

# OPINION/ FORUM

**THE CHRONICLE** Coastal Carolina University 38 Years

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## The Womble Victory

We rejoice with Rep. Larry Womble for his vindication from the misdemeanor death by motor vehicle charge that he faced after he was involved in a fatal car crash a year ago that left David Carmichael dead and Womble severely injured.

Womble is finally able to exhale a sigh of relief, put the legalities of this tragic incident to rest and focus on his recovery from the accident. To this, we are extremely grateful and thankful.

However, there are some issues that have always troubled us about this case and still do.

Why was Rep. Womble charged in the first place? This man is an exemplary leader and activist who has passionately served this city, state and its people for most of his life. Why this true public servant faced criminal charges is a question that many of us have. Where was the solid evidence to substantiate the charge? Is this another case of rush to judgment when the facts are still unclear? Is it all too easy for black leaders (and people) to be found guilty until proven innocent? Let's examine some points.



Womble

The word of eye-witnesses has been shown to be unreliable, and even more so when the accident happened at 11:06 p.m. on a pitch black road. Shouldn't there have been more careful investigation before indicting Womble? Who can determine anything clearly at night with moving vehicles on a pitch black road? Furthermore, given there were no skid marks, how can these witnesses' claims be substantiated?

Why would law enforcement at the scene of the accident choose to focus on Rep. Womble as the cause of the accident? Toxicology reports later confirmed that he didn't have any alcohol or any intoxicants in his system. On the other hand, the other driver had a blood alcohol level three-times over the legal limit. It should have appeared more probable to law enforcement that the level of intoxication may have precipitated the accident. We don't see how they could have proceeded to criminal charges, particularly without resolving that "one" question that continued to trouble everyone else.

Speculations that Rep. Womble fell asleep, got distracted or perhaps had some sort of medical condition causing him to lose control of the car should not have risen above the tested levels of intoxication and criminal records available to law enforcement. Rep. Womble has no criminal record, but records showed that the other driver pleaded guilty to driving with a revoked license and was cited for unlawful use of highways in 2002.

Why would law enforcement focus on the accident victim who had no criminal record as the cause of the crime where more logical evidence was available? Why did the restructure of the accident come only after a criminal charge was made, thereby forcing the surviving accident victim to prove his innocence? As citizens, shouldn't we expect law enforcement to do its job diligently to protect all of us?

People are rejoicing that justice has prevailed for Rep. Womble. However, we say that justice was not served because he should never have been charged in the first place. Furthermore, the citizens who know Rep. Womble and also those with the ability to think critically and without prejudice never really believed that Womble caused the accident. So, Womble never lived under a cloud of suspicion in his own community and we doubt, even in the broader community. The justice system too quickly and without complete evidence judges and condemns African Americans and is even less cautious when the citizen happens to be poor.

Those charged with the administration of justice in our community should not deflect it to others outside our community. They are charged with the public duty within this community, have taken a pledge to be fair and just and to administer the unbiased hand of justice. Unless the citizen is a family member, close friend or business associate, they should be committed to doing just that and not defer to others. Rarely does the justice system come back to clear up its own errors without being forced to do so by outside circumstances. Thank God that Rep. Womble could afford legal counsel. May God have mercy on those who cannot.



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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### Chief meets with Muslim community

To the Editor:

Police Chief Scott Cunningham responded to the concerns of the Islamic community at a forum held on Oct. 24 at the Community Mosque.

This second forum was the follow up to a forum entitled "One Humanity. One Community. Our Children." Chief



Chief Cunningham

Cunningham responded to all questions addressed to him after updating the community of his investigation of the incident

involving a female Muslim R.J. Reynolds High School student who was attacked. His investigation to date concluded that there was not enough evidence to conclude that it was a hate crime. Several attendees, including Darryl Hunt, asked a number of questions, from perceptions of excess force being used by the police department to profiling of African-Americans and the use of stun guns to detain citizens being arrested.

Chief Cunningham explained police policy

very carefully in each of these areas and assured the community that he was concerned about the safety of the total community. He agreed to continue communicating with the community on cultural awareness issues related to the Islamic community.

Imam Khalid Griggs extends his appreciation to the Police Department for their participation in this event.

Fleming El-Amin,  
 event moderator

## The Season to be Careful



Julianne Malveaux

Guest Columnist

Okay, I'll admit it. I am truly the Grinch who wanted to steal Christmas. It takes me until about Dec. 23 to get in the spirit, and I only feel obligated to find gifts for children and close family. I like to give, which is why I share with a few charities that are close to me. I like to connect, which is why I have a greeting card ritual. But all this crazy frenzy after Thanksgiving, before Christmas sale stuff truly repels me. And while I don't want to put a damper on anybody's spirit, I want to say that this is the season to be careful.

After all, we live in a consumer-oriented society. When we spend, other people get paid. When we spend other people are blessed. But if you spend what you don't have then you are sliding down your own fiscal cliff, and you won't have a pillow to protect you. The average American will spend about \$900 this year on Christmas gifts and toys, but that means that half will spend more. 'Tis the season to be careful.

Some of the biggest scams come from charities. They will reach you through email, snail mail, and even text mail. They may ask for a little or a lot. You've got to ask where your money is going. Some organizations take as much as 80 percent of your gift, which means that the people you want to help



get just 20 percent of your money. Before you send a penny, ask the right questions. Too many charities lean on this time of year to make their money, but if the whole truth is told, they are really leaning on this time of year to make a living. Check these folks out online, and look for their annual reports. If their overhead is more than 15 percent, walk on by.

Another scam is the garbled name scam. You may think you are giving to a worthy program, such as the Police Athletic League, only to find that you are giving to the non-registered Police Athletic Program. You may think you are giving to an African American cause, only to find that a garbled name takes you someplace else. Americans want to give, and African Americans are among the most generous, based on the percent of income we give. But give with your head and not with your heart, and ask solicitors important questions.

One of the other scams is the sale scam. If you buy it now, you will

get a sale that will never, ever, in your lifetime be replicated. So standing in line all night for the 52-foot TV for \$239, while the store has only 10. Find some furniture you like only to be told it is 50 percent off today, but not tomorrow. Retailers are playing on your greed and your panic. If you take your time, you might find an even better deal. And if it seems too good to be true, it is.

Scruffy little children will come to your door this time of year, asking for money for their church, for magazine subscriptions, for all form of causes. You may want to slip the child a few pennies, but please know they aren't going to make more than that with the magazine subscription scam, or with the church solicitation. In fact, most churches run their own solicitations, so maybe ask for the name of the church and call them before you make a donation.

I suppose I am the Grinch because I am dismayed that our holiday season that supposedly celebrates the birth of the

Christ child has turned into a commercial orgy with people shopping for a full five weeks. It has also turned into a solicitation orgy with almost every organization you have ever known asking for end of year contributions. In the middle of all this drama, the purpose of the holiday is swallowed.

I am weary of seeing frenzied faces anxious for the next sale, or children (and grown folks) defining their worth by what goodies they pick up. I am weary of the folks who go into crazy debt to prove a point, to buy affection, to shower folks with gifts when they should shower them with love. Can we be careful with our wallets and open with our hearts?

I hope that we will all remember and embrace the meaning of Christmas and not the crassness of consumerism.

Julianne Malveaux is a Washington, D.C.-based economist and writer. She is President Emerita of Bennett College for Women in Greensboro.

Have a Story Idea?

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