

We Must Demand Public Service, Not Lip Service

By Barbara Altman

After a hard-fought primary, Democratic candidates for all offices but President have been nominated. We 10th District voters know who will be running against Bob Dold in the House and Mark Kirk in the Senate. As those of us who supported Democratic primary candidates who did not prevail start working our way through the stages of mourning, I offer two very recent reminders of why we, as Democrats, must unite behind our candidates.

Our Democratic candidates share our core belief that government must work for all the people, not just the well-off and powerful. And because we believe that government must work, period, we reject the obstructionism and refusal to compromise that has become the hallmark of today's Republican Party.

Two otherwise unrelated current events, the ongoing public health emergency in Flint,



Michigan, and the President's effort to fill the Supreme Court vacancy created by the death of Antonin Scalia, illustrate for me the shameful consequences of current Republican ideology.

Flint, Michigan: Republicans Create a Public Health Crisis and Blame the EPA

Republican Governor Rick Snyder of Michigan, like our own Governor Bruce Rauner, captured office by promising to run government "like a

continued on page 7

In This Issue:	
Public Service, Not Lip Service	1
Post-primary Wrap-up.....	1
Congress Watch.....	2
Volunteer of the Month	3
Poetry Prose Awards...4	
Schneider	7
Duckworth	7
Trump Campaign.....	8
Another Religious Liberty Law	9

For information or to volunteer, email us at newsletter@tenthdems.org, call us at 847-266-VOTE (8683), or write to *Tenth News*, P.O. Box 523, Deerfield, IL 60015. Please visit our website at www.tenthdems.org and like/follow us on Facebook and Twitter.

Editor: Barbara Altman

Editorial Staff: Lauren Beth Gash, Eric Herman, Adrienne Kirshbaum, Ronald Schwartz, Steve Sheffey, Allan Sperling

Contributors: Barbara Altman, Bonnie Berger-Neel, Eleonora di Liscia, Steven Gan, Eric Herman, Mark Rosenberg, M.D., Laurence D. Schiller

Design: Mike del Rosario

Distribution: Roger Baron, Ronald Schwartz

The opinions expressed are those of the writers, and not necessarily endorsed by Tenth Dems



Tenth News

www.tenthdems.org

April 2016 Illinois Tenth Congressional District Democrats Newsletter Volume 13, Edition 4

Post-Primary Wrap-Up: The 10th District's Democratic Candidates in the November 2016 Election

We now know that Tammy Duckworth and Brad Schneider are the Democratic candidates for the Senate and the House in the 10th Congressional District, and soon we'll know whether Hillary Clinton or Bernie Sanders will be the Democratic presidential nominee. Then the fall campaigns will be underway.

It's imperative that we support our Democratic candidates from the top to the bottom of the ballot. Today's state legislator may be tomorrow's governor; today's county board member may be tomorrow's Member of Congress.

Following is a list of our candidates, statewide and locally, throughout the 10th District. In the coming months, look for articles that will provide deeper insight into these Democrats, their records, the issues they are running on, and the challenges they face in the fall and beyond.

continued on page 5

Statewide

Senator

Tammy Duckworth is running against incumbent Republican Mark Kirk.



Illinois Comptroller

Susanna Mendoza is running against the Republican Gov. Rauner appointed following the death of Republican Judy Baar Topinka.



10th District - Districtwide

Member of Congress

Brad Schneider is running against incumbent Republican Bob Dold.



Poetry/Prose Awards Night April 21!
Emcees named; details on page 4.

CONGRESS WATCH:

PARTY MATTERS – A VOTE FOR KIRK AND DOLD IS A VOTE FOR McCONNELL AND RYAN

By Laurence D. Schiller

History will mark the 114th Congress as one of the worst ever. As members of the party of obstruction, Mark Kirk and Bob Dold bear the responsibility of caucusing with, and voting for, the obstructionist and regressive leadership of this Congress.

This Republican-led 114th Congress has been the most obstructionist since the 35th Congress of 1858-60, which collapsed into secession and civil war. Republicans have refused to pass a proper budget, attacked a woman's right to choose, failed to enact immigration reform, played fast and loose with the debt ceiling, hurting America's bond rating, undermined the President's ability to conduct foreign policy, opposed the right of LGBTQ people to be full citizens, and generally ignored the Constitution while hypocritically wrapping themselves in it.



