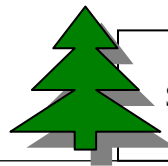
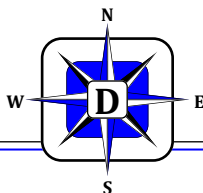


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P.O. Box 30714 Raleigh, NC 27622
 johndavis@johndavisconsulting.com
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What's More Important in Our Leaders, Character or Caring?

“For the Integrity of the N.C. Senate, Such As It Is”

John N. Davis, President

*John Davis Political Report is an in-depth summary of the political trends impacting North Carolina politics. Subscriptions for the 52 weekly reports through the 2010 elections are only \$500. Make checks payable to John Davis Consulting, EIN 26-3064837, and mail to P.O. Box 30714, Raleigh, NC 27622. Davis has followed NC politics for 24 years, serving as President of NCFREE, a political research group, where he was Editor of the *Almanac of North Carolina Politics*. Davis specializes in analyzing political trends, candidates and campaigns.*

“For the good of his district and the integrity of the N.C. Senate, *such as it is*, he [Sen. R.C. Soles, Permanent Senate Democratic Caucus Chair] should throw in the towel while he has a chance to leave on his own terms.”¹

Wilmington Star-News Editorial, December 12, 2009

While reading the Wilmington Star-News editorial this past Saturday, calling for the resignation of Sen. R.C. Soles, Permanent Chair of the Democratic Caucus, after a Columbus County grand jury requested an indictment for assault with a deadly weapon, I was struck by the characterization of the *integrity of the North Carolina Senate* with the phrase, “*such as it is*.”

*“Soles’ reputation – always a little suspect since his first indictment in the Colcor investigation of corruption in his home county – has been tarnished to the point that he can no longer represent his constituents effectively or with honor. He turns 75 this month. For the good of his district and the integrity of the N.C. Senate, **such as it is**, he should throw in the towel while he has a chance to leave on his own terms.”*

Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely.² Most of the corrupting influence of power is legal, like the disregard for ethical conduct. A great example is the decision of the Senate to keep Sen. R.C. Soles on as Permanent Chair of the Senate Democratic Caucus despite years of questionable behavior, *the kind of behavior that would have led to the immediate firing of the chair of any other board or committee, public or private*. Another example is the “no bid” deals between state agencies and Sen. Tony Rand’s company Law Enforcement Associates.

¹ <http://www.starnewsonline.com/article/20091212/ARTICLES/912119961/1108/OPINION?Title=Editorial-Soles-has-met-his-term-limit>

² Lord Acton, 1834-1902, British historian, in a letter to Bishop Mandell Creighton in 1887.

The “integrity of the NC Senate, such as it is,” has been corrupted by the disregard for ethical conduct by its leaders. But is character all that important? Is it more important than caring?

No doubt, Senate President Pro Tempore Marc Basnight has had a remarkable 17-year run as the leader of the Senate, arguably accomplishing more than any other Senator in state history. No one will ever be able to deny that he and his loyal inner circle, including R.C. Soles and Tony Rand, have done a whole lot of good for a whole lot of people. They care deeply about the Senate, the state and its people ... especially Basnight. Basnight personifies the servant leader of the Methodist tradition. He always wants to know what he can do for you. However ...

Crabtree Fever Epidemic in the N.C. Senate

Somewhere along the way the Senate Democratic leadership became stricken with a fatal case of Crabtree fever. Crabtree fever is like Potomac fever, caused by elected officials who let their power go to their heads. The only difference between Potomac fever and Crabtree fever is that one is named for a river that flows through the nation’s capitol and the other is named for a creek that flows through Raleigh.

The biggest symptom of Crabtree fever is an unsightly rash ... of bad decisions. Crabtree fever distorts your perception of how immune you are. It causes lawmakers to throw their weight around and run over anyone who gets in their way; a fever that can be easily diagnosed by the degree of hubris of those afflicted. Crabtree fever turns otherwise decent leaders into bullies, bullies who are so intimidating that even the most powerful corporate leaders, like the CEOs of public utilities and insurance companies, cower like 90-pound weaklings; abandoning the greater good of small and medium-sized businesses just to ensure that they don’t upset the bullies.

