

When it's the wolf who cries 'wolf'

by Julian Sereno

Call it the curse of the cheater. People who cheat — spouses, money managers, politicians — suspect everyone of cheating. It's a logical consequence. Necessarily, someone who cheats must assume that anyone could be cheating also, that it's likely they are. That may assuage guilt but it means neverending suspicion.

That seems to be the case with the North Carolina Republican Party. They have been breaking electoral law at least since 1990, when the Jesse Helms campaign sent out 125,000 postcards to registered voters who were African-American telling them they were not allowed to vote and would be prosecuted for vote fraud if they did. His opponent for the U.S. Senate seat was Harvey Gantt, an African-American.

The Justice Department investigated and filed a complaint. The Helms campaign signed a consent decree to settle it in 1992.

When the Republicans took control of the NC Legislature in 2010 they gerrymandered the state so that they would be assured of a majority for the indefinite future. The gerrymanders are so sophisticated, using ultra modern demographics, that in a state that is roughly half and half Republican and Democrat, Republicans held a veto-proof supermajority in the N.C. Legislature from 2010 until the recent election. They still have majorities in both chambers.

These gerrymanders have been challenged in court and are losing. Two predominately African-American districts were ordered redrawn by the U.S. Supreme Court two years ago. It affirmed an earlier court ruling that the districts diluted the black vote "with surgical precision." But the cases go on forever as they wend their way through the courts, and nothing changes unless the Supremes make a ruling. Although their districts might be illegally drawn, it's still business as usual in the NC Legislature.

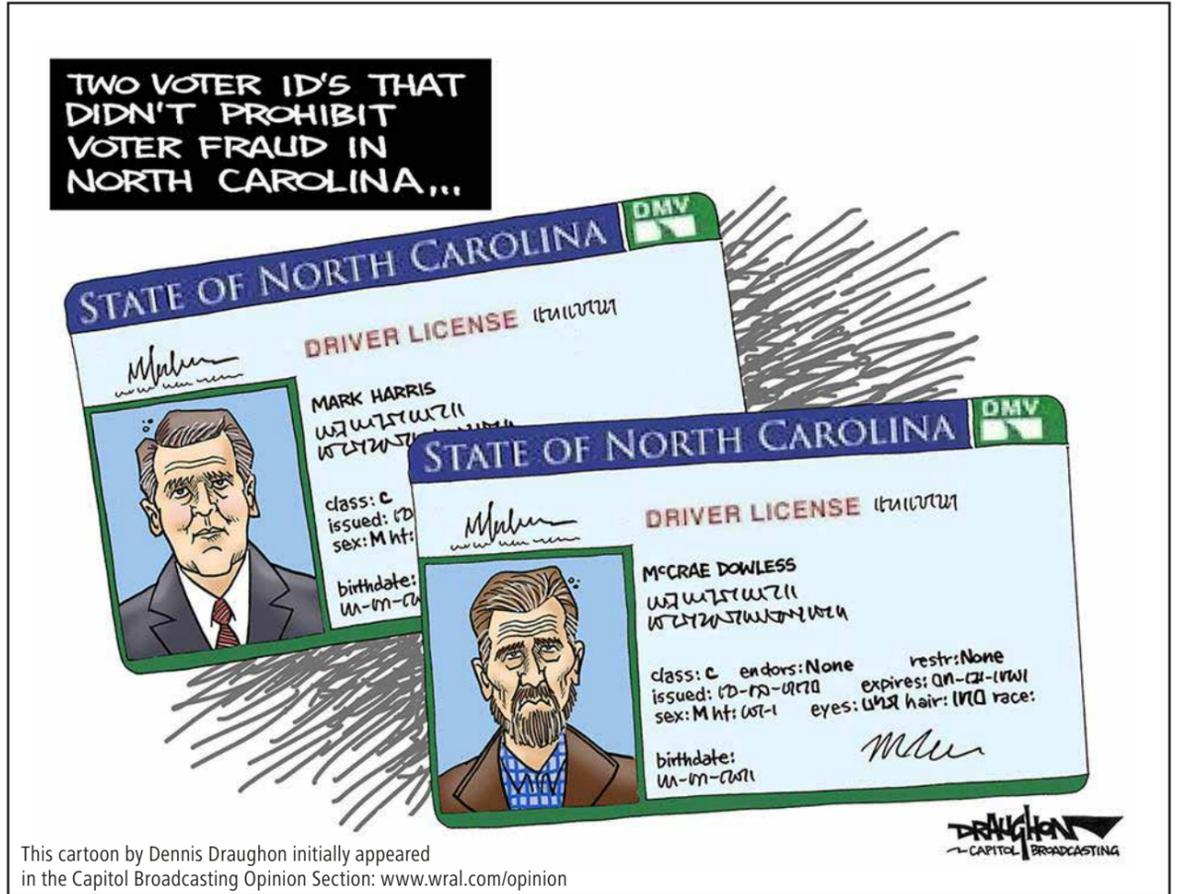
The next thing the NC Republicans did was cry "wolf". They insisted that election fraud was rampant, and that people who were not allowed to vote were voting anyway, because they were not required to produce a photo ID to obtain a ballot. Never mind that there are only a few such cases each election.