In the latest Senate outrage, literally minutes after President Barack Obama announced his nomination of Judge Merrick Garland to fill the Supreme Court vacancy left by the death of Justice Antonin Scalia, Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) stated he would “not meet with Garland” and that the seat should remain empty “until we have a new President.” Ignoring the fact that the Constitution dictates that the President “shall” nominate and the Senate “shall” consider that nomination, the GOP leadership has apparently decided that a President doesn't actually get to do his job in an election year if he can't run for reelection.

Clearly, the GOP leaders feel that they don't have to do their jobs either. McConnell's pathetically weak claim that the American people should have a “voice” in the nomination conveniently ignores the fact that the American people already had their voice when they elected Barack Obama to a second term with a solid majority. The hypocrisy of McConnell and Senate Judiciary Chair Senator Chuck Grassley (R-IA) is even more striking in light of Right Wing Senator Orrin Hatch's (R-UT) 2010 statement describing Judge Garland as a “consensus nominee,” saying that there was “no question” that he would win Senate confirmation with bipartisan support. McConnell's refusal to even meet Garland now that he has been nominated is an outrageous abuse of power, typical of a leadership that has allowed a complete shutdown of the government rather than do its job and work with the President.

Meanwhile, for the first time in history, Speaker of the House Paul Ryan (R-WI), has shepherded a resolution through the House (H. Res. 649) that would permit the House to file a brief before the Supreme Court in support of a case challenging President Obama's immigration policies. Rather than actually pass immigration reform legislation, Republicans prefer to lend support to the plaintiff in a court case aimed at deporting millions of people and splitting up law-abiding and tax-paying families.

No surprise that the two leading Republican presidential candidates are Ted Cruz, the most intransigent of the obstructionist, anti-compromise wing of the party, and Donald Trump, who believes in only one institution—Donald Trump. Nor it is a surprise that so many of these candidates' supporters are racist and xenophobic, since those are the folks the GOP has appealed to since the day Richard Nixon inaugurated the Republican “Southern strategy.”

All of which is to say, as much as Kirk and Dold would want us to believe otherwise, party matters. They can't vote for the Republican leadership of the House and Senate and then pretend that they don't somehow belong to the Republican Party and have a direct responsibility for the obstructionist actions of the leadership they chose.

Mark Kirk has already indicated that he would support the nominee of his party, including Trump. Regardless of what he says now, Dold would have to do the same if he wants to receive campaign funding and other support from the Republican Party in the general election. Imagine what the Supreme Court would look like if a Trump or Cruz nominee filled the current vacancy!

If we voters in the 10th Congressional District do not agree with the policies of Trump or Cruz or Ryan or McConnell, then how could we vote for their representatives, as Kirk and Dold most assuredly are? Party matters, and a vote for Kirk or Dold constitutes a vote for the lunacies that pass for policy positions in the party they represent.

Whatever they say, the harsh fact is that Mark Kirk and Bob Dold have voted for McConnell and Ryan to lead the Congress. No matter how moderate they claim to be, they HAVE FAILED to move their party to the center and, in fact, have facilitated its move to the radical racist right by voting for the very obstructionist leadership that is in place.

Kirk and Dold are part of the problem, not part of the solution.



Volunteer Of The Month: Laurie Schiller

By Eleonora di Liscia

After 9/11, Tenth Dems volunteer Laurence Schiller, who goes by Laurie, was one angry Democrat. But he channeled that anger into something productive—writing letters to the editor. The leaders at Tenth Dems took note.

“When Dan Seals was running, I wrote a couple letters to the editor of the *Deerfield Review*. Then Brad Schneider ran against Bob Dold, and again I wrote some letters to the editor. Apparently notice was taken of those. I got this email from someone at Tenth Dems who asked if I would be interested in blogging on our website,” he said.

Laurie started blogging for Tenth Dems in 2012. When the election was over, he stopped for a while, but then started again in 2014.

“I emailed them, ‘Is my password still good? Can I blog again?’ After that election was done, I stopped again, and then last spring I got a call from Barbara Altman saying ‘Hey, you did this blogging, and would you be interested in doing something on a regular basis? She was looking for someone to write Congress Watch,” Laurie explained.

