

VIEWPOINTS

Is nullification sign of things to come?

By CHRIS FITZSIMON
N.C. Policy Watch

If you want to understand the troubling state of the current political debate in North Carolina, the recent Ashe County Republican Party Convention is a good place to start.

The Jefferson Post reports that Sen. Dan Soucek gave the keynote address at the weekend event and defended the regressive actions of the 2013 General Assembly, at one point telling the crowd that “liberals across the country, especially in the Northeast,” were furious about the decisions state lawmakers made on Medicaid expansion, tax reform and other issues.

Nothing unusual there, though it’s not clear why Soucek is talking about people in the Northeast in a speech to a gathering in Western North Carolina.

Rep. Jonathan Jordan blamed the media for the General Assembly’s low approval rating, invoking another standard Republican talking point to explain away the unhappiness of the public with the reactionary 2013 session.

The convention also passed a number of resolutions. One of them was the “nullification” of the Affordable Care Act.

That’s not a call for Congress to repeal the law, as troubling as that would be. It’s a call for the state to invalidate the ACA and refuse to obey it, even though it was passed by Congress and upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Nullification was most famously invoked by segregationists like Alabama Governor George Wallace during the civil rights movement as he refused to obey a federal court order to desegregate the schools, citing states’ rights and Alabama’s sovereignty in nullify-

ing a federal law he didn’t like. It is not the first time in recent years that nullification has been endorsed by Republicans. Several GOP legislators addressed a nullification rally on the lawn behind the Legislative Building on the first day of the 2013 General Assembly session.

Robin Hayes, then the chair of the N.C. Republican Party, spoke to the crowd that day too and praised the event’s organizers who talked of nullifying the ACA and any new legislation passed by Congress to reduce gun violence in the wake of the Newtown, Connecticut shooting.

Hayes now runs the campaign of Rev. Mark Harris, a prominent candidate for the Republican nomination in the U.S. Senate race against incumbent Democrat Kay Hagan. Greg Brannon, a Tea Party favorite who is currently running second in the polls in the Republican battle for the Senate nomination, spoke last fall at a Nullify Now event in Raleigh.

Nullification is back in vogue as a legitimate policy position in the current Republican Party in North Carolina.

It is also worth remembering that 14 members of the state House signed onto a resolution during the 2013 session that called for creating an official state religion, declaring that people in North Carolina are not subject to decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court and proclaiming that the state can decide on its own what is constitutional and what is not.

The resolution prompted national scorn and ridicule but one of the 14 Republicans who signed on as a co-sponsor was House Majority Leader Edgar Starnes, arguably the second or third most powerful member of the House. Starnes is

widely reported to be a candidate for House Speaker in 2015.

Appropriations Committee Chair Justin Burr, another member of the House leadership team, also signed on.

The folks at the Ashe County convention passed other resolutions too, including one calling on the United States to withdraw from the United Nations, harkening back to the days when the John Birch Society was demanding a withdraw from the UN and calling President Eisenhower a communist dupe.

But this wasn’t a meeting of a far-right fringe group. It was an official Republican Party event, run by Republican officials with the participation of Republican members of the General Assembly.

Folks on the far-right conspiratorial fringe are no longer on the sidelines meeting in remote locations in back rooms with a handful of people attending. They are inside the Republican Party and in some cases they are the Republican Party, passing resolutions at conventions, sponsoring radical legislation and holding rallies about nullifying duly passed federal laws.

The more mainstream Republicans complain in private about the nullifiers and the folks with wild conspiracy theories that have seeped their way into party meetings and conventions.

But the party’s more traditional powers don’t say much in public about the far-right activists, especially if they are candidates or might be seeking elective office in the near future, for fear of offending the loud and boisterous base.

That public silence speaks volumes about the current state of the Republican Party and who is really running it—and it’s a scary prospect indeed.



Yes, it’s true, we talk funny

You sure do talk funny. Has anybody ever told you that? If you grew up in North Carolina and moved somewhere else for a while, you surely got that kind of question from folks who just had to laugh when they heard you talk.

