

# Opinions

## Retreat meetings spark debate



**Watching**  
By Paul T. O'Connor

Public officials sometimes find the public to be a real nuisance. They want to re-zone a piece of land, close a school or raise taxes and the public wants to horn in on the fun with its two cents.

City council or county commissioner chambers get all crowded and the citizens get all worked up, some even get ugly.

The county commissioners in Mecklenburg have arrived upon a solution to this inconvenience. They've asked the legislature to give them special authority to hold official meetings outside of their county. This way they can go ahead and do what they wish, and they won't have to listen to all those dissenting opinions.

The sponsor of the bill, Rep. Ruth Easterling, D-Mecklenburg, doesn't view the idea so cynically, of course. Explaining her bill to the House Judiciary I Committee recently, she said it was needed for those occasions when the commissioners travel together to national conventions. If there is a resolution up for a vote, the commissioners can't discuss it because that would constitute an official meeting.

Others weren't so impressed with the bill. Rep. Martin Nesbitt, D-Buncombe, said the bill would lead to violations of the spirit of the Open Meetings Law. A crowd of commissioners on an out-of-town junket could call a meeting and give the proper public notice

back home, "but it doesn't make any difference because you're in Timbuktu and no one can get there."

Rep. Tim McDowell, D-Alamance, asked how a board could comply with the Open Meetings Law if they're in Los Angeles. How could they post the required official notice on the courthouse bulletin board? Mrs. Easterling said no notice of any particular meeting would be required because the entire trip to and from Los Angeles would be considered an official meeting. One notice would be sufficient.

Hugh Stevens, lobbyist for the N.C. Press Association, told the committee the bill "strikes at the very heart of the idea of a people's access to their government." This law wouldn't hurt the press much, he said. Reporters would be sent along to follow the commissioners, he was certain.

"Our principal concern is not with the press," he said. "But this would be an enormous problem for the people. It is their rights, their property, their taxes that are being effected. The county com-

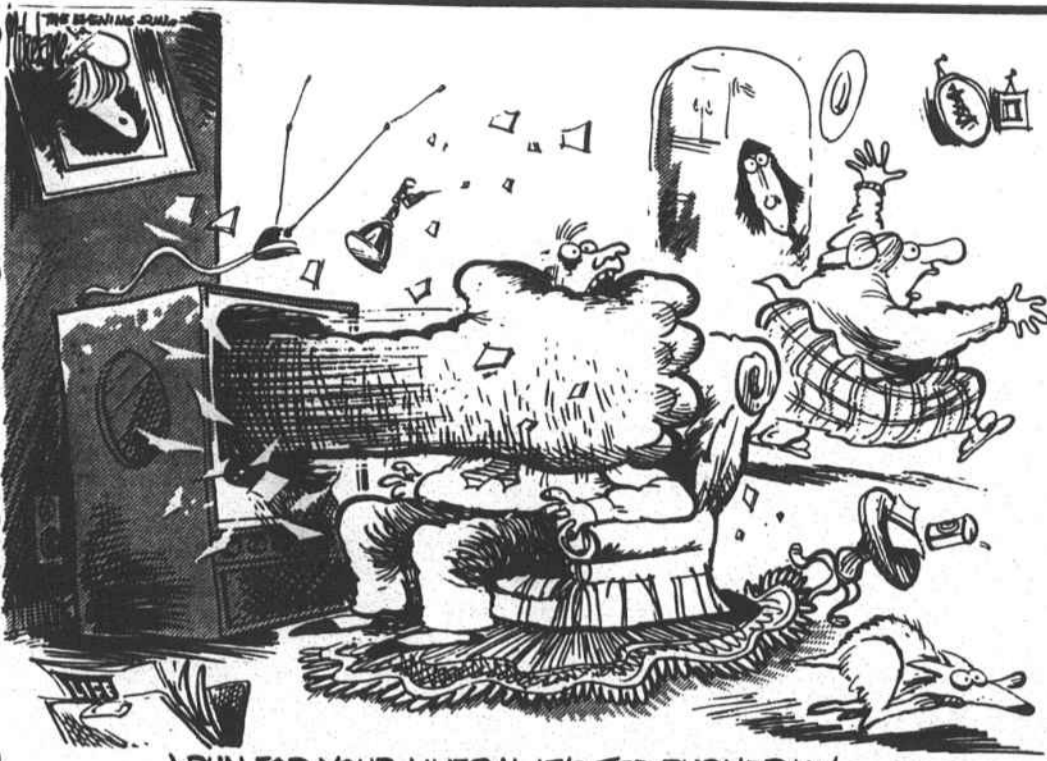
missioners are off in Las Vegas, Miami or Pinehurst taking action effecting these taxpayers when there is really no likelihood that the people they're effecting would be present."

