

Differences should not stop NC from finding way forward

RALEIGH — As I write this, the balloting isn't yet over in North Carolina. But here's an election result I can forecast with absolute confidence: most North Carolinians, like most Americans, will be dissatisfied with the outcome.

I don't just mean that roughly half the voters will end up supporting losing candidates for president, governor, U.S. Senate, and other statewide contests. For months, it has been clear that North Carolina would be a tightly contested battleground. We were also a tightly contested battleground for president, at least, in 2008 and 2012, so this is nothing new.

What really is new — perhaps even unprecedented in American political history — is that both major-party candidates for president have higher disapproval ratings than approval ratings. Outside of hardcore partisans, voters across the ideological spectrum dislike and distrust Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. It seems likely the next president will enter the White House cloaked in suspicion and dogged by scandal.

Here in North Carolina, the contest between Richard Burr and Deborah Ross rates as one of the nation's roughest Senate

and elevating the standards and practices of competitive politics. Early this year, a new project called the North Carolina Leadership Forum made its debut. Affiliated with Duke University's Sanford School of Public Policy and encompassing a broad range of current and emerging leaders, NCLF has given liberals, conservatives, centrists, and libertarians a valuable opportunity to develop personal connections, explore complex sets of data and arguments, and better understand how people with good intentions and shared goals can form entirely different opinions about what government should do.

NCLF is funded by the Duke Endowment and two charitable foundations whose grantees usually find themselves diametrically opposed on matters of public policy — the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation and the John William Pope Foundation, for which I serve as president. Reynolds and Pope are also jointly funding several other projects and initiatives at the moment — including the N.C. Institute of Political Leadership,

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the news service EducationNC, and the education group BEST NC — and even compared notes recently about disaster relief in the aftermath of Hurricane Matthew.

These efforts aren't about trying to converge to some kind of moderate consensus. That's unrealistic and unnecessary. North Carolina is a large and growing state of diverse people and varying viewpoints. As should be obvious by now, I have strong opinions. I like talking about them, trying to persuade others I'm right, and then adjusting my thinking to new information or good arguments as warranted. The goals should be to debate our differences more constructively, seek agreement where possible, and lift the conversation above vicious ridicule and character assassination.

I don't mean to diminish the coming challenge. The blades of 2016 cut deep wounds. It will take discernment, diplomacy, and diligence to bind them up and begin moving forward. We will stride and we will stumble. But both will be steps in the right direction. That's what healthy politics looks like. Perhaps North Carolina can model it for a nation yearning for something better.

John Hood is chairman of the John Locke Foundation.

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Letters to the Editor

New Interstate 87 is not without problems for our area

Dear Editor,
Recent news in Edenton showed a photo of the governor unveiling an Interstate road sign as the local politicians flapped their hands like a bunch of seals waiting for someone to throw them some fish. If Interstate 87 does indeed evolve, the local residents and merchants need to understand one thing. Interstate Highways have limited

access. That means that all those center turn lanes, cut throughs, and U turn lanes will ultimately disappear.

Many of the roads that currently access Route 17 will be cut off or rerouted. There are no traffic lights on Interstates so all turns will be by an elevated highway, not a jug handle. You may have to drive two, three or four miles or more to make

a U turn. Route 87 will be just like the Route 17 bypass around Edenton or Elizabeth City or Route 64 to Rocky Mount. Existing Route 17 businesses will die. In addition, there will be no agricultural equipment allowed on the Interstate unless you can reach 45 mph.

More jobs? Unless someone can entice a corporate business to the region the only new jobs will be

temporary construction jobs to build the overpasses. New businesses are based on area population density and natural or human resource location, not someone requesting your vote.

Local residents, and especially merchants, need to keep abreast of all public meetings. Tell the county planner and county commissioner what your needs are. Your busi-

ness is important to our region. Retain your road access. Politicians will say that this is a great Interstate from Raleigh to Norfolk and promise all these benefits, but slowing people down to stop and shop in our towns is more important to us.

Bob Escherman
Hertford

What does it take to embarrass Democrats like Hillary?

Dear Editor,
The picture of Michele Obama embracing Hillary Clinton was plastered all over the media this past week. That one photo, I maintain, is emblematic of everything that's wrong with the Democratic Party: the wife of the President of the United States — who actually detests Secretary Clinton — low-

ering herself to embrace the most corrupt liar of any presidential candidate in the history of this country. Which begs the question, "What does it take to embarrass Democrats?"