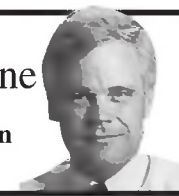
Or if you grew up somewhere else and moved here, folks may have told you that they know you are not from around here. They may have even said, “You talk like a Yankee.”

Is there something special about the way we talk here in North Carolina?

The best person to answer is Walt Wolfram, who has studied the speech patterns in our state since 1992 when he became the first William C. Friday Distinguished University Professor of English Linguistics at N.C. State. He and his colleague, Jeffrey Reaser, take on the task of responding to that question in their new book, “Talkin’ Tar Heel: How Our Voices Tell the Story of North Carolina.”

Their answer is, yes. There is something special about North Carolina speech, something more than the southern accents that we share with others in the South. In fact, according to Wolfram and Reaser, there are discernible and distinct speech patterns in almost every North Carolina region and locality, even the large cities where the mingling of voices from all over the state and nation has wiped away much of the earlier local ways of talking.

One on One D. G. Martin



Wolfram and Reaser take their readers across the state to examine our various linguistic heritages. Probably the most often mentioned North Carolina dialect is the Outer Banks Brogue. We learn from them that the idea that Outer Bankers are speaking Elizabethan or Shakespearean English is a myth. Sometimes their way of talking is called “Hoi Toider speech” because that is the way Bankers say “high tide.”

The Outer Banks were originally populated mostly by migration from coastal Virginia. Because the Banks were isolated, those old Virginia coastal speech patterns survived, while the coastal Virginians, with closer contacts to the outside world, lost more. But, if you ask me, those Virginians still talk funny.

There is also a notion that old North Carolina mountain people also speak a brand of “Old English.” The authors write that this idea “is not linguistically accurate, and most linguists dismiss it as a romantic myth. But there is a kernel of truth to the idea.”

Some features of “Old English” have been preserved, thanks to isolation in the mountains. But isolated mountain people’s speech changed over time, showing “the vibrancy

of a culture that has managed to look both forward and backward.”

“Talkin’ Tar Heel” also carefully examines African American speech showing surprising differences among blacks living in different parts of North Carolina and surprising similarities between whites and blacks who live in the same areas.

Wolfram and Reaser examine the distinctive speech of Lumbee Indians, even though they long ago lost the native languages of their ancestors. They also demolish another myth, one that asserts that survivors of the Lost Colony joined the ancestors of the Lumbees and made their way to the lands along the Lumber River.

The authors give detailed attention to the influence of Spanish-speaking immigrants. They consider the continuing impact of Native American languages that have disappeared as well as that of the living and recently revived Cherokee language.

Wolfram and Reaser write, “We claim that there is more dialect variation in North Carolina than in any other state.”

They concede that some of our language patterns and some special ways of speaking are changing, even disappearing. But, they write, “Being powerless to stop linguistic change in no way impedes our ability to celebrate linguistic diversity.”

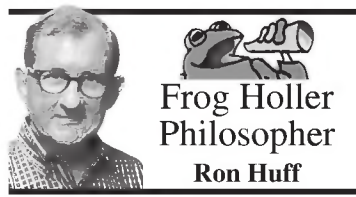
So, next time somebody says you talk funny, smile back, with pride.

It’s all for your protection

It all started with one of those unexpected card charges that have you scratching your head to remember if you were in New Mexico on the date of the charge. Nope, not on that day. Was the card stolen? Nope, the card is in the usual place. Here we go again on that not-so-merry-go-round caused by credit card fraud.

I first called the bank, only to be questioned as if I had done something underhanded—after spending five minutes proving to them through a series of questions, answers and the promise to submit a DNA sample that I was really me. That’s like having to prove who you are in order to make a deposit into your own bank account, as if some crook is scamming the public by making deposits into random accounts. “Sorry sir, it’s only for your own protection,” says the frazzled banking employee who just got off the phone with a dozen other people after making the same unappreciated excuse. “And of course, we will have to cancel the card immediately to avoid further fraudulent charges,” apologizes the employee. At least that means they have accepted my word that I didn’t do something wrong. “You should have a new card in the mail in seven to ten business days,” chirps the employee as you decide whether to complain about this just for the hell of it!

