

My last column on N.C. lottery (for now, anyway)

Now that it is finally done, who are the winners and losers in the lottery fight?

The biggest winner might be you, if you are a regular reader of my column. My opposition to a state-run lottery has been so strong that you have had to endure lots of columns filled with my passion about the topic.



D.G. MARTIN

Your ordeal could be over.

The biggest losers might be the biggest supporters of the lottery.

The lobbyists and public relations consultants, who have, off and on, been on the payrolls of gambling companies promoting the state lottery, may have worked themselves out of their jobs. Some of them, however, may get a second wind, again representing these companies as they compete to get a contract to run the state's new gambling business or working to expand the lottery's operation.

Other losers might be the Democratic Party leadership. The governor, lieutenant governor, the house speaker, and the senate leadership took prominent roles in the passage of the lottery this year. In public, they are celebrating and congratulating each other. In private, they worry that they have lost a popular political issue that helped them win the last two gubernatorial elections.

They remember what happened in South Carolina. In 1998 Democrat Jim Hodges won an upset victory over incumbent Governor David Beasley, on a pro-lottery platform. But in 2002, the South Carolina lottery was in place. Without the "lottery" issue to help him, Hodges lost his reelection campaign.

Similarly, some North Carolina Democrats wish they could have kept the issue on the table for a few more elections.

For the same reason, some anti-lottery Republican politicians are glad they finally lost and got the lottery issue out of the way.

The deputy leader of the Republican minority in the state senate, Tom Apodaca from Hendersonville, told the Charlotte Observer, "I've always been against it, but I spent my whole weekend back in my district with everybody I saw saying, 'Please vote for the lottery.' From that point, I'm glad to get it off the table. I'm tired of hearing about it. We've got a lot of other important issues we need to be dealing with."

Apodaca might have added, "And, having the lottery off the table is going to make it possible for us to win at election time."

The biggest losers, over time, may well be the students in public schools. With the lottery supposedly taking care of school construction needs, local voters may be less likely to approve school bond issues. Actually, even the most optimistic projections of lottery proceeds would cover only a small fraction of estimated needs. Also, even though the legislature has "promised" not to reduce other funding for schools, we have learned that you cannot take such "promises" to the bank.

Speaking of promises that might not be kept, don't count on me keeping the one I made about not writing any more about the lottery.

Here is why. The lottery issue might not be over quite yet. Some lottery opponents may be exploring the possibility of challenging it on constitutional grounds.

The North Carolina Constitution requires "revenue bills" to be approved on two separate days. The lottery bill was approved on a single day.

The question then is whether or not the lottery legislation was a "revenue bill."

Here is what the constitution says:

"Sec. 23. Revenue bills. No law shall be enacted to raise money on the credit of the State, or to pledge the faith of the State directly or indirectly for the payment of any debt, or to impose any tax upon the people of the State, or to allow the counties, cities, or towns to do so, unless..."

Is the lottery a tax or does it pledge the state's credit?

You be the judge.

John Locke Foundation President John Hood argues "that the proceeds transferred from the lottery coffers to the state treasury, typically about a third, is a tax."

If a court agrees with Hood, the lottery will be back on the legislature's table. The Democrats will keep a popular issue for another election season.

And you will have to continue to endure my anti-lottery columns.

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Katrina strips and reveals real America

New Orleans as we know it is gone. So are parts of Mississippi and Alabama. Those are facts. No need to recap the statistics or pour out a woeful litany of all the death, destruction, and damage that has occurred. Every news outlet in the world has already done that. But an overriding issue that has crawled under our black skin and risen over stories of good will is the allegation that response to the tragedy has been based on bias. At a time when our country should be banding together like we did for 9-11, Hurricane Katrina has exposed our country's disconnect along the lines of race, class, and politics.



ANGELA LINDSAY

I have received several times now the infamous email which aims to depict "selective reporting" on the part of the media. It shows two different pictures—one of a black person with a bag of stolen items from a grocery store and one of a white person with a bag of stolen food as well. The captions respectively stated that the black man was "looting" and the white person had "found" the items, leading many to be outraged at the difference in choice of words used to describe what appears to be the same action by both individuals. Some claimed news media's coverage was distorted and showed blacks in the worst light possible through constant images of looting and shooting. Some blacks expressed embarrassment at the behavior of their people.

The city of New Orleans is nearly 70 percent black. It is one of the poorest of all the larger cities in America. Many of its residents live at or below the poverty level, and, as a result, could not jump into their SUVs and evacuate. Therefore, they are the ones likely to be broadcast on TV. In desperate times, "lawlessness" often ensues. Now, granted—you can not eat a flat screen TV, and rescue vehicles are not going to pick you up carrying a stash of stolen guns slung over your shoulder. So, there is no excuse for those types of items to be taken. But if you knew the only thing keeping you or your child or your grandmother from death or sickness while you wait on assistance was to take what you needed to survive—what would you do?

