

Opinion Page Cont. . . .

Cont... from the last page

talking about using family members as interpreters, "The biggest problem in this community is when a six year old girl spends all night in the hospital interpreting while Mommy's having a baby. How can children comprehend these things?"

Tony strongly believes that there is a great need for interpreters in Wilkes County. I strongly believe that there is more need for English teachers and for immigrants who want to learn our language.

Wrapping the remainder of the lecture up for you, another main point hit on by Tony was this, "I believe that the reason you're so pissed off at us is because you believe that we take your money, and it's not (true)! With the exception of newly arrived refugees, asylum seekers, Cuban-Haitian entrants, and Amerasians, the only public service that immigrants are entitled to is emergency health care. This ban lasts for five years before considering alterations. Otherwise, it is ten years before an immigrant can gain residential status and be eligible for public benefits." This remark was stated in a hand-out we received and was briefly hit upon by Tony.

One last thing of interest. Immigrants working legally are paying Social Security, but they are not eligible to receive Social Security. So what's happening? "Wetbacks" are helping to support our grandparents. So think a little bit more before forming a biased opinion on a family of Mexicans or Guatemalans shopping in Super K-Mart this weekend. It might just be that your next door neighbor told you a whole bunch of hogwash and that this family of six isn't really interested in turning your neighborhood into a Mexican Mafia headquarters.

Another Airport Story by Matthew Lowder

In mid-December I arrived in DC for a connecting flight to Greensboro. Having come from Frankfurt, I naturally had to coil through the long lines for Immigration, Customs, and Security. After the September 11th attacks, Europe had become a teeming mass of security officials, paperwork, menacing soldiers carrying automatic rifles, and drab grey tanks rolling over cobble-stoned streets. I had no idea of what to expect upon my return to the States after living in Prague since August. I certainly hadn't expected to find out that the American public had been lied to and that security was as bad as ever. The first official, a white man with a sand-colored mustache, snatched my worn passport, scanned the bar code, gave me a cold stare, and stamped the last page usually reserved for amendments. I smiled real big, thanked him in my best imitation of a thick southern drawl, and continued the arrival process. The next man,

a short African-American with pinched curly hair and a bright silver Customs badge pinned to his navy-blue shirt, gave me a broad smile as soon as he saw me. I'm pretty sure he was gay, although after an eight hour flight and a fifth of vodka, I'm not sure I was looking my cutest. After lying through my teeth about having nothing to declare, I proceeded to the longest line of all. The flight had already been two hours late due to the security in Frankfurt, and now, after another two hours of standing in lines, tempers were running short. Soldiers were yelling at frustrated passengers who were arguing with the screeners. When I finally got close enough to see the screeners, I think my mouth dropped to my chest. After all the news and promises by our beloved government officials about increasing the quality of security screeners, I really hadn't expected to witness the scene in front of me.

About twelve screeners were gathered around the x-rays, all of them dark-skinned, some of them Indian, some of them possibly Turkish. Half the men were wearing turbans, one of the women was wearing a veil, the rest had those cool red dots in the middle of their foreheads. None of them had a very good English vocabulary. I calmly walked through the x-ray. I'd already missed my flight by an hour. The beeping went off.

"Empty ALL your pockets!" the small, turban-wearing dark-skinned man recited. My pockets were already empty as the little black wand began waving menacingly against my body.

"Take off this," he commanded, patting both my shoes. The woman next to him said something short in a language I was unfamiliar with; he just shook his head and said, "No."

My shoes were off, my belt was sitting on top of them, and my pants were rolled up to my knees. I think I smiled. His rough hands rolled around my ankles and then up my legs. Under different circumstances I might have given him a dollar. I mean, hey! We *were* in D.C. "Go," he said, shoving my displaced shoes against the wall.

Forgive me for sounding racist, but why is that when dark-skinned, turban-wearing zealots attack American interests that we hire MORE dark-skinned, turban-wearing immigrants to protect us? People around here complain about Tyson, but I never met a chicken that wanted to kill me except one and that was under excruciating circumstances...

