

Midterms 2018 — the Good, the Bad, and (mostly) the Ugly

by Julian Sereno

Hallelujah! The midterm elections are finally over. They were ugly, brutish and hideously expensive. They largely went as the polls predicted. So let's consider:

THE GOOD

Voter turnout smashed all kinds of records. Nationally, 49 percent of eligible voters voted, with more than 100 million ballots cast for the first time ever in a midterm election. In North Carolina, more than 52 percent of eligible voters voted, higher than the national average. That's up 8 points since 2014 when the number was 44 percent. Chatham County, once again, topped NC in voter turnout with more than 66 percent — 2/3 of eligible voters casting ballots.

Money didn't buy the election. While it may have bought any number of individual politicians, those with the most money did not necessarily win. They sure spent a lot of it: more than \$5 billion.

Some excellent, highly qualified candidates won election.

THE BAD

Hate was the big money maker this election, crossing party lines. Here's how it works. Political operatives find opponents' words and actions — truthful, taken out of context, or bald-faced lies — and bombard voters with them via emails, robocalls, Facebook posts, TV, radio, and print ads. News sites, many increasingly partisan, cover and amplify them. The messages are well engineered to enrage or terrify audiences into kicking in a few bucks or more, regularly. The pace is relentless. Elections are decided but campaigns are year-round and never-ending. Hate brought in more than \$5 billion this past election.

Hate and fear, its running mate, have led to the polarization of the electorate. Individuals with diverse political beliefs cannot discuss differences because there is no longer a vocabulary to do so. It has all become personal. People live in echo



chambers, associating only with those with shared beliefs. Political affiliation is becoming like religious affiliation was in Europe after the Reformation: religious wars, communal violence, pogroms, the Inquisition.

Nowhere is the loathing more pronounced than among the elected officials themselves. Our country has been built on political compromise, but that has become all but impossible. In our hyper-partisan era, a willingness to compromise on anything is an unforgivable betrayal of principal. Compromise has been replaced by the "zero-sum game" — somebody wins and somebody loses.

Probability dictates that over time, each side will win and each side will lose, in effect making it a lose-lose proposition. Win-win only comes about through compromise.

The hateful atmosphere and the mountains of filthy money it generates has led to the election of crooked scoundrels.

THE UGLY

Where to begin?

Let's start with President Trump. Presiding over the most robust economy in nearly a generation, he barely mentioned it.

Instead of pitching that to the country to help elect Republicans, he stoked fears over a caravan of Central American refugees. These are people driven from home by violence, begging us for help, walking thousands of miles to get a chance for a hearing and a safe harbor.

President Trump presented them as a revolutionary mob, infiltrated with members of ISIS, marching on and preparing to attack our Southern Border. He deployed the military to face the desperate refugees, still weeks away. The deployment, of course, was a \$200 million campaign stunt, paid for by you and me. It would have been cheaper to hire judges to hear the refugees cases.

In North Carolina, Republicans won a whopping 10 out of 13 Congressional seats with a pitiful 50.3 percent of the vote. This, of course, is due to the ginormous gerrymandering undertaken when Republicans won control of the state in 2010. With data from the 2010 census, districts were drawn with precise demographics.

Courts have declared the districts illegal and demanded they be redrawn, Republicans appeal. Slowly it wends its way toward the Supreme Court. The gerrymander remains intact.

But a funny thing happened. Both the North Carolina Senate and House of Representatives lost their Republican supermajorities. Governor Cooper regained his power to veto. Republicans no longer have absolute power in North Carolina. Absolute power corrupts absolutely, according to Lord Acton.

Ugliest of all in this ugly election campaign were campaign messages themselves. Relentlessly ripping opponents, they were dreary, dispiriting and depressing.

This ugly campaign led to the election of some ugly candidates. Make up your own minds which ones they are.

Julian Sereno is editor and publisher of Chatham County Line

It Takes More Than NCAA Championships to be a Champion

by Jeff Davidson

When I moved to the Triangle area, I was eager to partake of the best that both the University of North Carolina and Duke University had to offer. I lived near route 15-501 on the Durham-Chapel Hill border and am equidistant to both campuses (although my mailing address was in Chapel Hill).

Both schools had wonderful campuses, and I enjoyed visiting Duke's magnificent Bell Tower, its Sarah Duke Gardens, hospital complex, East Campus, and nearby Ninth Street, as well as UNC's Dean Smith Center, Bell Tower, Student Union, and libraries. Also, Duke University had just won the NCAA Basketball Championship for the second year in a row when I moved here. I had been a long-time college basketball fan, and I was eager to visit Cameron Indoor Stadium and see Coach K work his magic.

A TALE OF TOW CAMPUSES

As I began to attend games, I noticed distinct differences in the way crowds at the two universities treated the visiting sports teams. Fans at the University of North Carolina, with its spacious Dean Smith Center, showed respect for opposing players. When the teams were announced, UNC fans either applauded or were respectfully silent. During the games, there were few times when I heard abusive language from anyone in the stands. The exception was when someone on an opposing team acted overly aggressive towards a UNC player or committed some similar faux pas.

