

Edmisten-We don't Have Time To Cut Ribbons



Rufus Edmisten

ities. However, it is a credit to an agency that will take affirmative steps to hire people based on their qualifications who happen to be women, who happen to be minorities.

Q-Do you have any minorities as high as assistant attorney general?

A-Yes, in the SBI, Ray Eastman is supervisor of

director of the legal department of the Justice Academy.

Q-What is the extent of the drug problem?

A-Mammoth, unbelievable. It's the essence of organized crime. One trial now in Goldsboro are 17 people indicted by a Wayne County grand jury as a result of years of work by this office. "Ike" Atkinson and other individuals are on trial for a massive conspiracy to import, possess and sell heroin. Mr. John McConnell, a local Raleigh attorney, plead guilty two days ago to one count of accessory after the fact of possession and sale of heroin.

That trial will take months and I would say is the most critical trial today in America regarding the drug traffic. I will say no more.

Q-Is there any Mafia influence in North Carolina?

A-I can't answer that.

Q-What would you say is the greatest consumer rip-off?

A-Auto repairs. We have more complaints on that than any one thing. Sometimes as many as one hundred a week. It's just a simple fact: a car, next to a person's home is their most important possession.

It's the most perplexing problem I know. I favor this and will propose it: that any automobile repair dealer must give a person a

signed statement regarding the repairs they will do and if they change, they must call and get the permission of that individual or the individual will not be responsible for the repairs.

The problem is this. You take a car in and you say I want something done to fix my carburetor. You go back at the end of the day and they've done \$300 worth on everything you can think of and the consumer had no idea they were going to do that.

Now the car industry will fight this very much, but I think it's just basic fairness.

Q-Why did you decide not to run against Sen. Helms?

A-Because I loved the job I was doing. I'd love to go to the Senate. I make no bones about that. I'm sort of a creature of the Senate. I know how it works. Spent 10 years there. I just didn't want to now.

Q-How accessible is the consumer protection division?

A-All they have to do is call or write. We had a toll-free line. The General Assembly saw fit to take that away. I don't understand that. We receive about 500 complaints a week. Most of them we resolve short of having to go to court. A good many complaints are misunderstandings between the consumer and the business community. We act as arbitrators, mediators.

We are more concerned with fly-by-night operators.

We've always got somebody trying to sell some kind of junk to somebody. The incredible thing about it is that the public is so gullible. There is no such thing as a fast buck, there is no freebie in this world, I keep telling people that; they fall for it everyday.

The trouble with most people is that they won't ask a question before they get into something. All they have to do is call us and say hey, what about this company, should we do business with them.

If there was one thing I could do, it would be to inculcate in individual citizens that there is no disgrace in asking before they take a big step in spending their money. But they won't do it. It's not confined to ignorant people. I know more doctors and lawyers that get hornswoggled in these get rich schemes like the Pinehurst Mortgage and Loan because it said they'd get 9 and 3/4 per cent interest.

Nobody pays 9 and 3/4 per cent interest. If they did, the banks would do it. But here went thousands of people investing in Pinehurst Mortgage and Loan Company and now they're going to get back 10 cents on the dollar because it was a swindle.

Q-What do you plan to do in 1980?

A-Probably run for attorney general again. I'd rather be attorney general than governor.

Rufus Edmisten, Attorney General of North Carolina, participated in a Chronicle Questions and Answers interview with members of the news staff in his Raleigh office on September 14. Following are excerpts of that interview.

Q-Briefly outline your goals and what progress you've made towards achieving them.

A-When I first came into office, I realized that the Attorney General's office could probably do more to help people than any other office because we don't have time to cut ribbons around here.

I don't have time to do all the ceremonial things because this office, under the Constitution and the statutes of this state, has more power than any other state office, because we can make things happen.

The number one aim I had was to concentrate on serious crime--to cut out the foolishness.

I am a fanatic about serious crime--murders, rapists, robbers, those who deal in hard drugs. One thing we set out to do is to look we're going to change our priorities. One example of the change in priorities was to recommend to the General Assembly that they ease the harsh law regarding pot smoking.

Now, I do not favor the decriminalization of marijuana. I think that would lead to an acceptance of the drug cult that we have in this country. Everybody's caught daily through television, radio and newspapers that take a pill for this, take a pill for that, get one to go up, get one to go down'.

