another, voted with the Democrats to organize the house and elect the speaker — or, more likely, just didn't vote at all.

Why would a member not support his own party's nominee for speaker? Several reasons:

- He might be angry at his own party and be looking for a way to "teach them a needed lesson."

- He might be a close friend of the opposition's candidate for speaker.

- He might covet some particular leadership post that could be promised by the "other side."

- He might live in the same town or region as the opposition candidate for speaker. The folks at home might say, "It would be so beneficial for the speaker of the house to come from our community. Won't you cross over party lines just this one time for the benefit of our community?"

Those are all possible reasons. But if any Democratic candidate for speaker has gotten such a commitment from a Republican member, it is still a dark, dark secret.

So, back to the original question, how is it all going to turn out?

I still don't know. But it is sure going to be fun to watch.

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Letters To The Post

VA should care for vets with spinal injuries

The writer is advocacy/legislative director for the North Carolina chapter of the Southeastern Wheelchair Sports Association

As a nation, we observe Veterans Day, a day set aside to honor those who sacrificed serving our country. For those who sacrificed a spinal cord impairment, the best way to remember their personal sacrifices is to continue to provide them with high-quality medical care year-long so they can live life to its fullest.

Fifty years ago, the Veterans Administration started specialized services for paralyzed soldiers returning from World War II. In the decades that followed, our grateful nation pushed the VA to expand these services as separate and distinct programs that did not exist elsewhere.

As a result, the VA developed extraordinary expertise in caring for those with this catastrophic disability. And, this expertise benefits not just veterans, but many American who use wheelchairs for mobility.

Today, the high-quality care provided by this national resource may be in jeopardy. The reason is that the VA is facing a major reorganization that may result in staff and budget cuts that could threaten these unique special programs.

We are concerned. Given these changes, the VA must assure our members of the continuation of the high-quality health care provided by the VA Spinal Cord Center in Augusta, Ga. and Richmond, Va. which served Charlotte's veterans.

As we pay tribute to our veterans this Veterans Day, I call on the VA to honor our spinal cord impaired veterans with assurances that the Augusta VA and VA Spinal Cord Injury Center will continue to provide paralyzed veterans with the high-quality health care they earned, deserve and need.

For members of the Paralyzed Veterans of America, quality health care is a matter of life and death.

*Kater W. Cornwell
Charlotte*

The Post looks like a daily newspaper

Just wanted to let you know that I was in Charlotte a few weeks ago and picked up your newspaper. I'm very impressed. The format looks like a daily newspaper and I'm sure you take pride in putting a lot of effort in making it look that way.

*Again, great looking paper.
Helen Blocker Adams
e-mail: hba@GroupZ.net*

What's on your mind?

Send your comments to The Charlotte Post, P.O. Box 30144, Charlotte, N.C. 28230 or fax (704) 342-2160. You can also use E-mail — charpost@clt.mindspring.com

All correspondence must include a daytime telephone number for verification.

Republican Party's star rising in N.C. politics

By Sam Currin
SPECIAL TO THE POST

It has long been said that not too many years ago, the Republican Party in North Carolina could meet in a phone booth. Today, it would require a mighty big phone booth to accommodate the growing numbers of Republicans in this state.

In 1992, there were 42 Republicans elected to the N.C. State House. This year, the Republican Party retained a majority in the State House by electing 61 members. Similarly, in the State Senate, Republicans increased their membership from 11 four years ago to 20 in 1996.

The Council of State remains the last Democratic stronghold, but our slate of Republican candidates came closer to winning those offices than ever before in state party history. In fact, the

State Auditor's race and the State Treasurer's race were too close to call until well into the morning after election day. Interestingly enough, the Republican Party had never fielded a full state of candidates until this election cycle.

Clearly, North Carolina is now a two-party state.

With more Republicans registering to vote than Democrats, it appears that the trend will hold fast. But Republicans have historically been more successful at holding federal offices than statewide offices. With more power returning to the states in a revitalization of federalism we must now concentrate on North Carolina's role as a laboratory for democracy. The question of who will be in charge of that experiment should be on the mind of every North Carolinian who cares about the future of our state.

We are the driving force in

America. Republican governors across the nation are implementing new ideas. Gov. John Engler of Michigan is in the process of abolishing the state income tax so that his state can join the ten other income tax free states in this nation. Gov. Pete Wilson of California has implemented a program to reinstate statutory rape laws to stop teenage pregnancy bought about by men over the age of 18. Gov. Tommy Thompson of Wisconsin has presided over one of the most successful school choice experiments in the country. Gov. William Weld took his state of "Taxachusetts" and lowered taxes dramatically while preserving services.

In this state we cannot be content with the status quo. The experiments of the liberal left have negatively impacted our state for a century. For example, we now claim the dubious honor of holding the 48th slot in

education. Somehow, North Carolina has gotten completely off the track with out of control spending in education, spending on everything but teachers and their students.

Crime and drug abuse are out of control rapidly, with one feeding on the other in a dangerous dance leading toward a societal breakdown. But Governor George W. Bush of Texas has actually reduced crime in the Lone Star State dramatically. The secret, according to Dr. Morgan Reynolds of Texas A&M University, is in the increase in available prison space. Reynolds, an economist, wrote that crime is a matter of economic choices. If there is a greater chance that hard prison time will be the end result of a criminal deed, and if more criminals are placed behind bars rather than free to commit crime, that crime will decrease dramatically.

