

One Lifelong Activist's Analysis: Belans



Cheri Beasley For Senate Campaign: One Lifelong Activist's On-The-Ground Experience, Analysis, and Recommendations

It is because of my deep love for North Carolina, and the belief in the power and potential of our collective work together to create an enduring Blue State for our children and grandchildren, that I write and submit this analysis.

As analysts have noted, there is a confluence of contributing factors for Beasley's defeat in the 2022 North Carolina midterm. I offer my experience on the ground from the moment Beasley declared her candidacy through November 7, 2023.

- ◇ Note: Most of my volunteer activist work in [2020](#) and [2022](#) was with North Carolina Central University (NCCU) students through my affiliation with grassroots [Bull City Votes](#).

Context: who voted?

Young voters

- ◇ 18-29 year-old voters showed up in historic numbers in [2020](#) – 11% increase over 2016. Because 2020 was a presidential election with known stakes, students were more strategically organized, informed on the issues, and motivated. ** That number fell by nearly [5 percentage points](#) in the 2022 midterms in North Carolina.

- ◇ **Black Voters**

It is well-documented that Cheri Beasley lost her 2020 election for the Chief Justice seat by only [401 votes](#). Despite her name recognition and popularity, data indicate that [Black voter turnout](#) for the 2022 midterms was down by 3% across the state. As noted in the [News & Observer](#), "...Democratic President Barack Obama won the rural county [Anson] an hour outside Charlotte, whose residents are mostly Black or Hispanic, by 25% of the vote in his campaign for reelection in 2012." Beasley, however, lost the county to her right wing Republican opponent by 5 percentage points. While Democratic absentee voters had about a 3% higher turnout than Republicans, Republican in-person turnout was [7.3% higher than Democrats](#).

What happened? 2022: Midterms.

Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU)

North Carolina is home to [11 HBCUs](#), more than [any other state](#) in the country. This represents about [50,000](#) students plus their families (many of whom are North Carolinians). Unfortunately, NC HBCUs were [not tapped](#) strategically as a Democratic mobilizing force, leaving it to students to organize mostly on their own without the power of a sense of belonging to a greater network.

- ◇ NCCU has about [8000](#) total students enrolled. Through the extraordinary leadership of [Cameron Emery](#) – student body VP, [Devin Freeman](#) - sophomore class president/ NAACP campus president, and other campus activists, students mobilized to GOTV. They were supported by partners including Bull City Votes, [NC Black Alliance](#), and [Black Voters Matter](#).

Beasley Campaign: One Lifelong Activist's Experience: Linda Belans

- ◇ But students needed resources and support from [NCDP](#) and from candidates to help extend and build on their momentum and to maximize turnout through funding for events, dorm storm materials, paid student canvassers, and bringing celebrities to campus. This would have gone a long way toward informing students about the election and GOTV.
 - It was surprising in October to discover anecdotally through conversations with students that a significant number were unaware of midterms, and/or had no idea who the candidates or issues were. This was contrary to the 2020 experience*.

Black Voters We've [known](#) since at least 2019 that Democratic candidates can no longer expect Black voters to show up on election day when elected officials have not actively addressed their aspirational and policy needs that impact their lives on an ongoing basis: the Voting Rights Act, criminal justice, affordable housing, healthcare, and environmental racism are some examples.

Candidates

Cheri Beasley came to NCCU in October and November – including Homecoming. Where critical opportunity was lost was with justices and judges running for office. NCCU has a highly respected and popular criminal justice program/major. During the 2022 campaign, however, students shared their disappointment that these candidates running for (re) election were not visible on campus.

With the loss of all five Democratic judges and justices, we can expect [consequential relitigating](#) of cases by the State Supreme Court that were blocked or tossed out previously: a restrictive photo ID requirement, and illegal gerrymandering respectively.

White Republican Women Voters

Candidates had the rare – and under-tapped opportunity – to target white married women voters on three issues, especially in communities that we assume will vote Republican: SCOTUS Roe V Wade decision, capping Rx for Medicare recipients, and capping insulin at \$35.

- ◇ I regularly posted on the Beasley campaign social media sites and in emails, that I wanted to help organize pro-choice Republican women as we successfully did across the state with the NARAL PAC during the 1990 Gantt campaign. No response. (Here is the [link](#) to the accompanying video.)

Hispanic/Latino Voters

- ◇ Turnout dropped from 35% in 2018 to 26% in 2022 for self-identified [Hispanic-Latino voters](#).

Volunteers & Campaign Staff

- ◇ **Fundraising:** I hosted one of the first on-line fundraisers for the Beasley campaign in June, 2021. While we accrued 200+ names of potential donors in NC and across the country that we shared with the campaign, we didn't raise much money. The campaign did not follow up with the donors. Their analysis was that it was too early in the campaign. I never heard from them again.
- ◇ **Communication:** I sent emails to the campaign, and regularly posted on the their social media and websites offering to volunteer. There was no social media response. The response to emails was form letters: "We'll respond shortly." They never did.
 - It's worth noting that there was no phone number on the campaign's website.
- ◇ **Statewide volunteers:** I responded to a link that an activist friend sent to me to attend a statewide volunteer Zoom event. The campaign director didn't welcome new participants or provide a vision, background, or strategies. When a few of the volunteers noted that they weren't sure how to talk with voters when they canvassed – and no one responded – I offered a couple of researched ways, and that I would be happy to write them up, and/or offer a session for volunteers. The director offered no response, didn't follow up, and I had no email address or phone number for him or anyone on the Zoom call.

