

Blust says voting changes are meant to strike a 'proper balance'

Doug Clark | Posted: Wednesday, August 21, 2013 9:23 am

The state legislature is "striking the proper balance between ease of voting and the integrity of the voting," Republican state Rep. John Blust said in an email exchange with me yesterday.

It began when Blust sent Allen Johnson and me a series of articles by conservative analysts claiming that, with these changes, North Carolina's voting laws will fall into line with those in many other states.

I sent this response to Blust:

"Is this really your best reason for supporting rollbacks in voting opportunities – because we still won't be as bad as some other states? And now we're seeing the next step – attacks on college students voting by local election boards.

"The intellectual dishonesty behind this movement is staggering. So far you've fooled the people who can't recognize the pattern and don't understand the cumulative impact of all these individual changes. But please don't insult me by suggesting I should believe these actions are meant to improve our election system and 'restore confidence' in government. I'm ashamed of it and embarrassed for otherwise good people who have climbed on board because the conductors whistled."

The following is his reply. Notable is his assurance that not one single person will be prevented from voting by the new requirements and restrictions -- and also that he actually doesn't agree with all the provisions or like that they were presented on the last night of the legislative session. Nevertheless, he voted for the entire package. It is also significant that, in portraying the moves as attempts to strike a new balance between "ease of voting and the integrity of the voting," he tacitly acknowledges that the intended effect is to constrain "ease of voting."

From Blust:

"You call me intellectually dishonest and then fail to even understand the point of the articles I sent you. I think the dishonesty of the news coverage of this and several other issues is staggering! I am not arguing that we are not "as bad as other states." My argument is that we are striking the proper balance between ease of voting and the integrity of the voting. We are bringing our election laws in line with other states who have struck the same balance without the Washington Post, the New York Times , and the News & Record opining about a "neo Jim Crow." You have made it clear that attempts to strike such a balance will only be interpreted through your template – those

who want to strike the proper balance must be bad people. To disagree with you is to be immediately labeled as a bad person with evil motives. The only way to be a good person is to keep on making elections chaotic and simply trust that nothing untoward will occur.

"The college early voting sites is a whole separate issue from the bill which passed the legislature. I have nothing to do with local "attacks on college students voting" as you erroneously put it. I was always able to vote quite easily while I was in college. But I can tell you I have for years heard complaints that college students ought to vote in their home towns. Are those who think college students are smart enough to vote in a precinct are bad people who do not want the students to vote at all? No it does not.

"If you want to feel insulted that I believe the changes will improve the elections then you are free to feel insulted. That is what I truly believe. People are so used to being required to show a photo ID for everything imaginable that they do not think it is a big impediment to voting – which it is not. The disgusting talk of "voter suppression" has been proven objectively in other states with the photo requirement not to be true. Plaintiffs in one of the lawsuits against photo ID (I think it was in Georgia) could not produce a single person who could say they had been prevented from voting by the ID requirement when required to do so during discovery. NOT ONE PERSON. I am sure that fact will be kept out of the News & Record – it doesn't fit your template.

"I think it is naïve to think that in today's society there are not many instances of voting irregularities going on. Some on the left have even stated that it is their aim to overwhelm the system with bad names on the voter rolls. The book "Who's Counting" relates that the very person who seconded Barack Obama's nomination for president at the 2008 convention in Denver has admitted he knew about such efforts and even helped to fund them. Voter fraud does occur – there is no doubting this.

"Not one person's vote will be "suppressed" by the new law. Voting will remain quite easy to do. I deeply regret the tone and tenor of the news coverage of this issue. Your embarrassment should be for the low quality of the arguments put forth on the editorial page and for the abject bias. On issue after issue, anything that is deemed to reflect badly on the current majority in the legislature or the bills that pass is greatly exaggerated and repeated constantly. Any fact that tends to show that our positions are correct are not mentioned or are hidden as much as possible. It is just like the coverage of the landfill issue a few years back when the News & Record undertook a vendetta against the city council majority and would never print that their chief aim was to save taxpayers around \$8 million a year. This type of coverage has permeated the paper and it doesn't surprise me that you cannot see that the coverage is flawed.

"I do not agree with every single provision of the election law bill. It was received by the House only at 6:11pm on the last night of the session for concurrence only. I readily admit that is not

good practice. That is something we can be justly criticized for doing. For example, I would like to keep the requirement that a candidate appear in a TV ad to take responsibility for the ad. If someone is going to lie about me, they should have to own the lie. Many of us in the House are working to fix the legislative process that has been abused by both parties in the past regarding one house sending bills back to the other house with major changes that do not get to go through each House separately. One house forcing the other into a take-it-or-leave-it situation is not acceptable.

"The news media today have become, in essence, bullies. You can fire away with your excessive rhetoric knowing you are safe with the ability to monopolize the discussion in your own forum. Every now and then you let someone else have 400 or 500 words to respond knowing safely that you have unlimited words in future editions. A fair fight is the last thing you want. Look at this issue again. Most states require photo identification. North Carolina requires photo ID – must be for purposes of suppression. Many states have no early voting. North Carolina keeps the same number of hours over a shorter number of days – has to be for purposes of voter suppression. Most states do not allow straight-party voting. North Carolina eliminates straight-party voting – must be for purposes of suppression. Most states are smart enough not to allow same day registration for obvious reasons. North Carolina eliminates same-day registration – must be for purposes of voter suppression.

"Again - Voting in North Carolina after the new law will still be incredibly easy. No citizen's right to vote once vote will be suppressed."

Of course, I disagree with all of this and sent Blust the following, brief reply:

"Are you really serious? Your party has total political control of this state and is fully exercising its will, and you call the news media bullies?"

"Please tell me how it's restoring a balance to make all these changes? Tell me one aspect of our election system that was out of balance.

"It is your balance I question when you think you can guarantee that 'not one person' will be unable to vote because of these changes. What will you say if you're wrong, that 'one person' or two people, or three don't really matter anyway?"

"I'm happy to see you admit that the 'process' was imperfect and that you don't agree with some of the new provisions. Why were they rushed through at the last moment? Why didn't the sponsors want them examined and discussed? I would feel better if you had stood up to object as you did when the other party was in power and doing the right thing in the right way was one of your principles.

"We've never used the term Jim Crow to describe the actions of this legislature. I know the difference between the tactics of 1900 and 2013. But measures like these are moving the state backward to the time only 20 years ago when our state had one of the lowest voter participation rates in the country. Now we have one of the highest rates – without documented fraud – and that seems to be a problem for your party. It is regrettable."

Blust hasn't replied to this, but of course he's welcome to comment here -- as are you.