



2018 Elections: What's at Stake?

by Jim Crawford

The US Constitution makes Congress the heart of our national government. Its framers put the most ink and the most governing power into their establishment of the House and Senate in 1787. Having the entire body of Representatives and one-third of Senators stand for election every 24 months puts accountability in the hands of the voters. Our charter presses the demand that we actively and willingly govern ourselves.

How do we honor this obligation? Sadly, our country has very low voter participation. The nation that has fought many wars to establish or preserve democracy around the globe has poor turnout at home—especially in so-called off-year elections. We are being bested by nearly all other electorates. Consequently, the legitimacy of government itself is in crisis here.

The United States cannot function well if the public does not choose representatives who can make effective policy. Is any other country as complex, as fast-moving, and as wonderful?

There is so much work for this generation to do for the next. Education, job training, a balanced and healthy economy, repairing damage to the environment, and securing safer homes and public spaces are common goods that benefit all citizens.

Poll after poll shows nearly unanimous support for policies that improve people's lives.

Right now, policies from Washington and Raleigh harm Chatham's people. The state legislature has curtailed local government's power to serve local needs. This county was essentially forced to accept coal ash, seen its power to slow run-off water and protect streams weakened, and had its judicial system rearranged to suit others. Despite a growing economy, per pupil spending in our community colleges has not even been restored to pre-recession levels. Instead of leaders offering self-serving state amendments, the people deserve investments in those things that will make North Carolina great.

The current White House inherited an expanding economy. Its tariffs and tax cuts will impact us mightily in the coming years.

Lower corporate and upper-end personal income taxes should spur investments. But historically businesses and banks too often invest their windfalls overseas. Sometimes this freed capital spurs speculation bubbles. These economics are uncertain. The federal deficit, for certain, has ballooned this fiscal year. Until it is paid down, there is less money available in each budget to do the public's business, the things we all believe make America great.

How will wild tariffs impact employment? Our industries' product lines are hit in odd ways, because manufacturing is trans-national. The news already carries stories of delayed orders or price spikes for our businesses. Some have forecast port delays and confusion as needed parts will have to pass through customs even as new duties and rules are being imposed. Any disruption in manufacturing will slacken employment. There is no discernible industrial plan informing our current tariff policy. The people deserve to have one. They can vote to get it.

Claims that there is a 'culture war,' that our values no longer mesh, and that this president offers timely or historic leadership in some epic battle are hogwash. Divisiveness for its own sake is not a new thing in our country. Some have made careers out of it. All the while, however, governing and policy must also go forward. Look for the people who are helping the public. Help them by voting. Then our national bout of distemper will pass.

As a people, Americans have been through far more difficult political times and faced tougher problems together. But it took more work and deeper cooperation than we have going right now. We need to stop putting people in office who don't believe that we can improve our lives through our government. Choose leaders who show greater faith in our civic compact.

There is no such thing as an off-year election in our republic. Under a democratic charter, the people get the government they deserve. I think that you deserve better, and that you will vote for better.

Dr. James G. Crawford is County Commissioner, District 3 and former Chairman of Chatham County Commissioners

Trump and the Midterms: What's at Stake?

by Bill Crawford

The subject here is Trump and the midterms, what is at stake? The short answer is, just about everything. Why is that?

Having two large political cohorts competing for supremacy is a recurring theme in our history, what makes things different at the peak of a culture war is that the premises and values held by the two sides are too far apart to find rapprochement outside of the ballot box. In 1986, there would have been a better chance for a few "my esteemed colleagues" on Capitol Hill to hammer out an agreement that would be palatable for all, like the last round of Social Security reform.

In the struggles of this culture war, both political parties are straining to hold together. The more traditional Democrats like Joe Biden and Steny Hoyer are doing their best to find a marriage with the Bernie Sanders wing before it breaks away. The NeverTrumpers and various establishment Republicans (like John Boehner, the late John McCain and Paul Ryan) and their like are trying to find a way to live with Trump. And the President is keeping both parties together, one side because the Democrats all despise him and the Republicans because his base is showing a fierce loyalty to him.