Beasley Campaign: One Lifelong Activist's Experience: Linda Belans

- ◇ **Yard Signs part 1:** There were very few Beasley yard signs in Durham. I sent an email to the campaign in October requesting 100 of them to plant. The campaign responded 7 weeks later with an email letting me know that I could come to their Raleigh office and pick up a yard sign.
- ◇ **Young Activists:** In between these events, a high school student I know kept trying to volunteer for the campaign through the website, but no one responded to her. To help keep her engaged, along with two other activists – one from NCCU and from Duke – I paid to go to Beasley's final Durham fundraiser in October to connect them to her. They were the youngest guests there and Cheri graciously spent time with them. During her speech, she handed the mic to Duke student [Giovanny Sims](#) who spoke extemporaneously. Beasley gave the students her personal phone number with assurances that she would respond. No one from the campaign followed up with them.
- ◇ **Yard Signs part 2:** One of the student's gave me Beasley's number. I texted her to let her know that I had been trying to reach the campaign for a couple of months to get yard signs, and that the only sign at McDougald Terrace (public housing in Durham) was for her opponent. Beasley responded, directing me to her deputy campaign director. He responded 2 days later, October 13, and arranged to get 100 signs to me.
- ◇ **Connecting:** Saturday, October 15, Cheri's husband and son, Curt Owens and Matthew Owens, delivered the yard signs to my house. They mentioned that the campaign had not scheduled anything else for them for the rest of the day. Seeing opportunity to engage them at NCCU, they eagerly agreed to accompany me to the campus where I connected them to Cameron Emery (student body vice president), and to other community members we met along the way. The campaign didn't follow up.
- ◇ **Yard signs part 3:** I paid a person who lives and works within the Black community to place – then remove – the 100 signs, plus 5, 5'X8' banners that we were able to secure.

Bull City Votes (BCV)

- ◇ **October 16:** With Thomas Johnson and Holly Ewell-Lewis - two BCV leaders - we organized a meeting with Curt, Matthew, and Cameron, to focus on GOTV at NCCU. (Curt & Matthew cancelled to attend the Jon Ossoff rally for Cheri which was the right priority.) We had an otherwise productive meeting and created a strategy to partner with Cameron's activist team. BCV devoted most of the rest of the campaign to working with NCCU students, as we had in 2020. Black Voters Matter joined as they had in 2020.
- ◇ **Partnering:** BCV partnered with NC Black Alliance on October 29 to train and pay canvassers to GOTV in the larger community, and to blanket students with information.
- ◇ **Nov. 2:** Devin Freeman (sophomore class president/NAACP campus president), joined me at a rally near NCCU featuring Cheri Beasley, Shirley Caesar, seasoned Black Durham activists, candidates, and politicians. Their Ask: get Black voters to the polls because numbers are down. Devin knew many of the folks there, and formed new connections.
 - **Nov. 6:** The campaign then invited Devin [to speak](#) at the final Nov 6 rally in Raleigh with Governor Roy Cooper, Beasley and other officials. We prepped in the car (he had not been given guidelines by the campaign). (**Devin currently is in consideration for a White House internship. If anyone has influence, please message me.**)

Summary:

I would like to say that my story about the campaign is an aberration, but people I met all along the way shared similar stories of frustration of an unresponsive campaign. What seemed to be missing from the Beasley campaign was a strong team with a clear [vision](#) to guide strategies and the tactics that emanate from it. 2024 campaigns can and must do better.

2024

Vision: Turn North Carolina blue: From the local to federal level anchored in lessons learned from 2022 midterms.

Strategy: Hire seasoned, responsive campaign directors who know and reflect North Carolina and/or associated counties.

Strategy: Designate volunteers as a top priority

Strategy: Mobilize HBCUs

Strategy: Frame quality of life issues valued by the Democratic party.

Strategy: Target white Republican women voters on issues that impact their lives.

State Races 2024

Governor: *The National Spotlight*

- ◇ AG Josh Stein declared his candidacy for governor on January 18 against likely opponent Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson labeled by NY Times political writer & Duke professor [Frank Bruni](#) as “extremism incarnate: gun-loving, gay-hating and primed for conspiracy theories, with a garnish of [antisemitism](#) to round out the plate.” Bruni frames the campaign as winnable for Robinson. He cites Beasley's loss to Budd who, as congressman voted against certifying the 2020 election hours after the January 6 insurrection. “Mark Robinson is *extremely* popular with the Republican base and the Republican rank and file,” notes [Chris Cooper](#), political science professor at Western Carolina University.

Other State Races

- ◇ Lt. Governor, **Attorney** General, Secretary of State, Auditor, Treasurer, Superintendent of Public Instruction, Labor Commissioner, Insurance Commissioner, Agriculture Commissioner.

For more information about the work Bull City Votes did with NCCU, Duke students, and the larger community in 2020 and 2022, please feel free to contact me.

Respectfully,



Linda Belans

919 656 6743 Linda.belans@gmail.com LindaBelans.com

Linda Belans is an award-winning journalist, founding host of The State Of Things on public radio, Fellow - NC Institute of Political Leadership, and author - [States Of Being: Leadership Coaching for Equitable Schools](#).