

OPINION

Thomasville Times

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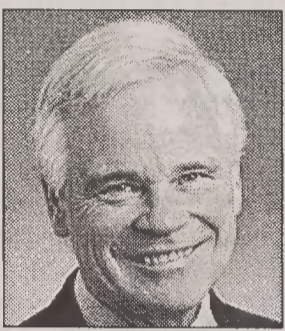
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Who says runoff is good for Dems?

VIEWPOINT



D.G. MARTIN
 N.C. Columnist

Okay. So what if most North Carolina political experts disagree with me? They say that a primary runoff like the upcoming one in the race for the North Carolina Democratic nomination will be detrimental to the eventual winner. They point out that the runoff between Elaine Marshall and Cal Cunningham forces both candidates to spend money against each other while their eventual Republican opponent, Senator Richard Burr, is raising more funds to use in the fall. And, they say, the time Marshall and Cunningham fight each other could be better used to organize and prepare for the November general election. They remind us that a hard-fought, bitter primary runoff can leave negative impressions about both candidates. The winner might be burdened with the unfavorable impressions created by the loser's hard-hitting ads. Finally, they argue that these "second primaries" are a waste of everybody's time and effort since so few voters show up at the polls. Good points. Here is the other side. To have any chance of winning in November, the Democrats need a jumpstart of enthusiasm for their nominee. She or he will stand a better chance of getting that kind of spirit when the nominee is a clear winner over another strong candidate. It did not happen in the first primary. But it can happen in the June runoff. At the very least, the winner will move into the fall election having won more than 50 percent of the vote. Right now both candidates have the burden of having more than 50 percent of the primary voters go against them. More important, perhaps, the runoff gives both candidates the opportunity to grab the spotlight in ways that were not open during the days leading up to the May primary. The field was too crowded. Without a second

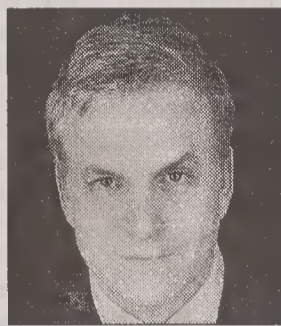
primary, the nominee would be stuck with only the very hazy impressions generated so far. The extra weeks between the primary and the runoff give both candidates more time on the political center stage to refine and drive home a message and build name recognition and credibility with the public. The free publicity and public contact during the next few weeks can be positive factors in the fall election — and worth hundreds of thousands of dollars. In the summer months before a November campaign, it is almost impossible to develop the mood of immediacy that a candidate needs to prepare for the fall by expanding the organization, by recruiting new supporters, assigning tasks, and building teams across the state. A primary runoff can put a candidate's statewide organization to work at a time when it would otherwise be waiting and resting. The contest forces the candidate and his or her organization to push those organizational efforts. Practice makes politicians better speakers, better interviewees, and better fundraisers. As they are required to explain, and as they learn to listen on the campaign trail, they improve as candidates. If you think of politicians as "actors," the runoff is a valuable dress rehearsal for the fall campaign. It requires the candidate to go over his or her message and practice the lines and the moves, getting better prepared to meet the critical audience that will grade the performance in the fall. Do you want an example? Maybe you remember the 1990 senate primary contest between Harvey Gantt and Mike Easley. Gantt led Easley in the first primary, but did not quite reach the 40 percent threshold. The runoff gave both candidates more exposure and credibility, giving Gantt and his campaign a jumpstart that helped him mount a very strong effort against Senator Helms. How about you? Do you agree with the experts — or with me?

D.G. Martin hosts UNC-TV's North Carolina Bookwatch, which airs Sundays at 5 p.m. For more information or to view prior programs visit the webpage at www.unctv.org/ncbookwatch/. This Sunday's (May 16) guest is Brett Friedlander, author of "Chasing Moonlight." Brett Friedlander Shares His Book, Chasing Moonlight on UNC-TV's North Carolina Bookwatch,



