

# Demos need better immigration reform



**Your Turn**  
David Stewart  
Guest columnist

I suspect that I am not the only Democrat who believes the Democratic Party has failed to recognize that immigration reform is necessary and important to many Americans – not just Republicans. I have some suggestions for what I believe would result in more fair, humane, and community-enriching immigration management in the years ahead. Included is a Republican idea.

The Democratic platform adopted at the 2016 convention calls for secure borders, enhancement of border security, and enforcement of immigration laws. Democrats in Congress have consistently voted for measures to improve border security including additional funds that have boosted the Border Patrol's ability to prevent unauthorized crossings. There is no truth in Trump's charge that the Democrats favor open borders and illegal immigration. Democrats need to more clearly state their opposition to such ideas.

If the Party's platform addresses illegal immigration, it does not in my view adequately speak to laws in the present arrangements for legal immigration. For example, the platform would leave in place the "chain immigration" program. Under this provision, an immigrant to the United States can facilitate the admission of not just members of his or

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her nuclear family but also parents, siblings, and their families. The intent is admirable, but the effect is that many thousands of immigrants, often low skilled, who may not meet real needs of the US economy are free to enter. Some 60 to 70 percent of all legal immigrants arrived under this provision in the past decade – way too many.

A much better plan is the points system used by Canada which rates applicants based on education, language skills, and work experience, as well as family ties. This type of plan would enable the US to lessen the problems while augmenting the opportunities that are inherent in immigration management. Democrats should withdraw their support for chain immigration and join Republicans who favor developing an alternative plan that encourages immigration by better educated, highly skilled individuals. (I know this means temporarily getting in bed with Donald Trump, but it is the sensible thing to do).

Apart from statutory changes, measures to enforce immigration law as practiced by the Trump Administration need drastic change. Fair and humane are the last terms that could be applied

to treatment of families recently arrived on the southern border. A more humane approach would, of course, get rid of Trump's nauseous separation of families or ill-treatment of persons who enter the country without authorization.

In addition, immigration reformers ought to take a look at the number of legal immigrants admitted and the vetting process for those admissions. Legal immigration has been, and is, a good thing for the United States. What is not a good thing is admitting more people than can be accommodated on reasonable terms. For example, urban schools, one of the nation's most fragile institutions, too often have been overwhelmed by suddenly needing to serve large numbers of schoolchildren who often require expensive additional services. The costs of providing education and also social service to immigrants falls heavily upon taxpayers in states and localities that have no control over admissions. In 2017, the nation admitted 1,127,167 legal immigrants according to the Department of Homeland Security. This is a massive influx by any standard.

When it comes to numbers, refugee immigrant admissions, which are au-

thorized under a special section of immigration law, are another matter. More of these people should be admitted. A refugee is defined as a person who is unable or unwilling to return to his or her country because of "well-founded fears of persecution" due to race, social group, political opinions, race, or national origin. In FY 2018 the Trump Administration passed a cap of 45,000 on such admissions and will lower it again to 30,000 during the coming year. This is less than half of the cap that applied during the Obama Administration. It is a national disgrace that Trump denied entry to Syrian refugees that other countries were welcoming. The cap on refugee admissions should be reset to a higher level. Why? Because that's what civilized nations do.

The current backlash against immigrants being exploited by Trump is largely fueled by social tensions resulting from the admission of too many newcomers at one time. Both local communities and immigrants will benefit if the number of immigrants can be reduced and the composition of the inflow changed to better match community and national needs.

Democrats should consider signing on to some of these ideas – even the Republican one.

*David Stewart is the author of "Immigration and Education: the Crisis and the Opportunities" (Lexington books). He has lived in Asheville for 22 years.*

# Dogwood Health Trust should be independent of Mission Health



**Your Turn**  
Deborah Miles  
Guest columnist

The people of WNC are at the threshold of a major decision being made on our behalf concerning the sale of Mission Health to the Hospital Corporation of America which is the largest for-profit health care corporation in the world. This letter is not to object to the sale (while acknowledging there are reasons for concern). Rather, it is to address the \$1.5 billion in proceeds which will generate over \$50 million yearly to be used towards the wellbeing of our mountain home.

"The transfer of the \$1.5 billion is to go to the formed Dogwood Health Trust which, as of now, is to be governed by 7 men, 2 women, 8 white people, and one Cherokee member with decisions already being made as to how to prioritize these funds.

Recently, health advocate Kathey Avery shared data that demonstrates how disproportionately health outcomes are for African Americans served by Mission Health. As a mother, the doubled rate of infant mortality of African American babies compared to white infants is especially disturbing. This statistic has persisted for over 100 years and is indicative of the lack of a racial

and gender lens that has dogged all maternal and infant health care services, and frankly all of our institutions, for many years.

Here is additional historical context: In the early 1880's, a group of women in Asheville established the Little Flower Mission with the purpose of visiting the sick to bring flowers, food, and comfort. Their visits brought them face to face with the medical needs of people in Asheville – regardless of age, race, gender, or prosperity. In 1883 they established Mission Hospital in a five-bedroom house.

According to the research of Nancy Marlowe, Mission Hospital grew under the wise counsel of this all women led board (albeit white) for the following 63 years.