That was never the point. The point was to dissuade African-Americans from voting by adding as many deterrents as possible — just like 'Uncle Jesse' did in 1990. The Voter ID law was struck down for its racist intent by the Federal Courts. It passed as an amendment to the NC Constitution during the last election, but was struck down by again by an NC judge because the amendments were placed on the ballot by Representatives and Senators from illegally racially-gerrymandered districts.

Continuing to cry "wolf", former Gov. Pat McCrory vented a few months ago that he had lost his election due to voter fraud — on the part of college and university students.

"In my particular election we had a lot of college students, who were out-of-state college students, vote," McCrory said, according to the Raleigh *News and Observer*. "And they could do it because there was no voter ID which would've showed New Jersey license plates, Pennsylvania license plates, you name it. ... And I couldn't do a thing about it."

McCrory later continued: "The question is where do they actually live? ... If they voted in North Carolina and yet their car is registered elsewhere, they have a driver's license from



This cartoon by Dennis Draughon initially appeared in the Capitol Broadcasting Opinion Section: www.wral.com/opinion

elsewhere, they're breaking the law. And there is no way we can do anything about it."

However, McCrory is wrong about this. "College students may register and vote in the county where they are attending college," says the website of the North Carolina Board of Elections and Ethics Enforcement.

In North Carolina, it is illegal to spread misinformation about people's eligibility to vote. According to state election laws, it is a felony offense for "any person, directly or indirectly, to misrepresent the law to the public through mass mailing or any other means of communication where the intent and the effect is to intimidate or discourage potential voters from exercising their lawful right to vote."

McCrory said he was not intending to spread misinformation.

While NC Republicans were busy denouncing non-existent vote fraud, one of their campaigns was committing it on a scale that would have impressed the Chicago Democratic Machine of yesteryear. Leslie McCrae Dowless Jr., a political operative, and his crew in Bladen and Robeson Counties collected absentee ballots and made sure they were votes for Republican Mark Harris, running for the U.S. Congress in the 9th district.

Harris won by a little more than 900 votes, and demanded to be seated in Congress. So did Robin Hayes and Dallas

Woodhouse, respectively chairman and executive director of the NC Republican Party, calling the fraud trivial, not having any influence on a razor-thin margin of victory — less than 1,000 votes out of 282,717 ballots cast. Harris, pastor of First Baptist Church in Charlotte, lied through his teeth as he proclaimed his innocence, that he knew nothing of the shady dealings of the political operative he hired who harvested the absentee ballots.

When the NC Board of Elections finally met to hold hearing on the fraud, Harris was caught in a lie by his own son, an assistant U.S. Attorney, no less, who had warned him that Dowless was dirty.

Harris wept in courtroom after the testimony and, when he took the stand the next morning, called for a new election. The board agreed, voting unanimously, three Democrats and two Republicans.

Harris will not run again. McCrory won't enter the race. Hayes and Woodhouse have been unusually quiet.

The last redo election was in 2002 for an Illinois State House seat in Chicago. With Republican leadership, North Carolina has beating out Illinois for the dirtiest politics in the country. All the while crying "wolf".

Julian Sereno is editor of Chatham County Line.