I recommended to the General Assembly that they not take kids and place them in jail with rapists and murderers and robbers, where they would be taught to be criminals. As a result of the General Assembly passed a law saying that simple possession of an ounce or less would not be a criminal offense. We now can fine persons for that.

In doing that, we said we're going to concentrate on those who deal in more serious matters. I believe that anyone who deals in drugs is a distributor and should be given a minimum sentence upon the second conviction. No probation, no parole, no nothing. That's a change of priorities. That's one thing I said would do. We've done it. We set up a very, very potent drug squad. We

have approximately 50 drug agents in the state of North Carolina now and I need 150. We don't even scratch the surface on drug dealing. PCP, and I didn't say PCB, laboratories are rampant. Heroin traffic is rampant. We can't even keep up with the offers to sell hard drugs to us. I need more help in that area, desperately. It's part of our priority assessment.

Another thing we did was to establish an Attorney General's Committee on Public Drunkenness.

For years, we've been putting alcoholics in jail for having the disease of alcoholism. That new law becomes effective October 1. It says this: if you are simply an alcoholic, then you haven't committed a crime. It was along the lines of my statement about priorities that this came about.

I kept saying, 'Look, why do you put people in jail for having an illness?' Why use law enforcement's very scarce time to convict people of being sick? Now what we do is this: if you're an alcoholic and you're not bothering anybody we either leave you alone or make you get treatment.

Another area was in consumer protection. I'm a fierce advocate of consumer protection because I believe that anyone who has to resort to deceptive advertising, to cheating, other methods, does not really believe in the free enterprise system. As a result, we have one of the strongest consumer protection laws in America.

Now, before you can come into this state and say you can make a million bucks overnight, you have to file with the secretary of state, you have to show your assets, you have to put a bond up. We have almost stopped those kind of companies from coming in.

We have filed more suits since the time I've been here than in the entire history of the attorney general's office in consumer protection. We average a suit a month.

Q-What's the status of the so-called "reverse discrimination" law suit against the UNC law school and what position is your office going to take on it?

A-We are defending the University of North Carolina law school because we say they have a reasonable admissions program. That they do have an affirmative action program, but that affirmative action program is perfectly in line with the

Bakke case handed down by the Supreme Court. They do not discriminate against anyone.

They are simply saying at the UNC law school that we are going to encourage women and minorities to enter law school and we'll take affirmative steps to see that they do so.

Q-Could you give us some insight as to how the PCB investigation actually progressed?

A-This was one of the most marvelous investigations that has ever been conducted by the SBI.

It involved several hundred people, it involved several states and it was a classic detective story. We were able to pinpoint the persons we've indicted in New York because of some secrets I can't tell because these people are up for trial. They've got a right to a fair trial.

The significant thing about the PCP matter is that we've discovered that the storage of toxic chemicals is extremely dangerous. In this state, there are thousands of gallons of toxic materials sitting around in various warehouses. There is no state inventory whatsoever of what we have, what's being done with it, what's going to be done with it.

As a result, I am going to propose that an inventory be done of all the toxic materials we have and that those be classified as to their dangerousness and that anyone who improperly disposes of any toxic materials be guilty of a felony. It is not a felony now.

Q-What's the maximum penalty they could get?

A-The full penalty could be up to 40 years for each individual with all the charges that have been filed against them. Plus the federal government has charges filed against them.