It is an unfortunate truth, that since that time, Mission's board has been the space of largely white men –which signaled (as the largest non-profit in WNC) that it was (and is) an accepted representation of the residents. Even today, with 19 board members there are 12 white men, 5 white women, and 2 African American men on the Mission Health Board.

Given the history of Mission and the opportunity to start anew, I call on the Dogwood Health Trust to be at least 50% female and 25% people of color along with representation of people from across the region.

The issue of board representation is one that I have advocated for over many years. As the recently retired director of the UNC Asheville Center for Diversity Education, I had conversations with other non-profit leaders who shared that board members were required to do fund raising so it was hard to find women and people of color who had the skill sets or financial means to be successful. While I can dispute several different points of that argument, it is important to note the fundamental difference of the Dogwood Health Trust: it will not fund raise.

Mission Health, started by women caring for the sick over 130 years ago, has been built with our own money – through taxes (exempted), insurance benefits, and our cash matches.

We, and those who came before us, put a substantial amount to Mission Health to generate that \$1.5 billion figure.

We deserve to have representation that is worthy of the significant contributions women and people of color have made to Mission Health.

There are exemplary hospital conversion foundations with diverse initial boards that were established as independent of the current board from the hospital sale including ones in Missouri and Virginia. In particular, the Danville Health Trust contracted with MDC, Inc in Raleigh to vet an independent board

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that would hold the Hospital Corporation of America to the agreement. This is especially critical as this initial board will hire the staff which will set the tone of the trust for generations to come. With due respect to the current appointed board, all good people with excellent skills, I call on Attorney General Stein to require that the Dogwood Health Trust be an independent board with no ties or conflicts of interest to the current Mission Health and soon to be Hospital Corporation of America. The people of WNC deserve an independent board that represents the great diversity of WNC with the vision, experience, skills, and wisdom to match the challenges and opportunities before us.

*Deborah Miles is the founding director of UNC Asheville's Center for Diversity Education and a member of the WNC Diversity Engagement Coalition. She lives in Asheville.*

# Finally, some good news from the 2018 election



**Your Turn**  
Christopher Cooper  
Guest columnist

Campaigns and elections in America are full of bad news, and it seems like it's just getting worse. Judging by the major media narratives, the 2018 elections were no exception. Accusations of voter fraud, vote rigging, negative campaigning and extreme partisanship were tossed around more often than insults at a Duke-Carolina game. And while these are all no doubt serious issues that should be considered by government officials and political reformers, they should not obscure the fact that 2018 also represented some positive steps for democracy.

For starters, voter turnout was up. In fact, judging by the voting eligible population (that's the number of voters divided by the number of eligible voters), voter turnout in 2018 was more than 49 percent – the highest it's been in a midterm election in more than 100 years. The last time turnout was this high (that would be 1914), the first pitch was being

thrown in Wrigley Field and Woodrow Wilson was president. North Carolina's voter turnout, while far from the highest in the country, exceeded the last few midterm elections by a considerable amount.

We don't know what the high turnout in 2018 will portend for the future, but the best guess would suggest that 2020 voter turnout will look similarly impressive. After all, the best predictor of whether someone will vote in an election is whether they voted in the election before. Voting, in this way, is best understood as a habit – not that different from brushing your teeth or paying your bills on time. People who turned out in 2018, therefore, are likely to turn out in 2020, just like those who brushed their teeth last night will be likely to do so again tonight.

There are a number of potential explanations for why voter turnout was up. We've all noticed that interest in politics more generally is on the increase. No matter where you stand on Trump's election, 2016 reminded us all that votes count and that elections have consequences. That message has clearly gotten through to America's voters.

Closer to home, both parties deserve credit for presenting us with real decisions across the state on election night. Whereas in 2016, approximately half of our state legislative seats were uncompetitive on election night (meaning that one of the two major parties did not nominate a candidate for the general election), virtually all of our state legislative seats had two-party competition in 2018. Both parties deserve credit for recruiting candidates throughout the state – even in districts where their odds of victory seemed slim. We can only hope that the same trend will hold in 2020.

As pleased as I am with the number of folks who turned out on election day, I am similarly impressed with the decisions that North Carolinians made on election night. Perhaps the best example of this was on the six proposed amendments to the state Constitution. The parties gave strong and clear signals – the Republican Party urged voters to support all six amendments, while the Democratic Party favored the alliterative "nix all six" campaign. North Carolinians chose a middle path, voting yes on four and no on two of these amend-

ments, ultimately delivering a message that they would not blindly support either party's agenda. Further, while many (including me) had feared that these amendments would spur high levels of ballot roll-off (people voting at the top of the ballot, but quitting as they progressed down the ballot), voters resisted this temptation and showed high levels of ballot completion.

This election has not turned me into a Pollyanna overnight. I still fear some of the darker trends in American politics – such as the lack of information literacy, extreme levels of partisan polarization and battles over the very meaning of facts – but I also think it's important to acknowledge when some parts of American politics reflect the "better angels of our nature," as Abraham Lincoln once quipped. The 2018 election may be such a case. Let's all hope 2020 holds a similar number of silver linings.

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