The swamp

by Don Lein

One of our esteemed President's campaign promises was to "drain the swamp". While he has made headway on some of his promises to eliminate some red tape/regulations, cut taxes and get a start on building his wall/control immigration, he has had minimal impact on the "deep state" and its operatives. The swamp denizens may change, but the swamp and its control over our lives and our economy continues unabated. What does the future hold? Let's take a look at some of the changes that have resulted from last year's election.

Firstly, we have had a change in the leadership of the House of Representatives. Instead of Paul Ryan being Speaker of the House of Representatives trying valiantly, if not completely successfully, to control his Republican majority, we now have Nancy Pelosi. Nancy is a long-term representative from California, a multi-millionaire — unlike Harry Reid, her millions were made before her government service. She will be remembered as one who fought Trump's border wall and called for open immigration. Yet when trespassers scaled the barricade of her estate and wanted to take up residence, she called law enforcement and had them evicted. Certainly, a woman of principles!! Who does she oversee and what chance does she have of controlling them? Let's take a look at some of her challenges.

The House recently added a billion to our foreign aid to Yemen, adding language pledging to fight Anti-Semitism which was a direct rebuke of two new Congresswomen, Ilhan Omar (MN) and Rashida Tlaib (MI). Ilhan in her remarks about the subject indicated "Its all about the Benjamins" and also used the adjective "hook-nosed". Apparently, Minnesotans are indifferent to this kind of offensive and insensitive language. Not so Chuck Schumer, who said these kinds of characterizations have "no place" in political dialog. Tlaib fought back

indicating that her remarks were being criticized because they came from a "woman of color", which, apparently, is one of the protected species in the swamp. Realistically, it has served Elizabeth Warren well!! In all fairness one should not expect the American public will be as gullible as the Harvard faculty.

The star of stars of the new House of Representatives is Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) from New York. She is an avowed socialist who has done two things of note early in her career. Firstly, she took issue with the Amazon deal which would have placed their second headquarters in Long Island City. She felt New York was giving up too much in the deal — especially in order to lure the richest man in the world to their fair city. Amazon did withdraw and the headline in Times Square said to AOC — "Thanks for nothing". Also, it was suggested that the fact that Amazon was anti-union probably had something to do with her demurral. Apparently, having been a former bartender may have also had something to do with her considered judgment.

Her crowning achievement, however, is the "Green New Deal", in which she would take the courageous steps of eliminating flatulent cows and airplanes, among other measures. Before she pushes that agenda too far, she should consider that California recently abandoned its plan to eliminate in-state air service by providing high speed rail transportation. It was too expensive for even profligate California!!! Sounds like a non-starter to me. It is strange that she labelled it a "New Deal", since the original "New Deal" was an abject failure, prolonging and exacerbating the original depression. FDR did not want to run for a third term because of this failure and was only convinced to do it, because of the looming war in Europe.

Her adherence to socialism is strange, since it also has been

an abject failure — it sounds good, but unfortunately, doesn't work. As Margaret Thatcher noted you ultimately run out of "other people's money". Countries across the globe have tried it with the same outcome — failure. Recent examples in our hemisphere are Cuba and Venezuela — countries with great natural resources who embraced socialism and it bankrupted their economies with dictatorships ensuing. The only area that seemed to escape the detrimental effects of socialism was Scandinavia, where the "Protestant Work Ethic" rules. Fundamental to AOC's philosophy is that everyone should have a basic quality of life, irrespective of their ability or willingness to work. It is in the willingness to work that Scandinavia has differentiated itself from the rest of the countries that have tried Socialism. Incidentally, it has been jokingly pointed out that the groups that best personify the Protestant Work Ethic are the Irish Catholics and Jews. Mitch McConnell, Republican leader of the Senate has suggested that he might just try to have the Senate debate and vote on the "Green New Deal", just to highlight some of the obvious drawbacks of such a plan.

It looks like we will have quite a display of unrealistic idealism and economic naivete mixed with a healthy dose of anti-Semitism in our next Congress. Apparently, some of the discussions/actions in the swamp may rival Saturday Night Live, but unfortunately a great deal of it will be repackaged ideas that have failed in the past. As Santayana, and Euripides and Thucydides, before him, have noted "Those who cannot (or will not) remember (or have not been taught) the past, are condemned to repeat it."

Don Lein is a regular contributor to Chatham County Line. A Chatham resident, he is involved in a variety of civic organizations.

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