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Look Carefully At Global Park

N.C. Industrial Facility May Not Be All That Its Proponents Claim

By Elliot Fus
SPECIAL TO THE POST

JACKSONVILLE - Unfortunately for the quality of public debate, there are some issues where criticism of government spending often equals political suicide.

Topics such as education and "the children's agenda" are good examples. Whenever a new spending package is unveiled, to do anything less than fully embrace it - regardless of merit - is to be "for ignorance" or "against children" in the minds of many. For skeptics, speaking up can be dangerous.

In eastern North Carolina, a similar problem revolves around what many consider to be the region's economic messiah, the Global TransPark. So far, former Gov. Jim Martin has been the primary lobbyist for the \$450 million TransPark, a proposed air cargo airport and industrial complex in Lenoir County. Now, Gov. Jim Hunt will be the most prominent voice for the project as the new chairman of the N.C. Air Cargo Airport Authority.

What they envision is a 21st-century industrial metropolis that will bring countless benefits to the region, where the decline of the agricultural lifestyle has led to extensive economic stagnation.

The TransPark is meant to work on the concept of "just-in-time" manufacturing. Factories ship their goods out of an easy-access airport just in time to reach customers around the globe.

Advocates predict tens of thousands of new jobs, massive infrastructure improvements throughout the region, increased county tax bases, and a host of other boons. "There has never been a more important project for this part of the state," Hunt said a few months ago

at a forum at Mount Olive College in Wayne County. "It'll create a ripple effect for all the surrounding counties."

However, one almost-erie feature of the proposal is how little it has been questioned. From most of the TransPark rhetoric, one would assume it's an inevitable winner on all sides, a "sure bet." The Mount Olive forum was typical of that assuredness. Scores of state leaders attended, but it seemed more like a TransPark pep rally than an inclusive delving into risks vs. rewards.

Meanwhile, little is heard from the manufacturing experts who claim TransPark is an overrated economic fad with no guarantee of success. Other states - including Kentucky and Georgia - also want TransPark, and the country's few existing all-cargo airports, such as those in Denver and Huntsville, Ala., are having difficulties getting off the ground, according to The Wall Street Journal. "Airport building is going to be the S&L scandal of the 1990s."

Understanding why the TransPark is applauded is easy. The East is seriously short of industry. With the exception of some coastal communities that attract retirees, out-migration is the norm. Who would want to see "anti-industry?"

And so, from land purchase funds to a proposed revolving loan fund, local, state, and federal governments have all signed on to the project with millions of taxpayers' dollars. The investment may turn out well if the TransPark is the next Research Triangle Park. But there has to be more risk involved than what N.C. communities are being led to believe by their leaders. If a project like the TransPark is going to succeed, it had better be fully debated - and the expectant citizens of our state fully apprised of its potential risks as well as its potential awards.

ELLIOT FUS is a reporter for the Daily News in Jacksonville, N.C. and a writer for the John Locke Foundation.

Government Abuses Taxpayers

By Frank Barnes
SPECIAL TO THE POST

It is common for abusers to deny they have a problem.

Recently we have been hearing from city and county officials that the taxes we pay are too low and that we should be encouraged to contribute more of our hard-earned money to finance their pet causes.

Tax abuse is so prevalent in our society because the peddlers of higher taxes spread these tall tales without challenge.

Let's examine the rate of local government spending since 1983. Population in the City of Charlotte stood at 337,895 people. Total city government spending was around \$126 million and property tax revenues generated about \$65 million.

In 1992, total city government spending rose to \$264 million while our population increased to 421,900. This increase is even more staggering when you discount for inflation. In real terms, spending increased 43% while our population grew by 25%.

And what about our taxes? Adjusting for inflation prop-

erty tax revenues increased 45% while the total tax base increased 142%. The picture for the county is the same. Property tax revenues increased 64% in real terms since 1983.

To put this in perspective, consider that in 1983 per capita income was \$10,233 for all residents of Mecklenburg county. In 1991, that figure grew to \$16,732. After adjusting for inflation, per capita income grew 11.6% while per capita government spending in the city increased 15%.

Local government spending is increasing faster than inflation and faster than our incomes.

Comparing property tax rates between cities serves no worthwhile purpose because of differences between tax evaluations and other factors regarding local revenues. Despite these disparities, out of 29 counties in North Carolina with populations of 10,000 or more, Mecklenburg ranked number 13 in property tax rates.

