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Subject: The Slaughter of the Firstborn

“A single volley from Virginia marksman dropped all the enemy officers dead and sent the frightened guards fleeing backwards”. So began the Battle of Saratoga September 19, 1777. Later in the battle, a legendary marksman was dispatched to remove a British officer from the line of battle. “Tim Murphy climbed a tree and lifted his double-barreled rifle. His first shot creased the crupper of Fraser’s horse. The second parted his horse’s mane, and Fraser’s aide urged him to take cover. But the brave Highlander shook his head. ‘My duty forbids me to fly from danger,’ he said just as the third shot struck his chest, mortally wounding him.”¹

Another brave officer was struck down at Spotsylvania Courthouse in May of 1864. “Then Sedgwick walked over to an artillery emplacement to give the battery commander some directions, and the sharpshooters’ bullets were pinging around and the gunners were ducking, and Sedgwick laughed at them and told them not to worry – the sharpshooters were so far away ‘they couldn’t hit an elephant at this distance.’ A minute after this there was a sharp cry from the gun pits – ‘The General!’ The headquarters people ran over and there was Sedgwick on the ground, a bullet hole under the left eye, killed by one of the sharpshooters whose aim he had derided.”²

“At midnight the Lord struck down all the firstborn in the land of Egypt . . .”³ Like a judgment from God we witnessed the slaughter of our firstborn. These were the most viable elected political leaders that had years of success and pedigree with the potential to be presidents, senators, or governors in the future. How can they be replaced? They were all lost in a single political battle, the General Election of November 7, 2006. Although they were firstborn, they were not innocent. As a Republican voter, I can’t help but think that our leaders were struck down in some small part by our own troops.

The result of the Maryland Governor’s race is the one that seemed to be the greatest mystery. A \$2-billion surplus created from a \$4-billion deficit in four years, with a strong economy, and low unemployment should have been enough to guarantee a re-election victory. In spite of a strong record of success the voters were looking for new leadership. There is no evidence to suggest that the new governor will do a better job.

So where did Bob Ehrlich go wrong? Seven thousand state employees serve at the pleasure of the Governor. Mr. Ehrlich replaced just 200 and the yellow media squawked like there were a thousand foxes in Maryland’s hen house. In retrospect he should have replaced them all, every one of them. The agents of the state are the visible face of the government. The mid-level bureaucracy, “the regulators” were never changed from the Glendenning administration. From my own experience they appeared to operate from instructions and processes established by the previous government. Ehrlich’s team never appeared to provide appropriate control to the state agencies. He never established a new culture.

Two years ago a state law was passed to transition the control of oyster aquaculture from the Maryland Department of the Environment to the Maryland Department of Agriculture. The

¹ Robert Lecklie, “George Washington’s War, the Saga of the American Revolution” (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992) 404, 413.

² Bruce Catton, “A Stillness at Appomattox” (New York: Washington Square Press, 1953) 124.

³ Exodus 12:29 (ESV)

agency leads balked at the change and the law was never implemented or enforced. As a shellfish farmer that needs support from state agencies in order to create a new industry I too often found the Ehrlich administration to be just as obtuse and dysfunctional as the Glendenning government he replaced. Maybe other voters saw this also.