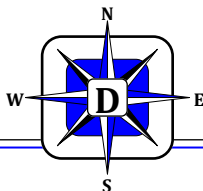




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## Key Predictors Foretelling North Carolina's 2010 Elections

### The Republican, the Democrat and the Drowning Man

**John N. Davis, President**

*John Davis Political Report is an in-depth summary of the political trends impacting North Carolina politics. Premium 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.*

#### The Republican, the Democrat and the Drowning Man

*There was a drowning man, 50 feet from shore. A 50 foot rope lay on the beach. A Republican came along and seeing the man struggling threw him 25 feet of rope and said, "If you'll swim half way I'll pull you on in." A Democrat came along and seeing the man struggling threw him 50 feet of rope, then dropped the rope and went off to do another good deed. The man drowned.*

As we begin the 2010 election year, all indicators are pointing favorably towards Republicans. We saw in Virginia and New Jersey last year that President Obama's base is a mile wide and an inch deep. They didn't vote. Obama's liberal notions are beginning to raise doubts about his leadership in a nation where 8 out of 10 voters are either conservative or moderate.<sup>1</sup> In our state, Democrats are rocked by scandal, a budget crisis and the fall of the Basnight/Rand Empire.

However, when the dust settles after the 2010 elections, if all NC Republicans have to offer voters is, "We're not the other guys ... those corrupt tax and spend liberal Democrats," they will not win either chamber of the NC General Assembly. Our problems are too great. Our fears are grounded in too many stories of family, friends and neighbors struggling to manage a catastrophic loss of wealth, income, jobs, homes, and financial security.

Karl Rove, architect of the two successful campaigns of former President George W. Bush, had some sage advice for Republicans in his *New Year's Resolutions for Washington* published in the Wall Street Journal. "It won't be enough to surf voter dissatisfaction with Mr. Obama and Democrats," he wrote, "Voters will want to know what Republican candidates would do."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Gallup Poll, *Conservatives Finish 2009 as No. 1 Ideological Group*, January 7, 2010; www.gallup.com

<sup>2</sup> Wall Street Journal, Dec. 30, 2009, Op-ed by Karl Rove

### Implications of the Fall of the Basnight/Rand Empire

The fall of the Basnight/Rand Empire implies three things: 1. Less money for Senate Democrats and more money for Republicans; 2. Disruptiveness of a leadership shakeup; 3. An estrangement with Progressive Businesses threatened by an era of liberal dominance in the NC Senate.

Truth be told, the Basnight/Rand Empire fell to a palace coup led by liberal urban lawyers.<sup>3</sup> The divisive issue before the Senate Democratic caucus was the *Racial Justice Act*, legislation intended to ensure that the race of a defendant in a death penalty case is never a factor in determining guilt or punishment.

A half-dozen or so senate leaders were opposed to the bill, including Senators Basnight and Rand. The majority of the Senate Democrats favored the bill, especially the African-American members. The caucus majority, led by Sen. Martin Nesbitt (D-Buncombe) and Sen. Dan Blue (D-Wake), issued an ultimatum to the leadership: support the Racial Justice Act or else. As with all who rule with autocratic arrogance, the day came when their subjects refused to be pushed around anymore. Thus, the coup succeeded and the Basnight/Rand Empire fell.

Rand, humiliated in defeat, quit. Ironically, Rand began his service in a new role as Chairman of the state Post-Release Supervision and Parole Commission this week even as he faces possible criminal investigations involving insider trading at his high-tech security equipment company, Law Enforcement Associates (LEA) -- a company that did business with the state without competitive bids.<sup>4</sup>

The days of Senate Democrats outspending Senate Republicans five to one are over. Sen. Nesbitt, elected Majority Leader after Rand's departure, will not be able to raise nearly the money that his predecessor raised. Granted, there will be many gestures of appreciation for his new-found influence ... but the gestures won't be in the amounts that Rand received. Additionally, there will be many gestures of appreciation for the new-found potential of Republicans. Republicans will receive more financial support this year as state and federal polls and pundits tout their likely success in races throughout the nation as voters shift to the right.

#### Are Liberal Democrats Forcing Business Progressives to Coalesce with Republicans?

Upon Rand's departure, Sen. Nesbitt was elected Majority Leader. Who will likely be the new President Pro Tempore when Basnight decides to hang it up? A likely choice is Sen. Dan Blue.

Progressive is one thing; liberal is another. The coalition of Democrats and Business Progressives in North Carolina, a unique paring that has distinguished us from the rest of the South for decades, will begin to unravel this election cycle as the threat of insurgent liberal Democrats in Washington and Raleigh push business to coalesce with Republicans.

The only political option Democrats are offering business is: Liberal leadership of the North Carolina Senate and House, backed by a liberal majority in their caucuses, with a liberal

<sup>3</sup> See John Davis Political Report, Vol 2, No. 8, Liberal Insurgents End Sen. Basnight's Historic Era of Power

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/opinion/story/1117098.html>

President in the White House, backed by a liberal US Congress. If for no other reason than survival, business must help Republicans win at least one chamber in Washington and Raleigh.

The best hope for long-term political stability for the North Carolina business community is a commitment to work together to maintain a base of business owners and managers in both caucuses. They must be about the business of recruiting and helping elect business people ... Democratic business people in Democratic districts, Republican business people in Republican districts, and African American business people in majority-minority districts.

### Why Has Business Been So Reluctant to Coalesce with Republicans?

But why has business been so reluctant to coalesce with Republicans? I discovered the answer to that question in 1986 following my first statewide tour of regional briefings as head of NCFREE.

I had initiated the conducting of straw polls at NCFREE regional political briefings, using the time honored secret ballot, just to see where everyone stood on candidates to back in each legislative race. In half a dozen cases that first year, Republicans with solid business support records received very low support on the straw poll ballots from local business leaders. It made no sense. I was certain that we had made a tabulation error.

After checking and double checking and re-tabulating the ballots, the low scores for those half dozen business-friendly Republicans kept coming up correctly. Following the tour, I shared the confounding straw poll results with several long-time political insiders. That's when I learned that the common denominator among those business-friendly Republicans with lousy straw poll scores was their preoccupation with a right-wing religious and/or socially conservative agenda.

Over the next 20 years, it became very apparent that although North Carolina business people do not have a personal problem with religion or social conservatism, with many supporting that agenda privately, they simply believe that the primary responsibility of elected officials is to run the government as efficiently and effectively as possible, addressing the fundamental needs of the state. In the mind of many North Carolina business people, there is a disconnect between effective governmental leadership and a preoccupation with a social agenda.

As I said at the outset, when the dust settles after the 2010 elections, if all NC Republicans have to offer is, "We're not the other guys ... those corrupt tax and spend liberal Democrats," they will not win either chamber of the NC General Assembly. Our problems are too great.

If I am out of work, living on unemployment, can't afford health insurance, can't afford to keep my kids in college, can't afford to buy my family Christmas gifts ... don't come to my door asking for my vote based on your position on abortion. If my wife is sick and I can't afford to take her to a doctor, and my daughter lost her job and I can't afford to help her pay her rent ... don't come to my door asking for my vote based on your position on same-sex marriage.

Karl Rove is right. "It won't be enough to surf voter dissatisfaction with Mr. Obama and Democrats. Voters will want to know what Republican candidates would do."