

Opinion

More dialogue needed...

For the second time in as many years, Senate Democrats walked out on their Republican colleagues and left them to conduct legislative business by themselves.

The first time they did it was in March 2016, when the Senate prepared to vote on House Bill 2 just hours after the "bathroom bill" was first made public.

The Democrats objected to the process and declined to cast their votes. It happened again last week during a committee meeting on judicial redistricting.

The meeting agenda called for comments from a "representative from the governor's office." When it turned out that Gov. Roy Cooper had sent retired Judge Don Stephens — an outspoken critic of proposed judicial changes — Sen. Dan Bishop, R-Mecklenburg, refused to let him speak. Bishop said Cooper should have sent someone from his staff.

The three Democratic senators at the meeting stormed out and sent out a press release that said "this isn't a democratic process, this is a farce. Therefore, there was no reason for us to attend today's committee meeting."

Senate leader Phil Berger called the move a "political stunt" showing that Democrats "will do anything to preserve North Carolina's existing, unconstitutional judicial system for the benefit of their political party."

The committee's fireworks were entirely unnecessary. If you invite the governor to send someone to speak on his behalf, he's entitled to send whoever he likes.

By sending Stephens, Cooper was making a statement that he wants judges to have a major role in deciding how judges are selected. Silencing Stephens sends a bad message to the state's judiciary, undercutting the efforts Republicans have made so far to meet with judges and get their feedback. The move, however, wasn't surprising coming from Bishop, who's a Trump-like figure known for brash statements on Twitter.

So why do Republicans dislike Stephens? Berger's top aide, chief of staff Jim Blaine, spelled it out on Twitter: Stephens has ruled against the legislature in several lawsuits brought by Democrats, so the GOP views him as a partisan figure. Blaine also accused Cooper of using Stephens to avoid making an official statement himself on the judicial overhaul proposals.

If Cooper wants to show how important this issue is, he should consider coming to the legislature himself and speaking to the committee. The governor doesn't have much power to stop the proposed changes, but he does have the bully pulpit.

That, however, would require Cooper to be more specific about his views. So far, he's issued statements criticizing proposed changes as an effort to "rig the courts" in favor of Republicans, but he also hasn't said the current system is perfect.

Experts have said there are constitutional problems with the current District Court and Superior Court districts that House Republicans want to redraw. If the redistricting approach continues to move forward, there's room for Democrats to propose alternatives to districts they worry will give Republicans an unfair advantage.

Last-minute sneakiness is always a possibility at the legislature, but the Senate has now released a set of maps tweaking the House judicial redistricting proposal — so there's a decent chance that's what will be on the agenda next month.