With welfare reform now passed down to the states, one need only look to Thompson of Wisconsin, who successfully reduce the welfare rolls by half.

Whatever the issue may be, there is an innovative program that has a track record somewhere in the U.S. that can be applied to North Carolina. We should not be satisfied with continuing in the program development business or with a governor who only comes up with creative proposals every four years, usually in the month preceding the general election. It is a losing proposition. Instead, we should see what program actually works before spending one tax dollar to build a bureaucracy that we can never get rid of — a bureaucracy that ends up only serving as the governor's bodyguard — once it is determined that it simply doesn't work.

SAM CURRIN is chairman of the N.C. Republican Party.

Texaco lawsuit shows need for affirmative action

Bernice P. Jackson



The recent revelations about Texaco executives make the case for the continuing need for affirmative action, although that was far from the intent of those involved. It seems that a secretly taped conversation revealed racist language and illegal behavior regarding a Federal lawsuit brought by minority employees of Texaco. Like the Rodney King videotape, these tapes show racism in America during those unguard-

ed moments that prove for people of color what we had known all along.

As California voters went to the polls and voted for Proposition 209, to end affirmative action programs in the state of California, they were faced with the news story which showed Texaco upper echelon employees shredding documents which would have implicated their company in the suit brought by some 1,500 minority employees of that company. These employees charge that Texaco systematically discriminates against its minority employees and that the company fosters an atmosphere of racial hostility. In tapes which they did not realize were being

made, the former treasurer of the company, along with other high-level employees, call African Americans "black jelly beans" and "niggers," proving that behind many closed doors of corporate America, racism is still acceptable behavior.

The suit by minority employees of Texaco contends that they were systematically passed over for promotions in favor of less experienced whites. In the secret tapes, one official says, "This diversity thing, you know, how all the black jelly beans agree." Another official agrees, adding, "That's funny. All the black jelly beans seem to be glued to the bottom of the bag."

The suit also charges that Texaco fostered a racially hos-

tile environment, saying that they were called "uppity" for asking questions and charging that black employees were called "orangutans" and "porch monkeys." At least one African American Texaco employee, upon hearing the tapes, said, "It sounds like a Klan meeting, and nobody seemed to object to what everybody was saying."

That may be one of the most troubling aspects of this case — that no one else in the room objected to such racist language and to racist and illegal behavior. But it is important to note that Texaco is not alone in allowing such language and attitudes to exist in the workplace. While other corporations might not have gotten caught,

there are many minority employees who have had similar experiences in other companies.

Which is exactly the reason why affirmative action is still needed. Despite arguments to the contrary, people of color and women are still underrepresented in corporate board rooms and work rooms. Women and people of color still hit that imaginary glass ceiling in every industry and still find it difficult to start and operate their own businesses.

BERNICE POWELL JACKSON is executive director of the Commission for Racial Justice in Cleveland, Ohio.

Time for a change toward self-empowerment

By Sidney E. Morse
NATIONAL NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS ASSOCIATION

The tally is in and, to no one's surprise, Bill Clinton regained his position as leader of the most powerful nation in the world.

And while the Republicans were able to maintain control of both the House and Senate by the slimmest of margins, the voters sent their message loud and clear that they want the tenor of government to be one of moderation and not one that is reflected in the agenda of the "extreme right." But while the White House and Congress remain the same, "is it time for radical change in the African American community?"

Neglected urban communities, drugs, crime, a severe lack of jobs, health problems, including the AIDS crisis, and a general absence of a definitive direction appear to be the most pressing challenges facing the African-American community today.

If not radical change, then at least two fundamental dynamics need to be modified if African Americans are to take advantage of this new "strategic window of opportunity" provided by the re-election of President Clinton. It is clear that the continuity reflected in the presidential election results, aided by a "tempered" Congress, at a minimum, signals a period of "benign" governance at the federal level as it relates to the concerns of African-Americans.

The first change calls for a shift in examining the cause of the challenges — the African-American community faces nationwide from an external perspective to an internal one. That is to say we must first change the instrument of analysis from a telescope to a microscope and look from within.

There is a critical need to engage in a national introspective dialogue and use it as a pillar for building effective "self-empowerment strategies." My mother used to frequently tell me that "prosperity starts at home and spreads abroad." As African Americans, we cannot build the kind of infrastructure that will facilitate our participation in the 21st century unless we understand what strengths

we possess both as individuals and as a national community. Equally as important is the notion of our willingness to better understand our weaknesses and use them to develop strategies that will make us stronger and healthier as a people. The second dynamic is one that is currently being controlled by media forces outside of the African-American community. At each important juncture of our socioeconomic evolution, we have made a definitive change in our public image to support structural changes necessary to facilitate progress. Just as we changed the nomenclature of what we were called from "colored" to "Negro" in the late '50s, "Negro" to "Afro-American" and then to "Black" in the late '60s

and early '70s and "Black" to "African American" in the 80s, it is now time to change the content of our dialogue from "civil rights" to "self-empowerment."

The Civil Rights Movement is a legacy of which all African-Americans can be proud, as it has served as a shining example to the world of what it means to engage in human struggle to achieve a noble and virtuous goal. That is why we should contest every time the media chooses to use the term "civil rights" leader or organization because it has come to be the equivalent of "code language" which signifies "Black" or minority.

SIDNEY MORSE is a Los Angeles-based columnist and author.