

OPINION

Suppressing the Vote and Stealing Ballots

The real truth about 'voter fraud'

BY LESLIE WATSON MALACHI



For years, Republicans in North Carolina have tried to roll back voter rights in the interest of "preventing fraud."

But now, one of their own — Republican Mark Harris in the state's 9th congressional district — stands credibly accused of paying a consultant who may have stolen or altered absentee ballots cast for his opponent. Officials have refused to certify the vote.

As we press for accountability, it's important that we also seek moral and factual clarity about voting more generally.

In the month after the November elections, claims of so-called "voter fraud" seem to have reached a dizzying new level. Some politicians have even implied that counting votes equates to stealing an election.

But counting every vote in any election is a legal and moral obligation. On the other hand, any attempt to secretly steal ballots

— like in Bladen County, North Carolina, where residents reported strangers coming to their door and demanding their ballots — isn't just shameless.

It's also illegal.

Those who perpetrated this scheme in Bladen County must be held accountable. As importantly, these crimes must not be used to justify the kind of racially discriminatory voting restrictions that some Republican legislators have pushed in the name of preventing "voter fraud."

Most veteran voters know, and every first-time voter must learn, that the Voting Rights Act was one of the great victories of the civil rights movement. In addition to protecting voters who'd been brutalized and barricaded from the ballot box, the law served as a national affirmation of a clear moral truth: It's wrong to keep people from exercising their right to vote.

Tragically, attempts to keep political power away from African Americans and other groups endure. When arch-conservatives on the Supreme Court gut-

ted one of the most important protections in the Voting Rights Act in 2013, legislators across the old Confederacy enacted new voting restrictions and drew new voting districts.

These more recent voter suppression laws have been described by a federal court as "targeting African Americans with almost surgical precision."

When those who defend voter suppression laws refuse to acknowledge that those laws are designed to influence election outcomes by preventing people from voting, we must be democracy's moral compass.

And when they say restrictive voter ID laws and other barriers to the ballot are necessary to stop "voter fraud," we must call it what it is — voter suppression. The kind of "fraud" they talk about — someone voting under another person's name or voting when they're not legally eligible to do so — almost never happens.

Every vote matters, and every eligible vote should always be counted. That's how we know who won.

To suggest that black voters and Democrats are somehow stealing elections through "voter fraud" is to suggest that

there's something sinister about taking the time needed to count each and every vote, as President Trump and others claimed during ballot counts in Florida, Georgia, and Arizona.

Unfortunately, some have suggested that the delayed certification in North Carolina is somehow a sign that Democrats want to "try and steal an election" there, too — even when available evidence suggests that, if anything, it was supporters of the Republicans who tried to steal the election.

What is stealing an election is keeping people from voting.

Regardless of political affiliation, our public officials must embrace these truths. As the late Senator Edward Kennedy once said, "For all those whose cares have been our concern, the work goes on, the cause endures, the hope still lives, and the dream shall never die."

So let us press on for morality in our processes and unburdened participation in our democracy — not just for a few, but for all.

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Ring in New Year with Focus on Success

This year, I'm cataloging what's going right.

BY JILL RICHARDSON

Usually, this time of year, my mind turns to New Year's resolutions. What longstanding bad habits of my past will the new and improved me shed in the year to come?



In the 1990s, I had several resolutions for giving up various junk foods in the new year. Each year I'd pick a new food — ideally something I didn't like all that much but ate anyway — and gave it up for the year, or longer.

Then around 1998 I had a new idea: I'd give up women's fashion magazines. I'd been reading them since my mom got me a Teen magazine when I was in fourth grade.

When they came in the mail each month, I'd hurry up to my room like Charlie Bucket with a Wonka bar, as eager as if my magazine contained a golden ticket. The articles in these magazines never change: How to lose weight, attract a man (or please the man you've got), buy the right clothes and

put on makeup.

Back then, I thought my distaste for makeup and lack of interest in men were personal flaws to be corrected. If I could only just try hard enough, I'd like both of them. I had no idea one could have a happy future as a chapstick-wearing lesbian, or that my life would improve dramatically as soon as I accepted that that's who I was.

But what really put me off the magazines was the part about them that I did like: the weight loss tips and the clothes. For maybe a day or two when I got each magazine, I'd do all of the exercises, try to follow the diet, and fantasize about all of the new clothes I would buy so that I could remake myself into someone I liked — and someone other people liked too.

It took me another decade to work out that the path to loving myself involved therapy and mindfulness, not shopping and diets.

In that moment, I realized that reading those magazines made me less happy with myself I'd been ludicrously promising myself that if I just spent thousands of dollars I didn't have on the products featured in them, I could be as pretty, popular, and successful as the models and celebrities on the glossy pages appeared to be.

The magazines sold me consumerism and

bad self esteem.

For a few years in the 2000s, I made resolutions to do things like ride my bike and then didn't. Finally, around 2012 and 2013, my resolutions turned into to-do lists. I began making a list of what I hoped to accomplish in the new year, and then realized that I might as well start getting it done and crossing items off the list even before January 1.

This year, I've got a new plan yet again. Rather than focusing on our failures, why not focus on our successes? I'm coming off an absolutely epic year in my personal life. I've accomplished more that I'm proud of in 2018 than in any other year I've been alive. Making a list of my many shortcomings seems a lousy way to celebrate it.

When I feel good about myself, I'm more productive. When I focus on the long list of things I need to do, I shut down.

If you include introspection in your end of year traditions, please join me. In addition to (or instead of) resolutions for the New Year, take stock of your proudest accomplishments of the past year and pat yourself on the back.

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