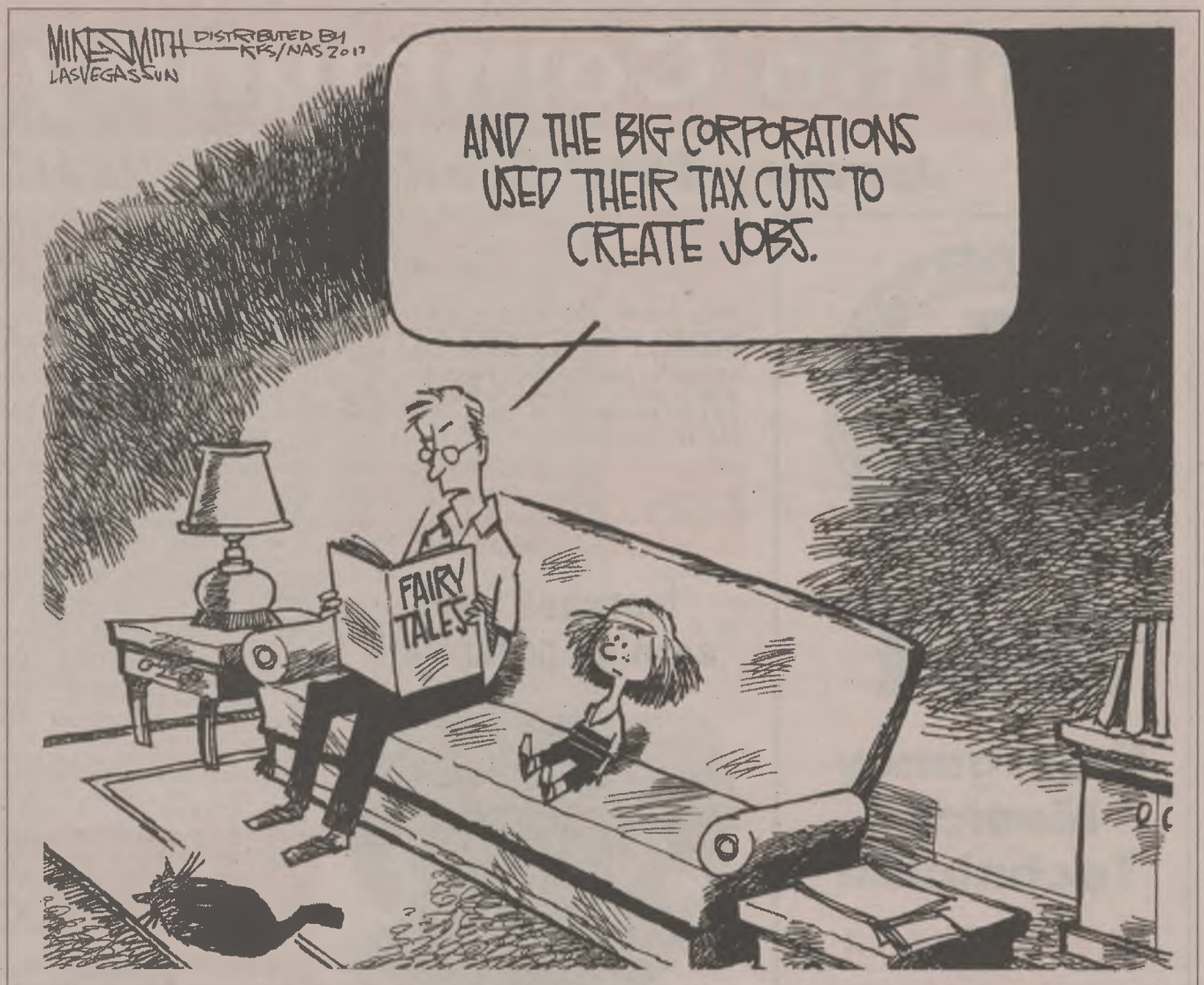
The latest acrimony on the Senate committee means a bipartisan compromise is unlikely. And while Republicans don't want to hear from Judge Stephens, they did put a link to submit public comment on the legislature's website at ncleg.net. So take a few minutes and give them your opinion — but maybe don't tell them your party affiliation if you're a Democrat.

Colin Campbell is editor of the *Insider State Government News Service*. Follow him at [NCInsider.com](https://twitter.com/NCInsider) or [@RaleighReporter](https://twitter.com/RaleighReporter). Write to him at ccampbell@ncinsider.com.



COLIN CAMPBELL
This Week In
North Carolina

The fabric of Bertie County since 1832



Thanks for being here...

Recently, while taking advantage of the atmosphere of a local coffee shop, my son was approached by a former teacher at Hertford County High School, who questioned him about his current situation as Librarian/English instructor at C.S. Brown High School-STEM, and then ended the conversation by saying, "Thank you for coming back; thank you for being a teacher."



SARAH DAVIS
Far From The
Madding Crowd

As he related the encounter to me, I began thinking about the importance of her words. How important it is for each of us to thank those people whose work affects our everyday lives, every day. Of course, all are not like my son, now in his 19th year of teaching, who grew up in the area, left, and has come back; some are like my daughter, now in her twenty-third year of teaching, who never left.