Stevens said local officials might delay decisions on really tough issues until they were going to be out of town. Then they could decide and not have to put up with the hassle of an angry citizenry.

Mrs. Easterling retorted that state law allows municipal officials to meet outside their jurisdictions. Stevens said that wasn't good public policy, either. If anything the municipal law ought to be repealed, he said. McDowell defended the municipal law, however, saying it was needed to allow officials from different cities to meet and discuss common problems.

Although this was only a local bill, several committee members said they didn't doubt it would spread to all the counties if Mecklenburg was granted the privilege.

The bill was put in a subcommittee that is also looking at modifications to the Open Meetings Law. The committee appeared willing to allow boards to meet outside of their own jurisdiction but members voiced grave concerns about allowing any final actions to be taken in these meetings.



'RUN FOR YOUR LIVES!! IT'S TED TURNER!!!' ©1985 Copley News Service

## Poll shows changes in thinking

The Starch Readership Service, which has been polling American households since 1932, polled 4,547 households to learn what the basic interests of Americans are today.

Results for the year 1983 households show quite a change in the attitudes of Americans in the last two decades.

In 1953, the top ten basic interests of men were: sports, automobiles, entertainment, home building, religion, gardening, business, politics, travel and books.

But in 1983, U.S. men's top interests were: business, sports, automobiles, travel, science, politics, health, cultural activities, entertainment and education.

Books, religion, gardening and



Cliff Blue

### People and Issues

home building disappeared from the list.

In 1953 U.S. women were most interested in: religion, food, homemaking, child care, home furnishings, fashions, entertainment, gardening, books and education. The latest polls, for 1983: fashions, food, health, home furnishings, cultural activities, child care, travel, home-making,

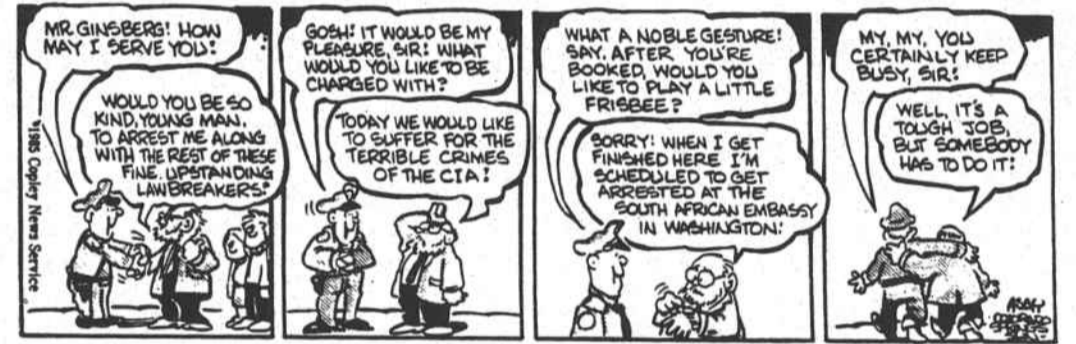
education and entertainment and books.

Religion and gardening disappeared from the women's list, religion having been No. 1 in 1953.

These results, reported in the Christian Science Monitor, indicate our churches need to work hard to make their message appealing and more realistic, relevant and practical in today's society.

**MEMORIAL DAY ...** Memorial Day began -- as a national observance -- during the Civil War, first in Mississippi and other states. In 1865 it was observed nationally. That year the U.S. Army suggested graves be decorated throughout the country.

To those who responded to the call of duty and gave their lives the nation is indebted.



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