There are better ways of measuring tax burdens between cities. The U.S. Statistical Abstract lists all kind of data comparing city to city. Charlotte comes in at

number 35, higher than New York (46) Boston (45) and Los Angeles (49).

Still think your taxes are too low? Consider that the estimated state and local taxes paid by a family of four owning their home in Charlotte is higher than the median average of the largest 51 cities.

In North Carolina, Charlotte raises the most local taxes per capita (\$365) than any city and spends more (\$1,361) than any city in our state.

Perhaps the most insulting part of the misinformation spread by these tax abusers is that it comes at taxpayer expense! Tax dollars are used by the city manager for slick pamphlets, newspaper advertising and cable for a propaganda campaign to keep him and the other tax abusers in power!

So it was no wonder that spending on public information was one of the lowest rated services in a recent study for City Council. What chance is there that funding for this worthless PR campaign will end?

FRANK BARNES is a member of Citizens For Effective Government, a Charlotte watchdog organization.

Summer's Roller Coaster Ride

In the General Assembly last week, the appointed day - June 15 - passed without much attention.

June 15 is the day the law requires our representatives to complete their work on the state's budget. It is a good rule. The state's budget year begins July 1. The leaders of all state agencies need to know by then how much money they can spend to carry out their assignments.

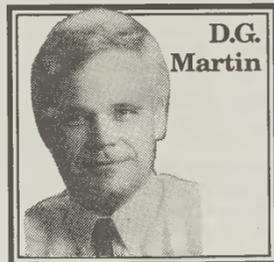
Nevertheless, it didn't happen. In spite of the law, the budget was delayed again. The leaders of the House and Senate could not find a way to resolve their differences so soon. In the General Assembly, June 15 turned out to be just another day.

And, for many of us, so was the day that marked the beginning of summer, June 21.

"Has summer slipped in on us again?" you might hear someone say.

Usually, by the time summer officially begins, I am so far into a summertime mode that the official date seems like an afterthought. School is out. Friends are on vacation. Church has begun its summer schedule. We are already planning for the fall. It is easy not to remember that summer doesn't really come until late June.

But this year I took notice of summer's designated beginning time. Waiting for it to come I have been watching more and seeing more. I have been feeling summer as it comes this time. It is as if the earth were a giant roller coaster car and I am a passenger. On its path around the sun I feel us coming up to the highest point and then going over the hump at the top. Then, for just a moment we wait, and seeing everything, I sense the coming change of direction before a wild ride back to the beginning - and to the end.



D.G. Martin

Maybe it's my growing older. Maybe it is something else. But for some reason the coming of summer this year seems richer and more welcome.

There were a few days this June that the moist warm air, trapped under the clouds, and cooked by the hot sun, gave us warning of what will come on most days in August. It's that pressure cooker feeling. Beads of sweat struggle to push out of the body. Then it flows. We roast like pigs at country barbecues. On such days we usually curse the weather's oppression.

Instead, this year I am thankful for the hot days and for the joys that come with them. For seersucker suits. For the gift of a breeze when it comes. For the thunderstorm's mighty power to bring a cooling rain.

And for the fresh wild flowers along the highways. For neighbors' gardens. For birds of every variety singing together like a revival choir. In the trees, at the feeders, blues, yellows, reds, browns and blacks turn our little worlds into kaleidoscopes of color.

For squirrels and rabbits. For lush green fields and forests.

For the feeling of water on the bare skin magically cooling the whole body.

For all the fresh things to

eat. My friend is a dignified member of the Legislature's Sargent-at-arms staff during the week. On the weekends she goes back home to the farm. Last week she brought back, and sold to me for \$5.25, a big box of fresh strawberries. It was worth hundreds of dollars. The head chef in a five-star restaurant, with all his staff, thousands of dollars worth of ingredients, and all the modern cooking equipment, could not produce a dessert that could come close to the taste of one of those just-picked, full ripe, big strawberries from the box that Billie sold me.

Pictures in the paper show the Aumonds' granddaughter helping with the harvest - bringing back the memory of a mouthful of a fresh, ripe, fleshy peach exploding with its sweetness at the first bite. Watermelons and blueberries are coming. Wild blackberries are on the vine.