We all owe a debt of gratitude to teachers, but how often do we thank them? And what about all the other persons to whom we

should express our appreciation for what they do every day?

Living in a place that does not have natural gas, I am grateful for the delivery person who keeps propane in my tank, allowing me to keep warm in winter just as I am grateful for the person who services my HVAC system.

I am grateful for the men who pick up my trash and recycling just as I am grateful for the driver of the street sweeper and the one who cleans the drains, hoping to keep the town from flooding.

I am grateful for the restaurant cook and server who provide me with the comfort of not cooking at home.

I am grateful to the editor of the local paper who makes me feel that my event is important, but this local paper is not big enough—and certainly not this column—to list all of those people for whom I am grateful for the part they play in my daily life. Do I take the time to thank them? I confess that, until someone else goes out of her way to thank someone for what he or she does, I do not think about the importance of that simple thank you.

In some cases, those are peo-

ple who have simply come here, some who have come back, and some who never left. For all of them, our lives are better.

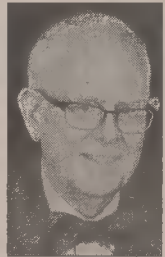
In terms of full disclosure, I confess that I am not a resident of Bertie County. Relocated to N.C. from Alabama in 1981, my family and I have lived on the same street in Hertford County for 36 years, at the same address for twenty-seven years, but for twelve years, I was Branch Manager of the Sallie Harrell Jenkins Memorial Library in Aulander. I, therefore, have a great love for Bertie County and its people and know that its peanuts are the best in the world.

When Thadd White first suggested I write an occasional column for this paper, he said he guessed I knew where the bodies were buried. I may, but I also know where the good souls reside, and I thank all of them for their contribution to life in this area. Whether you came, came back, or never left, thanks for being here.

Sarah Davis is a retired librarian for the Sallie Harrell Jenkins Public Library in Aulander. She can be reached via email at bertienews@ncweeklies.com.

The envelope on the tree...

Mike hated Christmas. Not the true meaning of the season, but the frantic rushing around spending money just to be able to say you got the person a gift he or she wouldn't use and would most likely end up at the thrift store. Mike's wife wanted him to enjoy the season, but to no avail.



TOM CAMPBELL
N.C.
Spin

Some might describe what happened next as a miracle. Their 12 year-old son, Kevin, was a wrestler on his school's team. They scheduled a non-conference match with a team sponsored by an inner city church. Whereas Kevin's team was decked out in blue and gold uniforms with spanking new shoes, the inner city team wore mismatched uniforms, ragtag sneakers and had no protective headgear.

Throughout the match Kevin's mom kept thinking about how poorly the opponents dressed

and wondered if perhaps it might have had some impact on their equally poor performance.

Then an idea was germinated. Instead of buying Mike something he didn't need or want, she decided to buy something for others. She traveled to the local sporting goods store and bought tennis shoes, head gear and other wrestling garb, sending them to the inner city church anonymously.

On Christmas morning she paper-clipped an envelope to the tree with a note inside telling Mike what she had done.

Mike's face lit up when he read the note. The envelope was everyone's favorite gift that year... so popular that it became a tradition. One year they sent a group of differently able kids to a hockey game, one year it was a check to two brothers whose home had burned to the ground. Always it was to some local group or individuals, always it was done anonymously and the envelope was always the last thing opened on Christmas morning.

Several years ago Mike died from cancer and his wife barely

had the stamina to put up a tree that year. But the tradition meant too much to everyone in the family so on Christmas Eve Mike's widow attached the envelope to the tree. Imagine her surprise the next morning when everyone gathered round the tree and there were four more envelopes, including one from each of their children.

What a marvelous tradition. Most all of us have more than we need and are hard pressed when someone asks what we want for Christmas. This year tell them to find some needy and worthy cause and give something in your name to others. That's the true meaning of Christmas.

This story was paraphrased from a collection of stories written by William J. Bausch, titled *A World of Stories for Preachers and Teachers*. Published by Twenty-Third Publications.

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