Not just black people are scrounging to survive down there. Regardless of race, many of the evacuees are poor and already live daily with the stress of poverty and dire conditions. The real story of what has occurred to these people should have moved us all to compassion. But what it did was put the prejudices of our society under a microscope. People called into radio shows and sent messages across the Internet about how America should be embarrassed that these "thugs" had resorted to looting during this time. There was even a story I read about a group who stated the hurricane was a sign by God that homosexuality is evil because a gay festival was set to be held in New Orleans this week. Some blamed the victims themselves for not evacuating, but many of them are poor and have nowhere else to go or any means to leave. It is shameful that a country at war is using another tragedy on its own soil to justify prejudices, impose elitist attitudes and foster party politics while Americans suffer.

Beginning last Monday, a local radio station and its listeners raised over \$250,000 alone and completely stocked up fifteen 18-wheelers with food, water and supplies and had the caravan on the way to New Orleans by Thursday. This was the work of ordinary people with only the resources donated by other kind-hearted people around this area. Now, I do not purport to know everything about the inner workings of the government but if two morning show DJs can put together an effective plan of action to help, then

Bush admitted that the results of the rescue efforts stood improvement and stated that \$10.5 billion will go toward the clean-up effort. And as much as some like to view him as the bearer of all bad things, it is no secret that New Orleans was a mess before he came into office. The local and state government is the first line of response, but the city has lacked adequate infrastructure and has been riddled for years with crime, poverty and corrupt officiating from its government to local politics to the police force. The dereliction of duties by the local and state leadership, however, should not have amounted to finger pointing between bureaucracies while citizens suffer.

I still fail to see a valid reason for all the disorder. We are the United States. We just sent people to the moon. We couldn't effectively get water and supplies to victims? That is the point. If after the chaos subsides, the sifting process to determine who is at fault for slow rescues, gas prices, oil refineries, global warming, levee breaks, and all the other ancillary issues of this disaster begins. But it is not the time right now.

The task of rebuilding will be long and difficult and unlike any natural disaster recovery effort we have ever seen. But we are a resilient people. We have been through worse. There are people of all races and backgrounds who are willing and able to help each other and do whatever it takes to restore some semblance of normalcy and humanity to an otherwise depleted region.

I did catch one heartening story about a black man who was pulled from raging waters and most certain death by a white man. They were neighbors. They rarely spoke before. The black man said they would be good friends from now on after profusely thanking the white man for saving his life. As they hugged each other, the white man simply said, "You're welcome, brother."

Exactly.

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Storm exposes the 'invisible poor'

By Theodore M. Shaw
SPECIAL TO THE POST

Even before Katrina ripped a path of destruction through the Gulf Coast the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and other civil and human rights advocates were advocating for more enlightened policies affecting class and race.

Then came Katrina. The nation watched as New Orleans was evacuated — or so we thought. Those who could left by the tens and hundreds of thousands.

Those who could not — the "invisible" poor, stayed. As the hurricane hit, most people thought that a relatively small number of people who could not or would not leave were safely ensconced in the Superdome to ride out the storm. The ugly reality, that those who were too poor to own cars and who had no place and no means to go numbered in the hundreds of thousands, only became apparent as New Orleans descended into a hellish nightmare that most Americans like to think could happen anywhere but here. Yet it did.

As the faces of the "invisible" poor were revealed, they were overwhelmingly black. Once again, race exploded openly into the national conscience. The issue of race is always a major sub-text in American life, but we like to deny it or treat it as if it were one of those nineteenth century diseases that had been largely eradicated by 20th century medicine.

Periodically there might be an isolated case or two among the uninculcated, but for the most part, the disease had been wiped out.

The truth is that race has always been and continues to be this nation's great affliction, and we know it. We choose to live in denial about the truth of race precisely because our nation's history of racism still holds so much power and explosiveness that we think we are better off if we make race the "third rail" in American life. Even, even if we acknowledge the continued realities of race and racism — we are tired — bone weary tired — of it. So we live in this carefully constructed denial of race and racism in which we prefer to soothe ourselves with the plumb of fictional color-blindness. Katrina exposed the issue of race once again, as it did the issue of class.

While the news cycle is short and this momentary candor is already fading, the underlying realities of race and class remain. The Legal Defense Fund is bringing its expertise and resources to post-Katrina relief. First response needs of Katrina victims obviously are basic and immediate concerns involving saving lives, and providing food, shelter and medical care. Second wave issues will include a thicket of legal questions, civil and criminal, of staggering proportion. LDF has reached out to lawyers across the nation in civil rights organizations, bar associations and law firms in order to begin coordination of pro bono legal services. And we are moving to represent New Orleans residents facing various criminal charges, including looting baby clothes for their one year old child. Black elected officials from Louisiana are seeking LDF's assistance in legal matters that they see on the horizon affecting the African-American community. LDF had clients in various cases pending when Katrina hit; we are finding our clients and ascertaining next steps on their behalf. And we are examining a range of legislative and regulatory issues that Congress and federal agencies must address.

Katrina has brought out the best and the worst in people in New Orleans, the Gulf Coast region, and around the nation. Just as it is true on an individual level adversity tests character, it is true for our nation. We believe that this is a time to articulate and pursue a better vision of our nation. This is not a time for Congress to further cut programs that provide health care for poor people, or to enact further tax cuts for the wealthy. It is time for a "paradigm shift", in which we as a nation commit ourselves to the adoption of priorities and policies which leave no person in this nation behind, mired in poverty and shackled by racism. What happened in New Orleans after Katrina was a warning that we ignore at our deepest peril.

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