Laurie has been writing the Congress Watch column since the spring of 2015. He also serves on the communications committee and has helped with press releases and caucus watch events.

“Doing this, I feel I’m doing something that’s helpful, not just bitching and whining. And while I realize the newsletter goes to people who sign up for it so we’re pretty much preaching to the choir, nevertheless, people read that stuff, and people in the middle read that stuff, and hopefully, we can make a difference,” he said.

Laurie is currently the Head Fencing Coach at Northwestern University. He is planning to retire at the end of this season with 1,261 career wins, two national coach of the year awards, and 10 conference coach of the year awards, having become the winningest coach in Northwestern history and the second winningest fencing coach in NCAA history. He has coached 33 All-American fencers and this year his team won the Midwest Fencing Conference.

He expects to be more involved with Tenth Dems after his upcoming retirement.

Laurie grew up as a committed Democrat with a family history of activism.

“My Dad grew up as a Brooklyn Jewish kid. He thought FDR was the best President ever. I have a letter from my dad in Germany, when it was announced to the troops that Roosevelt had died, about how this man was the best president we ever had,” Laurie said.

Laurie’s father went back to school on the GI bill and got a Ph.D. in African History. Laurie was 14 at the time.

“I was pretty aware of these issues as a kid. We did civil rights stuff in the ‘60s. My brother actually registered voters in Alabama in 1963. He was 16. I was too young. I remember marching in a huge civil rights demonstration in Manhattan in 1964. My Dad marched. They had a bunch of professor-types, and he wore an academic gown. The news media picks up on this kind of stuff. But my father was always very active. He was active in the Democratic Party in Nassau, Long Island. Kind of like what I’m doing. So I have a background with this sort of stuff,” Laurie said.

Laurie himself worked in politics until he went to grad school. He ran the McGovern headquarters on Long Island before coming to



Northwestern for graduate studies the fall of 1972. Then he put up McGovern signs around Northwestern.

After graduate school, Laurie was too busy for politics. He got married and went to Africa for dissertation research. In 1976, he and his wife spent a full year first in Nairobi and then in Lake Victoria doing interviews.

“I was looking at two things: Creating the political/economic system of Luo, the people that Obama’s father comes from, and then, I was looking at a series of ecological disasters that started to occur from 1880 until the beginning of the First World War. I was looking at how these two different groups dealt with these problems. The cattle died. What do you do? There’s drought, you don’t have crops. What do you do? That’s my dissertation,” he said.

In Kenya on a Fulbright Scholarship, Laurie was struck by living in a country that wasn’t America-centric. “You pick up the Kenya newspaper, the first thing out of their mouth isn’t ‘This thing in New York happened.’ Instead it’s ‘In Nairobi...’” Laurie observed.

He and his wife got their American news from short wave radio. They listened to baseball games on Armed Forces Radio in the middle of the night.

“It was interesting to be a white person in an almost all black milieu, and also culturally, this is not what you’re used to. America wasn’t ‘the place’ in the same way. It gave you more of a world view of things. We listened a lot to the BBC. It gave us an appreciation of a bigger scope of things,” he said.

After returning from Africa in 1978 and earning his Ph.D. in African History, Laurie was persuaded to take over a fencing club at Northwestern. And that’s how coaching fencing became his career for the last 38 years.

As a Democrat, Laurie is concerned about many progressive issues,

continued on next page

Local Luminaries to Emcee Poetry Prose Awards Night

On April 21, Tenth Dems will host our 6th Annual Community Connection Poetry Prose Competition Awards Night at the Waukegan Ramada Inn, 200 Green Bay Road, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. Admission to this event is free.

Dulce Ortiz, Lake County Latino Coalition, and Marc Jones, Waukegan Park District Commissioner, have agreed to serve as this year's emcees.

More than 200 high school students from Waukegan, North Chicago, and Zion have submitted poems and short prose pieces prompted by this year's topic—Justice. Volunteer judges, themselves published poets, will select first, second, and third place award winners in poetry and prose, respectively, as well as three entries in each category for honorable mention. First place winners will receive \$150, second place \$100, and third place \$50.