Sadly, Crabtree fever also makes leaders think that they are above the law. Yesterday, a second former official of Sen. Tony Rand’s security gear company LEA said that Rand tried to talk him into a scheme to manipulate the company’s stock. The FBI and the Securities and Exchange Commission are now investigating the allegations of insider trading. When you are so powerful, like Senate Rules Committee Chair Tony Rand, that you think it’s OK to peddle stock in a company where you serve as chairman of the board to state agency heads, and then to have those same agencies buy equipment from that company via no-bid contracts, you have a fatal case of Crabtree fever.

Sen. R.C. Soles, Permanent Chairman of the Senate Democratic Caucus, continues to enjoy the support of the Senate leadership despite ***40 emergency calls to Soles’ Tabor City home and law office in the past four years*** involving a shooting, attempted burglary, assaults, breaking and entering, young men high on drugs stalking Soles, loud cursing, screaming, and shots being fired.³ A house Soles purchased for a teenage boy was burned by an arsonist. Soles’ teenage friend with the burned house was caught driving without a license and was arrested for fleeing police in a high-speed chase in the Corvette Soles bought for him. Soles, 74 years-old, also bought the 17-year-old a pair of four-wheelers and provided him with a generous allowance.

³ StarNews ONLINE, “Teen with ties to Sen. R.C. Soles back in jail,” Sept. 15, 2009, by Shelby Sebens

The teenager's sister told a reporter for WWAY, the ABC News affiliate in Wilmington, "He's [Soles] threatened his life many times."⁴ Soles beat charges of conspiracy, vote-buying and perjury in back in 1983. Perhaps, with the help of a good criminal defense attorney, he will beat these charges too. What he cannot beat is the stain he has made on the integrity of the Senate.

Kharakter Found to Cure Crabtree Fever Epidemic

According to Safire's Political Dictionary, the word character comes from the ancient Greek word "kharakter," the word used thousands of years ago for 'engraving tool.' Over the centuries its meaning has been extended to include the mark a person makes to distinguish themselves.⁵

Character education is now a mandated curriculum in public schools throughout the nation. In 1993, the Wake County Public School System decided to teach character traits. The controversial issues associated with character education at the time were "which character traits do you teach" and "who decides." Wake County did something really smart. They turned to the parents of public school children for advice, using an opinion survey. A total of 28,198 surveys were returned by parents. The character trait that got the highest percent recommendation from parents was Respect, followed by Kindness (caring), Responsibility, Courage, Good Judgment, Integrity, Self-Discipline, and Perseverance. Those eight character traits are still taught today.

The great lesson to learn from character education is that all of the traits are important. That's the lesson that our political leaders need to dwell on ... national and state, Democrats and Republicans. However, no one can deny the good accomplished by Sen. Marc Basnight. He does care about the state and its people. So, what's more important, his character or his caring?

In 1996, when U.S. Sen. Bob Dole was the Republican nominee running against President Bill Clinton, ABC News conducted a national poll that examined the importance of character and caring. The question was asked, "Who has the greatest strength of personal character?" Bob Dole won on the issue of character by a 2-to-1 margin. The next question was, "Who cares more about people like you?" Bill Clinton won on the issue of caring by a 2-to-1 margin. The final question was, "What's more important, character or caring?" Caring won by a 2-to-1 margin.

The great political danger for Republicans in North Carolina is that they too will catch a fatal case of Crabtree fever by thinking that the voters will choose them to lead just because the Democrats have character problems. For those throughout this state struggling with the hardships brought on by this economy, there is no greater character problem than the lack of caring. Perhaps the leaders of both parties need a refresher course in character education.

⁴ <http://www.wwaytv3.com/node/17411>

⁵ Safire's Political Dictionary, Oxford University Press, 2008