What is at stake here is the directional we have been following since the end of WWII. The gradual growth and acceptance of a larger and more active state. An Executive and Judicial branch that has been growing at the expense of the Legislative. The maturity of a regulative state, it's overreach being regarded as an occasional consequence of a constructive effort to contain the darker side of capitalism. A gradually rising taxation level that still was well below what is the going rate in the European Union. An acceptance of the notion (started in 1945) that in a global economy, we as the big fish should always take the larger hit for the good of everybody else.

The questioning of this has been building for years. However, following an axiom that many conservatives follow along with now—that without Obama, there would be no Trump—a combination of the effects of the 2008 recession and many of the new directions Obama took on as part of his

"transformation of America" served to bring the questions into bolder relief in 2016.

The center of the coalition that elected Trump became convinced that the establishment in Washington D.C. had not been addressing or showing a public concern for what had been happening to them in the heartland after the recession. Trump was tapping into this in ways that even most of his GOP competition in 2016 weren't. This coalition also felt that large swaths of the media and a sizable chunk of the political class (of both parties) were sneering at them. None of this has changed.

For the Democrats, I think they see a direct threat to many things slowly established since 1945 that they hold dear and hope to continue. They see Trump as an outlier that needs to be expunged from the system. I think they see his coalition as an existential threat.

The people who voted for Trump see him as somebody who was sent to Washington to do certain things and they tend to look at him someone has been trying to follow through on what they asked. This is where their loyalty for him comes from. They have a growing list of serious issues with the way our Capitol works, and the culture within it, and they regard his inability to get certain things done (like funding for a border wall) as part of this. They have been growing more fed up about all this for years, but they don't spend anywhere near as much time in the media as their detractors—which is why their first full visibility was on Election Night in 2016. That is why nobody predicted the election results.

So while it would seem on the surface as a referendum on Trump, I say he is the cart, the horse are his supporters. This is a battle between competing values that are too far apart to find a common ground. There will be a few national votes in the next few years, the winner writes history, the losers become the footnotes. Whoever wins in November will have a much easier path to making to writing the history.

If any of the readers have questions about this, feel free to email me at twogenerations@earthlink.net.

Bill Crawford was Republican candidate for Mayor of Pittsboro in 2009 and 2013; Republican candidate for County Commissioner District 2 in 2012

The Forever War

by Barry L. Reece

On March 19, 2003 millions of Americans turned on their TV sets and watched an impressive display of male bravado. They witnessed the first few hours of the "shock and awe" bombardment that was designed to give the U.S. led coalition rapid dominance in the Iraq war. "Operation Iraqi Freedom" was breaking news.

On May 1, 2003 President George W. Bush stood on the deck of the USS Abraham Lincoln and boldly announced the end of combat operations in Iraq. A huge banner behind the President featured a two-word message: Mission Accomplished.

The Iraq war would last nearly nine more years and cost 4474 American lives.

Although U.S. troops exited Iraq on December 18, 2011, our nation continues to spend heavily on "contingency contracting." The United States has overwhelmingly born the burden of Iraq military and reconstruction costs. The defense sector remains a powerful force in politics. Over 1000 lobbyists represent some 400 corporate clients. Massive waste, fraud and abuse by Iraq contractors costs our nation millions of dollars each year. Dwight Eisenhower ended his presidential term warning the nation about the increasing power of the military—industrial complex.

The long-term cost of the Iraq war must take into

consideration care of wounded veterans. At least 30,000 troops have required medical care. Many will need life-time benefits. Health care costs for veterans are projected to increase in the years ahead.

Mark Twain said "Patriotism is supporting your country all the time, and your government when it deserves it." The U.S. has no realistic way out of its commitments to Iraq. Despite the sacrifices of our military personnel, we appear to have no option to the forever war.

Barry Reece is a Chatham resident. He served in the Iowa National Guard and the US Army, and is an active member of Veterans For Peace, Vietnam Veterans Against The War, and Peace Action.