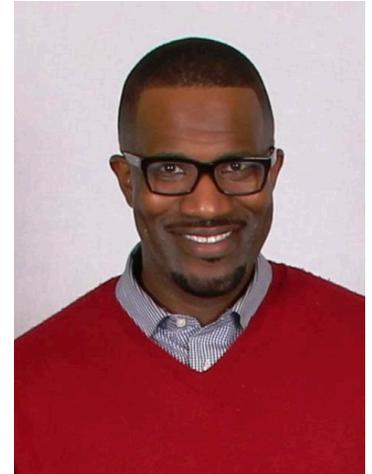
The judges are reading the student entries stripped of any information that would reveal any personal characteristics of the author. Every submission has been coded so that the judges have only a number by which to identify them. Names, schools, and communities are all in a separate file maintained by Tenth Dems volunteers.

On awards night, which is open to the public, every student who has submitted a poem, story, or essay will be invited to read his or her work aloud. In addition, each of our judges also will read an original work.

For more information, or to volunteer to help out, email events@tenthdems.org or call 847-266-VOTE (8683).



Dulce Ortiz



Hon. Marc Jones

Volunteer Of The Month: Laurie Schiller

continued from page 3

particularly income inequality and campaign finance reform.

“Right now, there are 107 guys who have bought Congress,” he observed.

Climate change and civil rights are other priorities. Laurie believes that the gun control issue falls within civil rights. “To me, that’s very closely linked. We wouldn’t have all these shootings in south Chicago if it wasn’t so easy to get guns out of Indiana. Closing these loopholes is very important,” he said.

Laurie believes there used to be a little more intersection between

the parties. Republicans tended to be more conservative over fiscal as opposed to social policy. Since Ronald Reagan, the parties have divided in two major ways, he explained: Conservatives want to see government disappear and see unregulated, unfettered capitalism. The other difference involves how the parties view the middle and working classes.

“Since 1980, we’ve had a very distinct divide between the parties which has widened. One party works for people and believes government should aid people who can’t aid themselves. And the other is ‘tough beans.’ That’s why I remain a Democrat, because I think the Democrats will make America better by helping people,” Laurie said.



State Representative

District 17

Laura Fine is seeking reelection.



District 18

Robyn Gabel is seeking reelection.



District 55

Marty Moylan is seeking reelection.



District 57

Elaine Nekritz is seeking reelection.



District 58

Scott Drury is seeking reelection.



District 59

Carol Sente is seeking reelection.



District 60

Rita Mayfield is seeking reelection.



District 61

Nick Ciko will be challenging an incumbent Republican State Representative.



District 62

Sam Yingling is seeking reelection.



On March 1, Tenth Dems enjoyed a Super Tuesday Watch Party at the home of Hon. Kerry and Vicki Martin.

North Shore Water Reclamation District

Ward 1

Preston Carter is seeking reelection.



Ward 2

Stephen Drew is seeking reelection.



State Senate

District 28

Laura Murphy, who was appointed to the state senate in October 2015, after Dan Kotowski resigned, is facing her first election.



District 29

Julie Morrison is seeking reelection.



District 31

Melinda Bush is seeking reelection.



Lake County – Countywide

State’s Attorney

Matt Stanton won his primary race to earn the right to face the first-term incumbent Republican in a race that probably will focus on the issue of justice and preventing wrongful convictions in Lake County.



Circuit Court Clerk

Attorney **Erin Cartwright Weinstein** faces a first-term Republican incumbent as she fights to bring needed improvements to the Clerk’s Office.



Coroner

Michael Donnenwirth won the Democratic primary after challenging and disqualifying the nominating petitions of current Democratic Coroner **Dr. Tom Rudd**. Dr. Rudd has launched a campaign to obtain a spot on the ballot as an Independent.



Lake County Board

District 2

Diane Hewitt is seeking reelection.



District 4

Retired federal officer and current forest preserve officer **John Idleburg** faces a Republican incumbent.



District 5

Gloria Charland is seeking election to an open seat.



District 7

Mary Turley faces a longtime incumbent Republican.



District 11

Paul Frank is running for an open seat left following the retirement of Democrat Steve Mandel.



District 13

Sandy Hart is seeking reelection.



District 14

Audrey Nixon is seeking reelection.



District 16

Terry Wilke is seeking reelection.



