

EDITORIAL

Holding hands is not enough

Hands Across America turned out to be the spectacular event it was promised to be, in spite of gaps in the line and the participation of certain individuals.

When it was first announced, it seemed incomprehensible that 5 million Americans would turn out and link hands to unite themselves to raise money for the poor and homeless within our shores. It was perhaps too much to ask that they pay \$10 for the privilege to stand abreast, 1,300 per mile for 4,000 miles, to call attention to the darkest aspect of our society — the fact that certain Americans do not have enough to eat or lack basic shelter.

Whether Americans stood in the line and held the hands of strangers in order to feed the starving, to be part of a "historic" media event, or to partake of such a fine warm Sunday afternoon in the United States that they were lulled into believing that no one could ever starve again, thanks to their 15 minutes or their \$10, is irrelevant. The question that should be asked is why America, the richest and the greatest nation, allowed people, any people, to starve for so long.

There were well-intentioned participants in the hype-line that was "Hands." There was Don Johnson standing in the middle of New Mexico to help attract even more handholders than the 17 percent of the state's population that showed up. But good intentions have to be backed up by some kind of effort. The United States has learned by now that money, even the projected \$50 million of "Hands," can't solve a problem as profound as hunger. To solve that problem, we have to confront it directly. The starving have to be faced if they are to be fed. The problem

Martin's meaninglessness

North Carolinians' lives are a little more significant each day, week and month of the year, thanks to that paragon of public relations, that master of meaningless gestures, Republican Gov. James G. Martin.

Martin has made it a routine practice to make proclamations such as Dental Assistants Week, Foot Health Month, Bicycle Month, Older Americans Month, Hurricane Awareness Week, Manufactured Housing Month, as well as the Year of the Family, the Year of the Principal, and the Year of the Native American.

Virtually any group or organization around the state can get the governor to publicize its cause by merely asking for a proclamation. Most requests are honored, according to an official in the governor's office, and the proclamations are sent out on semi-official looking stationery with a genuine photocopy of Martin's seal. For example, an excerpt from the Older Veterans Week proclamation reads, "In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the Great Seal of the State of North Carolina at the Capitol in Raleigh this twenty-fourth day of April in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-six, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and ninth."

State taxes, highway maintenance and other gubernatorial concerns must be petty annoyances when so many proclamations must be read and processed. There are speeches to be made, photographs to be taken; who has time to sit through those typically long-winded executive sessions?

cannot be glossed over with one afternoon of "We are the World" choruses and thought to be solved. We are not the world, we're a very small part of it, and in other parts of it, vast numbers of people are starving.

The most distressing part of the day was the participation of President Reagan. It was only a short time ago that Reagan told America that the only people in the country who were starving were those who were too "ignorant" to seek out the services available, at least those still available from an administration willing to deem ketchup a good enough vegetable to satisfy the dietary requirements of school children. Any educational materials concerning the food stamp program were cut out of the Department of Agriculture's budget in 1981 by Reagan.

The words, or at least the intentions of "Hands," were made clear when its organizer, Ken Kragen, told participants that Sunday was only a first step and an effort would have to be made in the future to go into every community to face and fight this abominable situation over a prolonged period in order to defeat it.

Only if the situation is confronted by people where they reside, or don't reside in the case of the homeless, will those truly seeking an American society be free of misery. That people starve in this nation is the greatest and saddest failure of our society. If we treat Sunday's extravaganza as a communal pledge to do something significant and go on to face and defeat the situation, then we can claim a victory.

If this is done, Americans can feel good about lining up for a similar event to be held on the same date a year from now — "Patting Ourselves on the Backs Across America."

Although it may be considered part of a governor's job to take part in such good will activities, Martin has gotten a little carried away. State funds are being extravagantly squandered on publicizing proclamations such as Cornbread Week and Vitiligo Treatment Week (a skin disease characterized by white spots on various parts of the body). These items are of little interest to anyone except the group members who pushed for their recognition.

Eventually, Martin will make so many proclamations that they will begin to contradict each other. Vegetarian Appreciation Month will coincide with Beef Producers Week; the Year of the Tobacco Growing Industry will conflict with Lung Cancer Awareness Week; the absurdity of the entire situation will escalate.

Martin's justification for making so many proclamations would probably be that he is honoring the requests of his constituents. Perhaps he is, but it cannot be denied that serving public interest groups is directly correlated with receiving votes, which may be a concern to Martin if he is considering a bid for re-election in 1988.

There are several new proclamations that Martin should consider:

- Ribbon-cutting, Champagne-bottle-breaking, and Other Such Nonsense by the Governor's Office Prevention Week
- Stop Government Waste in the Capitol Month
- The Year of Curbing North Carolina Officials from Politicizing on State Time

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Comments don't reflect the complete situation

To the editors:

I was pleased to read your report of a recent emergency town meeting on the Shearon Harris Nuclear Plant in your last issue. At the same time, however, I was confused by your reporter's concentration on a few comments of mine, which represented only a very minor part of that program. There is much more to the nuclear plant issue than the questions of utility rates which I discussed. The most important issues are those of public health and safety in event of a nuclear emergency. These were the concerns of six of the eight speakers that evening, and ought to be concerns of your readers; one hopes that your report would have reflected these serious and substantive concerns.

Speakers at the meeting were Dr. Harriet Amman, an environmental pollution researcher; Dr. Gerald Drake, a physician and internist; Norman Aamodt, a mechanical engineer and specialist on the Three Mile Island accident; Wells Eddleman, an energy conservation consultant who has studied construction flaws at the Shearon Harris plant; Dr. Phyllis Lotchin, chair of the Chapel Hill Mayor's Evacuation Task Force; Jane Sharp, former chair of the Consumers' Council of North Carolina; and Jackie Brockman, a housewife and mother who survived the nuclear "accident" at Three Mile Island.

Many people who attended the meeting felt that Jackie Brockman's account of nuclear disaster was the most powerful part of the program, since it was clear that hers could someday be our experience as well. I hope that your readers will be interested in a recounting of the message she brought to Chapel Hill.

Jackie Brockman, survivor of Three Mile Island, did what most anyone would do if their local nuclear plant went haywire. She drove to the school to get her daughter and then to get the hell

out of Dodge. Only the schools had their own evacuation plans, and held up release of the kids. And the gas-station man, reluctant to stand in radioactive rain to cashier, even for above-minimum-wage in the rush of the decade, shut down and locked the pumps. And the tow-truck drivers and some of the emergency deputy marshalls and the grocer and the banker took off too, figuring the evacuation meant "evacuate now," and not "direct traffic and make change and sell supplies." "There was one thing you felt whenever you heard the siren go off," she said, "and that was fear, knee-shaking fear." One knows that Jackie Brockman still fears, like other survivors who have witnessed the world going over the abyss of panic, and that she is still putting the pieces together, ten years afterward.

Ms. Brockman told about the breakdown of civilization in the midst of a nuclear emergency in terms which were so vivid, and so frighteningly everyday, that one knew they were still present dangers to her. The knowledge that her husband died of cancer, and that her daughter suffers from developmental handicaps ascribed to days of nuclear fallout exposure, made her account chilling to consider.

There are many issues connected with the question of use of nuclear fuel at the Shearon Harris Plant, but the human issue, as represented by the tragedy of Three Mile Island, is for me the most profound issue, and the one deserving the greatest consideration. We may resent increases in electricity charges to pay for wasteful projects like Shearon Harris, but we need to stand and fight when the safety, health and integrity of our communities are threatened as they would be nuclear emergency.

Lightning A. Brown
Dental Research Center
Chapel Hill