Meeting stupidity with stupidity

VIEWPOINT



JOE CONASON
 Syndicated Columnist

Isaac Newton formulated three laws of motion, No. 3 being: For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. If he were still around, he'd propose a fourth: For every action, there is an unequal and opposite overreaction. Lately, Americans seem to be taking advice from Oscar Wilde, who said, "Moderation is a fatal thing." Stupidity can be met and defeated with sensible, proportionate measures. Or it can be met with even greater stupidity. Guess which is the preferred option these days. Last week, a 17-year-old knucklehead exposed his idiocy to the world by venturing onto the field at a Philadelphia Phillies game and running around waving a towel. When a pursuing policeman got weary of the chase, he pulled out his Taser and shot the kid. For that, the officer won praise from players, sportscasters and city police commissioner Charles Ramsey, who said the cop "acted appropriately. I support him 100 percent." The cop was in line with department policy, Ramsey said, because "he was attempting to make an arrest and the male was attempting to flee." Really? Hitting a delinquent with a potentially fatal 50,000-volt burst of electricity even though he poses no physical danger to anyone

and has zero chance of escaping? Maybe the commissioner should read the directions from the Taser manufacturer, which say the devices are meant to "incapacitate dangerous, combative or high-risk subjects." The Police Executive Research Forum says they "should be used only on people 1) actively resisting or exhibiting active aggression or 2) at risk of harming themselves or others." A federal appeals court ruled that cops may not use Tasers unless "the suspect poses an immediate threat to the officer or a member of the public." Sure, shooting the kid with a Taser taught him a lesson and will undoubtedly deter others from following his example. But if that were the only consideration, riddling him with live ammo would have been even more effective. The rational response would have been to let him cavort until he ran out of gas, then take him away, leaving punishment to the courts. That is not to say the courts are always rational. The other day, a 19-year-old woman showed up in a Lake County, Ill., courtroom gallery sporting a T-shirt that only a person of incompetent judgment would wear outside the house. "I have the (female sexual organ), so I make the rules," it announced. That claim might be true if she were the only woman in possession of one. True or not, it was the wrong message to present to Judge Helen Rozenberg, who immediately held her in contempt and sentenced her to 48 hours in jail. The judge could have ordered the offending party to leave. She could have insisted that she cover up. She could have delivered a stern lecture. But the only remedy the magistrate could devise was to lock her up like a crimi-

nal. In Rozenberg's case, "judicial temperament" is a contradiction in terms. Critics of the new Arizona immigration law likewise have decided to fight fire with napalm. Rather than merely object that the statute is shortsighted, counterproductive and vulnerable to abuse, they decided to pretend it's the greatest atrocity of the 21st century. "When I heard about it, it reminded me of Nazi Germany," insisted Hispanic Federation President Lillian Rodriguez Lopez. Los Angeles Cardinal Roger Mahony said Arizona was "reverting to German Nazi" methods. A New Jersey cartoonist drew Hitler with a mustache in the shape of Arizona. The only value of statements like those is to reveal how little the speaker knows about life under the Fuehrer. Where are the concentration camps? Where is the mass slaughter? Who is the all-powerful dictator? Arizona may have become an uncomfortable place for Latinos, legal or illegal, but it bears about as much resemblance to Nazi Germany as it does to Antarctica. If a law like this were the worst thing Hitler had ever done, nobody would remember him today. In moments when we are presented with a sore provocation, the temptation is to respond with unrestrained fury. But wanton indulgence of anger usually ends up compounding foolishness with lunacy. You can fight fire with fire. As a rule, though, it's better to use water. Steve Chapman blogs daily at newsblogs.chicagotribune.com/steve_chapman. To find out more about Steve Chapman, and read features by other Creators Syndicate writers and cartoonists, visit the Creators Syndicate website at www.creators.com.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor

On behalf of the Clean and Green Committee, I would like to extend a huge "Thank You" to everyone who participated in our Spring Litter Sweep. We had a great show of volunteers on both Friday and Saturday. The Thomasville City Beautification Committee sponsors the Litter Sweep in conjunction with the NCDOT in both the Spring and Fall. We collected a total of 20 bags of trash. A special

thank you to Ms. Nancy Staton of Thomasville High School and her National Honor Society members who worked both days and picked up the litter along Main Street from the fountain to the underpass. The committee asks your help in keeping our city LITTER FREE.

Crystal Hodges
 Chairperson
 Clean and Green
 Committee
 City Beautification

To the Editor

To all those who voted in the primary on May 4th, I would like to express my thanks. Help keep our form of government alive by voting every opportunity you have. To those who voted for me I express my heartfelt thanks for your confidence and trust. Even though I did not win, I appreciate every one of you. **Owen Moore**
 High Point

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

All letters should include name, address and daytime phone number. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Letters should be no more than 400 words, unless otherwise approved by editor. Limited to one letter every 30 days. All letters are subject to editing.

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EDITORIALS

All unsigned editorials are the consensus of Editor Lisa Wall and Sports Editor Zach Kepley