District 18

Gerri Songer faces a longtime incumbent Republican.



Judgeship

19th Judicial Circuit, 4th Subcircuit, Judgeship A

Appointed Associate **Judge Mitchell Hoffman** is seeking election to his first full term.



Cook County Board of Review

2nd District

Michael Cabonargi is seeking reelection.



Cook County – Countywide

State's Attorney

Kim Foxx, who won the Democratic primary, is seeking election.



Clerk of the Circuit Court

Dorothy Brown is seeking reelection.



Recorder of Deeds

Karen Yarbrough is seeking reelection.



Metropolitan Water Reclamation District

MWRD President **Mariyana Spyropoulos** is seeking reelection to a six-year term.



MWRD Vice President **Barbara McGowan** is seeking reelection to a six-year term.



Urban planner **Josina Morita** emerged from the primary with the right to seek election to a six-year term.



A business representative for a union local, **Martin Durkan** is seeking election to a two-year term.



Schneider, Duckworth Nominated to November Ballot

Immediately after the March 15 primary, Tenth Dems started gearing up for the November 8 general election. Although our presidential nominee still hasn't been determined, we now have our candidates for the House and the Senate. Below are the press releases Tenth Dems issued to officially signal our uniting behind Brad Schneider and Tammy Duckworth.

We congratulate Brad Schneider on winning the Democratic nomination in the 10th Congressional District race. Tenth Dems looks forward to uniting behind Brad to win the general election and bolster the ranks of Democrats in Congress.

We also congratulate Highland Park Mayor Nancy Rotering, who ran a campaign focused on improving our quality of life and advocating for those who do not have a strong voice. She and her supporters should be proud of their campaign and all that they accomplished. The energy they brought to this campaign will carry into the next round.

Whatever differences Brad and Nancy have pale in comparison to the differences between them and Republican Bob Dold. Both Democratic primary candidates were terrific. Dold's Republican Party could learn a thing or two about having the sort of issues-oriented campaign Brad and Nancy had.

Throughout their primary, both Brad and Nancy articulated our need to be represented once again by someone who reflects 10th District values. Nancy has pledged to fully support Brad in the general election, and Tenth Dems looks forward to coming together with them to reclaim the 10th District for the Democrats.



We congratulate Congresswoman Tammy Duckworth on her victory in the Democratic senatorial primary. We look forward to doing all we can to make Tammy the next Senator from Illinois. Her strong record and outstanding character are a sharp contrast to

Mark Kirk's history of offensive, inappropriate statements and his votes against the best interests of the people of Illinois.

Congratulations as well to State Senator Napoleon Harris and Andrea Zopp. Both went out of their way to speak for people too often overlooked in politics. They showed just how fortunate Democrats are to have so many outstanding candidates.

Now it's on to the general election. As a grassroots organization in Mark Kirk's home district, we know a Kirk that he keeps out of his campaign ads. We also know that Tammy Duckworth has what it takes to defeat him. We're ready to help her.

We Must Demand Public Service, Not Lip Service

continued from front page

business." Since the goal of business is to make a profit (as opposed to the goal of government, which is to provide services), Governor Snyder moved forward quickly when presented with a way to save money on water in Flint, Michigan.

We all know how that turned out: For nearly two years, the faucets in Flint—a city where 40 percent of the population lives below the poverty line—have spewed toxic water that is polluted with lead and other dangerous contaminants.

How did it happen? First, the Republicans who control Michigan's legislature, while giving lip service to the primacy of local government over state and federal bureaucracies, reenacted an Emergency Manager law that the state's voters had repealed in a 2012 referendum. So much for government by the people. With the law back in effect, Gov. Snyder appointed an Emergency Manager for Flint.

The Emergency Manager had the power to take action without the concurrence of Flint's elected mayor or city council. So the Snyder appointee overruled Flint's mayor and city council and in April 2014 severed Flint from the Detroit water system and switched the city's water source to the Flint River.

Prematurely implementing the switchover, the Snyder-appointed Emergency Manager rejected experts' recommendation that a chemical be added to the water to coat the pipes to prevent corrosion. After all, this additive would have cost the government \$50,000 per year.