By contrast, I had a hard time in my own mind justifying the behavior of the people who attended Duke games at Cameron

Indoor Stadium. Cameron Crazies, as they are called, do not act with respect for anyone other than those in a Blue Devil uniform, and I questioned whether they even respect their own team.

Over the years, Duke students have thrown tubes of Clearasil on the floor taunting players from other teams who had acne conditions. They have made specific, purposely hurtful references to players' relatives, grades, and even campus incidents such as a shooting at NC State University.

CONDONED FROM ABOVE

I began to see in the broader sense that "Cameron Crazies" have endured because at some higher level, be it Coach K, the university administration, provost, university president, or board of trustees at least indirectly condoned their behavior. At the start of ACC games, when the announcement comes asking fans to respect the players, coaches, and game officials, Duke fans aren't listening. Neither Dick Vitale nor other announcers have the gumption to speak out on this matter and instead make general observation of about the fans' "spirit" at Cameron.

DOES RIDICULING THE OTHER TEAM SHOW SPIRIT? I DOUBT IT.

For a while, I attended a couple of Duke games each season, usually during the holidays when most students were gone and the tickets were easier to come by. Enough students were on hand to continue the antics. Trying my best to be objective, I began observing them with something akin to curious detachment. I reasoned that, of course, every home team crowd loves to win

and loves to celebrate the victory as their team pulls ahead.

With Duke, however, there's a taunting, a "hazing" ritual, that goes beyond anything I've seen elsewhere, and I've had the opportunity to watch 20 to 25 college basketball teams in 10 or 12 different states.

NOT SPIRIT: CONTEMPT

Duke "crazies" view opposing team players, especially those from Carolina and NC State, with outright contempt. The antics of the Cameron Crazies, as opposed to being clever, are obnoxious. They smack of the elitism that is part and parcel of the Duke campus mentality. Duke prides itself on being a high-class institution and, in many quarters, it bills itself as the "Harvard of the South." Yet, go to Harvard, view its institutions and sports and the way their students and fans interact with others, and you'll see they bear no similarity to Duke whatsoever.

Coach K has lamented that Duke is not a favorite among fans (outside of Duke University). Could it be that word of Duke's utter contempt for all that is non-Duke is spreading? Yes, I was excited when I moved to the Triangle. I wanted to embrace both universities and all they had to offer. Now, after many years in the area, I want nothing to do with Duke.

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Global Defense Spending

Many years ago members of congress and Pentagon leaders decided the United States should become the world's police force. Today the United States maintains nearly 800 military bases in 70 countries and territories abroad. By contrast Britain, France, and Russia have about 30 foreign bases combined. The United States spends more on defense than the next seven countries (China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, India, France, United Kingdom and France) combined. The 2019 defense budget is \$716 billion.

The U.S. military is outrageously expensive and yet is

poorly tailored to some actual threats. Former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates provides us with one example. He states that the U.S. operates 11 aircraft carriers, all nuclear powered. Some nations have one carrier, but many others have none. The newest U.S carrier, USS Gerald R. Ford, is the most expensive warship in U.S. history. The base price of this carrier is \$12.9 billion. Add the cost of the air wing (75 aircraft), a crew complement of 6,700 sailors, combat ships that support the carrier and the bill for operating the carrier is about \$2.5 million a day.

The biggest winners in the development of major military projects are the country's large defense contractors such as Northrop Grumman, Lockheed Martin, Boeing, and General Dynamics. These firms spend millions of dollars each year lobbying congress. The over-whelming power that the U.S weapons industry has over our political and economic system helps explain why infrastructure programs are virtually ignored. Can we still afford to be the world's policeman?

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Stopping the Opioid Crisis Starting at Home

The national opioid epidemic could hit much closer to home than you might think. Countless individuals have prescription drugs in their medicine cabinets, leftover from a long-ago dental surgery or a pesky knee injury. While you might not think twice about that half-empty vial of painkillers or the expired bottle of codeine cough syrup sitting on the bathroom shelf, those powerful medicines can often serve as the gateway to prescription drug abuse.

Studies consistently demonstrate that a majority of abused prescription drugs are not obtained from dealers on the streets, but rather from family and friends — often without their knowledge. And, research has shown that a majority of children aged 12 to 17 who illegally obtain prescription drugs do so from a parent, friend, or relative's medicine cabinet.

As a REALTOR®, I am constantly reminding my clients to secure or dispose of their prescription medications prior to opening their homes for public showings. It's a small step — but an important step, nonetheless — in helping curb the abuse of prescription drugs in the Triangle.

In 2016, 705 million opioid pills were prescribed in North Carolina — and many of those pills have yet to be consumed. This is why your local Realtor Association has partnered with

the DEA and the local law enforcement agencies to host National Prescription Takeback Day.

While participating in the National Prescription Takeback Day is one part of the solution, this is an issue that demands our attention every day of the year. Remember, if you receive a prescription medication, don't share it with anyone, even friends and family members. And, always keep your prescription drugs, particularly opioids, in a protected location.

On average, four North Carolinians die from a medication or drug overdose every day. Don't let your unused medications create a prescription for disaster — responsibly dispose of your prescription drugs during National Prescription Takeback Day each year during the month's of October and April. Together, we can create fewer opportunities for drug abuse in our community, and we can promote safer home environments throughout the Triangle. That's a cause we can all get behind.

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