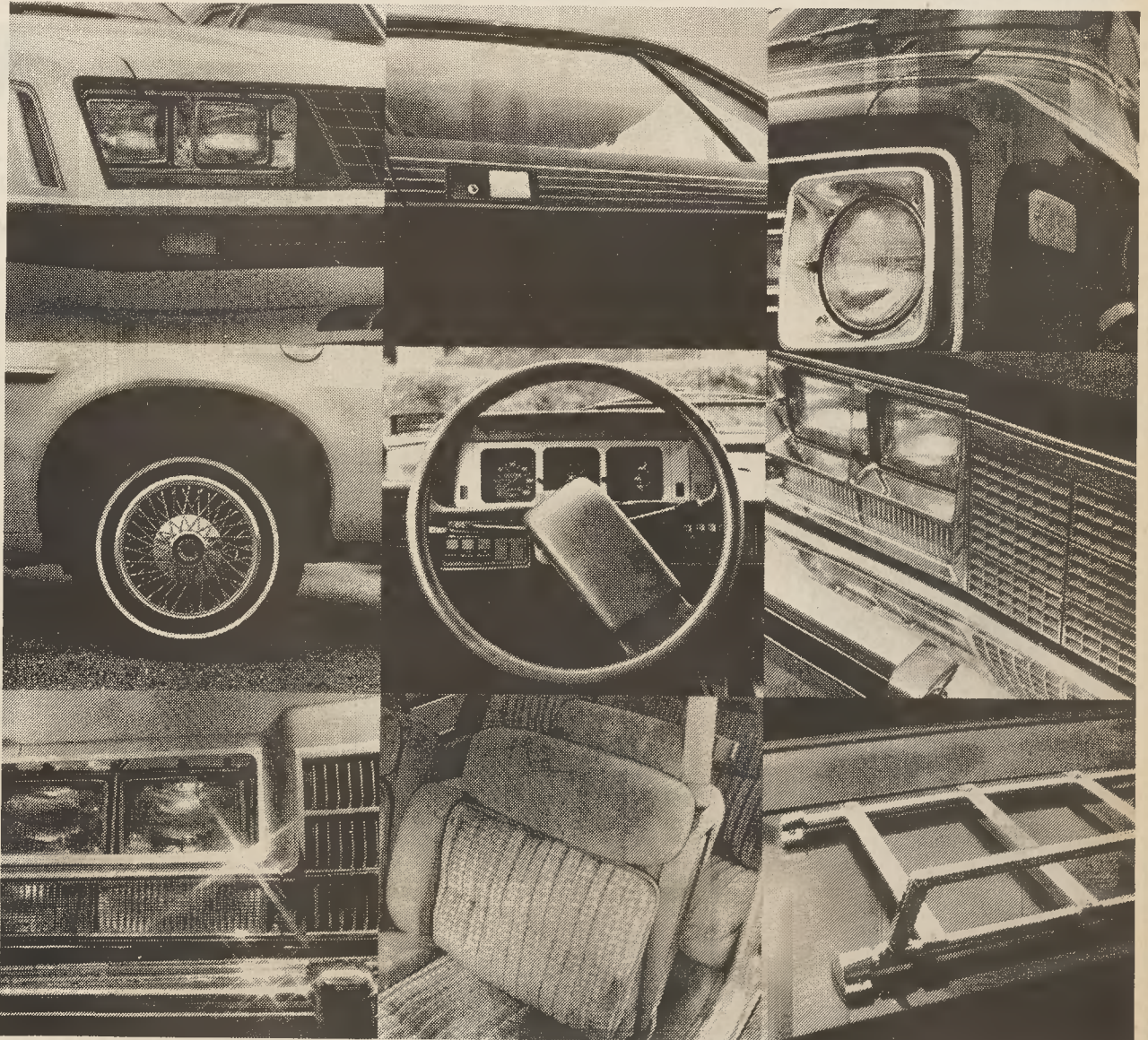
Q-You just spoke of defending UNC's affirmative action plan, What about yours?

A-Thank you for asking. I lead the state. When I first became attorney general, there was one female attorney. There are now 21 female attorneys. There were two female SBI agents. There are now 23.

On minorities, I think we still lead the state proportionately in hiring women and minorities.

I don't believe in quota systems. I think that's a put down on women and mino-

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The Habit of Study

By Naomi C. McLean
Business Writer



There are many young people who are eager to study, who love to study, who feel instinctively the value of what they are learning. Such young people will learn in spite of anything.

But let's face it: A number of healthy boys and girls, though they are in school or college, would never do almost anything more than study.

The business of inculcating habits of study is the problem in teaching.

For every effect there must be a cause, and for every act there must be a motive. If there is no motive, there will be no act. Unless the student himself or the teacher or some other factor in the student's environment provides a motive - a compelling urge - many students will study just as little as possible.

From the doctrine of individual differences, we learn that there is no single motive that may be relied on to actuate the formation

of study habits on the part of all students. Somewhere in every individual, however, there is a mainspring which, if the teacher can find it and set it in motion, will set the study habit going.

It is true, working with the individual takes time, patience, and experience with human nature; but it is that kind of teaching which can be made to mean much to the listless and uninterested student and get him out of the rut.