Next message received from the bank: account such and such has been overdrawn and you have been assessed with a \$30 fee. “What account is that? We don’t have an account by that number!” I explain



Frog Holler Philosopher
Ron Huff

to a local bank employee in exasperation. “Have a seat while I do some checking on this,” says the mildly cheerful banker as I settle in to read War and Peace during the wait. Halfway through 1,200 pages, the banker gleefully reports that she has found the problem—an old account that was never properly closed out. “But what caused the overdraft?” I ask reluctantly, fearful of the answer. Well, it was caused by a monthly charge stemming from some activity on eBay and having to do with PayPal.

This clearly being under the supervision of Charlotte, she is now dragged into the fray. It seems that some small monthly charge, which we knew nothing about, had been coming out of the account that we didn’t know we had and was being covered by some money we didn’t know we had until the money ran out. At that point, the train ran off the tracks when the ghost account sought electronic restitution. After finishing War and Peace during my second wait at the bank, it was determined that although I was there in person, I could not close that account, as it had been in Charlotte’s name. We still don’t know why it was abandoned in the first place, but it was undoubtedly due to some other fraud. After several conversations between Charlotte

and the banker, that account was successfully closed.

Next message from the bank: The biweekly transfer of funds from the joint checking account to Charlotte’s account did not go through because of problems with one of the accounts. Damn! Stopping at the bookstore to find a thick book, I headed down to the bank again. After submitting my DNA sample and reading half of East of Eden, I was interrupted by the banker who informed me that a “Hard Hold,” not just a “Hold,” has been put on Charlotte’s account. Now them sounds like fightin’ words to me, considering this is the first we have heard of it and both accounts have money in them as well as bounce protection, another miracle of modern banking.

As I finish up East of Eden, the manager of the local branch informed me that this mess was caused when the old account that we didn’t know we had was closed. What! It seems that that account was linked to Charlotte’s current checking account through the card that had been replaced due to fraud. Cancellation of the card had resulted in the “hard hold” (translation – we can’t use our money). FOR OUR OWN PROTECTION, this account would need to be closed and the brand new card would have to be cancelled. Not to worry, we will receive the new card in five to ten business days. It’s a comfort to know that our money is so secure.

At least I’m getting in some good reading! More later.

5 Things Every young person should know

Weekly Wisdom From Readers Of *The News-Journal* For The Youth In Our Community

What are five life lessons you’ve learned that you think all young people should know? That’s the question *The News-Journal* put to a list of respected local adults. The answers come from all walks of life. We want to pass on to our youth the wisdom of our community, a few lessons

at a time. Here are five:

1.) Nurture both your physical and mental health. Your health is precious and once it is ruined, you often can’t get it back. Avoid doing things that will hurt you in the long run. Don’t smoke cigarettes unless you have a death wish.

2.) Take advantage of your youth and freedom—don’t tie down your life too soon. Take the opportunity to do things when you are young before you become tied down to the responsibilities that can gradually take over your life.

(See FIVE THINGS, page 3A)

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TODAY’S HOMEWORK (Notes on Education)

“We are drowning in initiatives. Even if they were all good ideas, there is no way we could effectively implement them all. They are getting in the way of each other and working to inhibit necessary change and progress. The number and pace of regulations to which we must respond and comply is increasing at an alarming rate...[F]rom the years 1996 -2008 (13 years) there were 4,055 (average of 312 each year) documents requiring action of local districts in response to regulations. The same examination conducted on the four year period of 2009-2013 reveals that there were 5,382 (an average of 1077 each year) multiple page documents requiring action by local school districts. How are we effectively supposed to implement local initiatives and meet the needs of our students when we are mired in this bureaucratic nightmare of a system?”

—Todd Gazda, a Massachusetts superintendent, quoting Tom Scott in blog post “Enough is Enough”

“You prod the public for a billion dollar plan
To promote charters at the expense of public schools
Total shame you ain’t got no excuse
Passing public money
To your rich little buddies
It’s a scam, not a plan
I just gotta say damn.”

—Middletown High School (New York) students in YouTube rap “No Mo Cuomo”