Within weeks, Flint residents were complaining about the color, odor, and taste of the water. In August 2014, samples of the water tested positive for E. coli bacteria. In October 2014, General Motors stopped using Flint water in its plant, because the water was corroding newly-manufactured auto parts.

Still, in February 2015, a state-hired consultant told the public that



the water in Flint was safe to drink. Later that same month, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency advised state officials that lead was leaching into the water. Lead, as we know, is highly toxic and causes longterm mental and emotional disabilities, especially in children.

But it took until April 2015, a full year after the switchover for the Snyder administration to tell Flint's residents their water was unsafe to drink.

So Gov. Snyder saved the state \$50,000, thousands of people were sickened with legionnaire's disease and worse, and lead poisoning will destroy the lives of a generation of Flint children.

Fast forward to March 17 of this year, when the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform held a hearing to question Gov. Snyder and EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy about what happened

continued on next page

in Flint. The focus on the hearing was not how to fix the problem, but how it happened.

Loath to blame one of their own for creating a public health crisis, Republican committee members went after Ms. McCarthy. “Why didn’t the EPA invoke the Safe Drinking Water Act sooner?” they asked, greeting with derision Ms. McCarthy’s response that the law obliges the EPA to defer to and work with the state and the state was misleading the EPA about its own response to the crisis.

How ironic to hear members of the party that wants to shrink the federal government, that has placed the EPA on its hit list of agencies to abolish, and that calls President Obama a dictator and worse when he uses federal powers excoriate the EPA for not rushing into Flint and immediately seizing control of its water delivery system from the Michigan state government. How indecent that to save money the Michigan state government exposed an entire population to polluted and lead-laced drinking water for more than two years.

And the crisis isn’t over. Although Flint’s water no longer comes from the Flint River, the city’s now-corroded pipes continue to leach lead. The public health emergency will not be abated until those pipes can be resealed or replaced, at a cost more than a thousand times the \$50,000 that the corrosion-prevention additive would have cost in the first place.

Meanwhile, the human cost is ongoing, and incalculable.

A Supreme Court Vacancy: Republicans Say They Venerate the Constitution, Ignore Its Mandates

The Republican rationale for resolving to leave a Supreme Court vacancy open for more than a year? Why, President Obama is a “lame duck.” The problem is, up until Scalia’s death, a president’s “lame duck” period was understood to be the time between **the election of a successor** and the expiration of the current officeholder’s term. For Barack Obama, that would be from the day after the election, November 9, 2016, until Inauguration Day, January 20, 2017. To

conclude otherwise would be to condemn a President to lame duck status the minute he was sworn in for his second term. Four years as a placeholder President? Is that what was intended by the 22nd Amendment?

But, the Republicans respond, “the people” should decide on the next Supreme Court Justice by electing a new President in November. But isn’t that just what “the people” did when they elected Barack Obama in 2012?

So much for GOP lip service paid to strict adherence to the Constitution.

And we shouldn’t be fooled into thinking Democrats would play the same game were the circumstances reversed. No matter what Republicans would have us believe, even Robert Bork got his hearing—and his up-or-down vote. It just so happened that Bork’s vote was down (and not on party lines). Merrick Garland deserves the same consideration that was given Robert Bork—interviews with senators, a committee hearing, and an up-or-down vote.



A Presidential Campaign Like No Other

By Mark Rosenberg, M.D.

From campaign rallies marked by fistfights to walls across the southern border of the United States (presumably not across the northern border unless built by Canada), historians and political scientists will have abundant material for books about the 2016 Presidential campaign.

Some say that the origin of the raucous campaign dates to the candidacy of Barack Obama in 2007-08 and the false accusations of his foreign birth and Muslim religion. I would say that the gauntlet was thrown down by Senator Mitch McConnell immediately following the inauguration of President Barack Obama in January 2009 with his statement that his goal in Congress was to ensure that Obama only serve one term by opposing everything he proposed as President. From then on there was to be no compromise or negotiation. It was political theater at its worst. The Republican Party moved as far right as the Tea Party directed it. Centrist candidates and moderate political positions were unheard of.

The rhetoric became more and more strident. Has any President endured the level of vitriol and hate speech even on the floor of Congress than has been aimed at Barack Obama? Remember the shout, “You lie” during his State of the Union? It seems the inevitable consequence has been the angry campaign rhetoric that we have heard this year, generating equally strident speech from the Republican voters.