Tomato plants are holding on against the wilt in Bob Wendell's yard. Soon, I hope, the giant, full, more-than-red tomatoes will be ready.

And there is the promise of fresh yellow corn from the Cleveland County garden of Jack and Ruby Hunt. We've been talking about it all winter and spring, reminding ourselves how good it will be as we eat the frozen corn from last year.

We have missed a deadline in the General Assembly. So what? But let's don't miss this summer. Let's don't pass by the joys of this full-ripe living season.

On this wonderful wild roller coaster ride, this time, I am keeping my eyes wide open all the way to the end.

D.G. MARTIN is vice president for public affairs with the University of North Carolina system.

It's Just A Fair Weather Friendship

The President Sacrificed Lani Guinier To Save His Own Skin



Manning Marable

Lani Guinier is one of the most talented, intelligent and capable scholars on civil rights law in America. As a professor at the University of Pennsylvania Law School, she has sought to bridge the racial divisions among students. As a civil rights attorney she stands firmly in the tradition of Charles Hamilton Houston and Thurgood Marshall as a champion for equal rights. Without question, she would have been the ideal choice for Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights. Yet Lani Guinier was the victim of a carefully orchestrated campaign of character assassination by the Extreme Right, and in the moment of truth, was betrayed by the administration she had sought to serve. What were the basic charges leveled against Guinier? In brief, conservatives initiated their attacks by terming Guinier the "Quota Queen." Clint Bolick, a protege of Reagan's Assistant Attorney General for civil rights William Bradford Reynolds, claimed in the Wall Street Journal that Guinier favored racial quotas, and wanted to impose what he described as a "racial spoils system" which would "further polarize an already divided nation." Nothing was further from the truth. Guinier sharply opposed strict racial quotas.

Others condemned Guinier as an enemy of democracy and majority rule because she had endorsed so-called "radical" reforms in the political masse. What radical

reforms? Guinier has endorsed proportional representation, or cumulative voting, in certain instances in which minorities are unable to receive equal access to representation within the current political process. Cumulative voting is, in fact, far more democratic than the current one-person, one-vote system which now exists throughout the U.S. For example, in a city with seven districts for city council, instead of each voter having one vote in a particular district, he or she would have seven ballots which could be cast in any combination for any individual candidate or group of candidates. Such a procedure would encourage multiracial coalition-building across neighborhood lines, and break down the racial gerrymandering by electoral districts which often occurs.

Then conservative charged that Guinier was "radical" because she had argued that majority runoff requirements in primaries may violate the 1965 Voting Right Act. The conservatives who criticize Guinier on this point fail to observe that the Bush's Administration's Assistant Attorney General for civil rights, John Dunne, agreed with Guinier's interpretation, asserting that runoff elections in primaries are like "electoral steroids for white candidates."

William T. Coleman, Jr., a prominent black Republican and civil rights lawyer, has observed that "much of the criticism of Ms. Guinier is nothing more than a disagreement with current law" on civil rights. Many of the suggestions found in Guinier's writings which were dismissed and smeared as "radical," Coleman notes, were "adopted by the Department of Justice in the Reagan and Bush administrations." Far from being outside of the mainstream, it was Lani Guinier's critics and attackers who were at the fringes of political and intellectual legitimacy.

At the moment of truth, however, President Clinton, Guinier's friend of two decades, betrayed that friendship and his own political principles by pulling her nomination from the Senate Judiciary Committee. Clinton's behavior was nothing less than weak-kneed and spineless. At first, he proudly crowed about her nomination to black constituents. Then, as the right wing assault and mountain of lies spread, the President became increasingly cautious, hiding once again behind his Attorney General, Janet Reno. Finally, when the "neo-liberal" publications such as the New Republic came out against Guinier, the pressure became just too much for the white Southerner to handle.

Even reactionary and racist commentators such as Patrick Buchanan understood that Clinton's failure to support Guinier's nomination was political stupidity. By abandoning Guinier and by not permitting her to defend herself before the senate subcommittee, Clinton alienated his core political base, and showed a failure of political courage. An articulate defense of her ideas could have persuaded a majority of senators, fresh from the embarrassing situation of the Thomas-Hill hearings of two years earlier, to endorse Guinier.

Clinton failed to comprehend that it is always better to fight for your principles - especially when your principles are worth fighting for.

MANNING MARABLE is a syndicated columnist.