I might ask that question of Nancy Theodore who should be embarrassed by her letter to the editor on Oct. 26 that was filled

with distorted facts and glaring omissions to refute my negative observations on Barack Obama's legacy. Ms. Theodore has always been consistent in her support of Obama's disastrous Affordable Care Act, his budget-busting tax and spend policies, his extra-constitutional executive orders, his job-killing regulations, his sympa-

thies for Muslims, and his treasonous Iran agreement. For all these failures she still blames Bush and the Republicans. We can search in vain through all her letters critical of me to find anything critical of Obama and the Democrats.

After all the WikiLeaks exposures of Clinton corruption, after Director Comey's announcement

that the FBI is reopening its investigation into Hillary's emails, what more does Ms. Theodore need to be embarrassed by Democrats? If Hillary Clinton came to Hertford, would Ms. Theodore stand in line to give her a hug?

Claude Milot
Hertford

Clinton, not Trump, more suited to improving people's lives

A few weeks ago I met a guy in Idaho who was absolutely certain that Donald Trump would win this election. He was wearing tattered, soiled overalls, missing a bunch of teeth and was unnaturally skinny. He was probably about 50, but his haggard face looked 70. He was getting by aimlessly as a handyman.

I pointed to the polls and tried to persuade him that Hillary Clinton might win, but it was like telling him a sea gull could play billiards. Everybody he knows is voting Trump so his entire lived experience points to a Trump landslide. He was a funny, kind guy, but you got the impression his opportunities had been narrowed by forces outside his control.

One of the mandates for the next president is to help improve the life stories of people like that.

Trump speaks to this man's situation and makes him feel heard. But when you think practically about which candidate could improve his life, it's clear that Clinton is the bigger change agent.

Let's start with what "change" actually means. In our system, change means legislation. It starts with the ability to gather a team of policy experts who can craft complex bills. These days, bills often run to thousands

of pages, and every bad rookie decision can lead things astray.

Then it requires political deftness. Deft politicians are not always lovely, as Lyndon Johnson demonstrated, but they are subtle, cunning and experienced. They have the ability to work noncontentiously with people they don't like, to read other people's minds, to lure opponents over with friendship, cajolery and a respectful nudge.

Craftsmanship in government is not like craftsmanship in business. You can't win people with money and you can't order people around. Governance requires enormous patience, a capacity to tolerate boredom and the skill of quiet herding. Frustrations abound. When it is done well, as a friend of mine in government puts it, each individual day sucks but the overall experience is tremendously rewarding.

Change in government is a team sport. Public opinion is mobilized through institutions — through interest groups, activist organizations, think tanks and political parties. As historian Sean Wilentz once put it, "political parties have been the only reliable electoral vehicles for advancing the ideas and

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DAVID BROOKS

interests of ordinary voters." To create political change, you have to work within groups and organize groups of groups.

Now, if you wanted to design a personality type perfectly ill suited to be a change agent in government, you would come up with Donald Trump: solipsistic, impatient, combative, unsubtle and ignorant.

If you wanted to design a personality type better suited to getting things done, you might come up with James Baker, Robert Gates or Ted Kennedy, but you might also come up with Hillary Clinton.

None of us should be under any illusions. Wherever Clinton walks, the whiff of scandal is always by her side. The Clintons seem to have decided that they are righteous and good, and therefore anything that enriches, empowers or makes them feel good must always be righteous and good. They surround themselves with some amazing people but also some human hand grenades who inevitably blow up in their faces.

But Clinton does possess the steady, pedantic skills that are necessary for governmental change: the ability to work doggedly

hard, to master details and to rally the powerful. If the Clinton campaign emails have taught us anything, it is that she and her team, while not hugely creative, are prudent, calculating and able to create a web of interlocking networks that they can mobilize for a cause.

Passing legislation next year is going to be hard, but if Clinton can be dull and pragmatic, and operate at a level below the cable TV ideology wars, it's possible to imagine her gathering majorities behind laws that would help people like that guy in Idaho: an infrastructure push, criminal justice reform, a college tuition program, an apprenticeship and skills program, an expanded earned-income tax credit and a bill to secure the border and shift from low-skill to high-skill immigration.

Many of us disagree strongly with many Clinton policies. But any sensible person can distinguish between an effective operating officer and a whirling disaster who is only about himself.

The thing about reality TV is that it isn't actually real. In the real world, the process of driving change is usually boring, remorseless and detail oriented, but the effect on people out there, like the guy in Idaho, can be profound and beautiful.

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