With major victories in recent primary elections, it appears that Donald Trump is on his way to the Republican nomination. I can only imagine the depths of discourse that will likely follow if Trump succeeds. He has clearly shown no remorse at the aggressive behavior of his followers and continues to stoke the fires of their passion. Anger about stagnation of wages and inequality in social strata may well be understood. Yet



by Brad and Amy Herzog, www.BradHerzog.com

continued on next page

where are the solutions? Could a President solve these problems by building a wall and deporting 12 million undocumented immigrants, many of whom are women and children? The result of this rhetoric has been the stigmatization of the “other,” whether they are followers of Islam or non-white.

The Southern Poverty Law Center, an organization that tracks hate groups in America, has documented a 14 percent increase in the number of reported hate groups in the past year, with increasing numbers of incidents, primarily of neo-Nazis and white supremacists. While in the middle of an election campaign it is difficult to imagine a good ending to this level of polarization in our society, there is some hope that if we can address some of the issues of inequality and continue to improve our economy, perhaps the rhetoric will tone down. We all need to chill a bit, as they say.



A Personal Perspective: Here We Go Again - Another Religious Liberty Law

By Steven Gan

Ever since marriage equality became the law of the land in June 2015, easily more than a dozen states have responded by enacting some kind of religious liberty law so that people who hold sincerely religious beliefs can use that law as justification to refuse to do business with a person or people who identify with the LGBT community.

Of course, right off the top, I'd bet you no florist, baker, photographer, caterer, or any other service retailer would deny services to any straight person or opposite sex couple getting remarried after having been divorced. No, the law is supposedly “to facilitate” those individuals from having to do business with any LGBT person because, let's be honest, two people of the same sex who are getting married (or remarried) is just too foreign a concept to them—in a way that goes far beyond their religious beliefs. In short, it's plain old unadulterated state government-sponsored discrimination.

Georgia has become the latest state to strongly entertain religious liberty legislation. On March 16, the Georgia state legislature passed a religious liberty bill that has to be signed by Georgia's Republican Governor Nathan Deal to become law. Deal has made it very clear that he will not sign any bill that allows discrimination, and as a Southern Baptist himself, he feels the bill is not in line with Christian beliefs. At least he has a backbone.

The present version of the bill heading to Gov. Deal's desk would enact the following main provisions:

- Religious leaders are not required to perform ceremonies against their beliefs.
- No one is required to attend a ceremony they don't want to.
- No business is required by the government to be open on Saturday or Sunday.
- Faith-based organizations are not required to lease facilities for events that are objectionable to their beliefs.

- Faith-based organizations are not required to provide “social, educational, or charitable services” that violate their beliefs, except under a government contract.
- Faith-based organizations are not required to hire someone whose beliefs they do not like.
- The government may not “substantially burden” a person's exercise of religion unless there is a compelling government interest.

Each of these main provisions can be easily construed to eventually discriminate against gay individuals and couples. For example, a photographer who provides wedding photos for opposite sex couples has to physically attend their wedding to do so. However, under provision 2, “No one is required to attend a ceremony they don't want to.” The photographer would now have a legal loophole to dive through in order to refuse to shoot a same sex couple's wedding.

Many businesses with a huge presence in Georgia, including large corporations such as Coca-Cola, Microsoft, Apple, and Nike have opposed this bill throughout its long journey through the Georgia Legislature. The Metro Atlanta Chamber of Commerce restated its opposition to the revised law in a statement to the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, “This legislation is in conflict with the values of diversity and inclusion that Georgians hold dear and could erode Georgia's hard-earned status as the No. 1 state for business – and would harm our ability to create and keep jobs that Georgia families depend upon,” the statement said. Apparently agreeing, on March 28, Gov. Deal vetoed the law.

But even when the ‘religious liberty’ legislation that plainly encourages discrimination against the LGBT community has been either greatly modified or vetoed, it's discouraging to see the Republican state legislatures in Georgia and elsewhere dominated by religious conservatives who continue to wage a misguided fight to trample the rights of millions of LGBT Americans. And it is equally discouraging that the North Carolina legislature just passed a law that would eliminate all local ordinances that prohibit LGBT discrimination.