

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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PAGE 4-A, THURSDAY, JUNE 17, 1993

It's Better To Know Either Way If Canals Are Polluted

Other Brunswick County beach communities might do well to join Sunset Beach lead and have their finger canals tested for evidence of pollution. This would not be a repeat of past groundwater studies which used test wells, but a simple check of canal water to look for evidence of unacceptable levels of pollution from malfunctioning septic tanks and stormwater runoff.

The Sunset Beach testing project was conceived when a citizen attending a public hearing expressed concern about reports of high fecal coliform levels around the island, and asked what type of warnings will be issued if any canals are determined to be unsafe for swimming. Good question.

If Sunset Beach finds reason enough to warn its visitors, there's a good chance that a similar situation exists in other areas where finger canals are lined with rental cottages which rely on individual septic tanks for wastewater disposal. Getting that information through testing now, depressing as it would be, is preferable to finding out via an eventual public health crisis.

Conversely, if there is no problem found, visitors and people whose businesses rely on them deserve to know those fears were unfounded and that it's safe to swim, fish and crab to their hearts' delight in finger canals as hundreds of thousands of vacationers have done in years past.

Any long-term, regional solution to the problem of local water pollution will be a long time coming. But it doesn't take much looking around to see a growing anxiety about this issue right now, not just on the part of fishermen who rely on the waters for their living, but by vacationers, retirees, school children and public office-holders.

Together, they need and deserve accurate information to make sound decisions for the region's residents and visitors, now and later.

Let Marketplace Deal With Smoking In Private Sector

It's annoying when governments move too slowly. It's scary when they move too quickly.

All around the state, municipal and county governments are hastily drafting laws to restrict smoking. All this to get in under the wire—to be "grandfathered" out of a legislative proposal which would prohibit towns and counties from adopting anti-smoking rules more stringent than the state's.

When towns and counties limit these regulations to publicly-owned buildings, that's appropriate—even laudable. Some propose to go farther, even though they appear to lack the resources to enforce smoking restrictions in privately owned establishments. When they try, there'll be every reason to anticipate enforcement to be selective. In addition, stay tuned to hear a chorus of city and county governments this time next year asking more money to apply these new rules.

Smoking in restaurants and other private sector establishments is an issue the marketplace can resolve of its own device. It's been happening for years now without the costly aid of a government nudge, at least in this state. No-smoking sections in North Carolina's eateries were virtually unheard of, and would have been politically blasphemous, not too many years ago. They exist now, not because government said to do it, but because consumers did. That's the right way for it to happen.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Columnist Didn't Deserve Chastising

To the editor:

I waded through James Payne's verbose letter chastising reporter Eric Carlson, and I came to the conclusion that Mr. Payne better not give up his day job. On the other hand, if he does, he could try out as a television evangelist.

Mr. Payne evidently doesn't know that the job of a columnist or editorialist is to express his or her opinion on subjects about which he feels strongly. Mr. Carlson's column did just that: reflected his opinion. Unlike Mr. Payne, he did not insult the intelligence of his readers with his manner of writing. He merely provided food for thought.

Despite his long-winded, ego-trip letter, Mr. Payne failed to prove his allegations regarding Mr. Carlson's "lack of objectivity and danger of ignorance."

To paraphrase his "old tactic": When you have nothing important to say, use as many words as possible to say it.

Pegge Jaynes
Supply

'Fools' Gold'

To the editor:
A lottery in North Carolina would be a bad bet any way you cut it.

States that have tried it have found that the expected funding for schools, etc., never materialized. It turned out to be fools' gold.

The lottery, if passed, would put the state of North Carolina in the gambling businesses—a sorry example for our children and grandchildren. The people of North Carolina would be the ultimate losers, and our state would never again be the wholesome state that it is today.

The lottery can be compared to a red apple that looks good on the outside but inside is filled with worms. The lottery bill has passed in the Senate. I hope the House will let it die in committee for the good of our people.

Berry Williams
Wilmington

Write Us

The Beacon welcomes letters to the editor. All letters must be signed and include the writer's address and telephone number. We reserve the right to edit libelous comments. Address letters to The Brunswick Beacon, P. O. Box 2558, Shallotte, N. C. 28459.

Graduating With An Exercise In Rights

Watching the mini-drama that swirled around South Brunswick High School's graduation ceremony last week, it was hard not to feel admiration for the clean-cut young man at the center of all the controversy.

As he and his fellow seniors prepared to close an important chapter of their lives, Jason Lanier thought it would be appropriate to say a prayer during the ceremony. A majority of his classmates agreed.

But the school administration said no. Because the U.S. Supreme Court had ruled that public schools could not sanction a formal prayer. Because doing so would violate the Constitutional separation of church and state—the idea that our government should not be allowed to favor one religion over another.

You might think this law stinks. Because, like most Americans, you probably believe in some form of Judeo-Christian religion. As do most, if not all, of your friends. So you would probably assume that any prayer read at a public school would coincide with your beliefs.

But what if you went to a high school graduation and they began the ceremony with a Buddhist sutra or a reading from the Koran or by chanting the words "Hare Krishna. Hare Krishna. Krishna Krishna. Hare Hare?"

You might be a little upset to find your tax money funding a school system that promotes a religion you don't believe in. Which is probably the same way a Buddhist American or an Islamic American or a Hindu American or a Native American



Eric Carlson

might feel when a Christian prayer is read at their graduation.

That's why the Supreme Court and local school systems tried to avoid such conflicts by not allowing religious observances of any kind. Because the first amendment says our government (of which our school system is part) "shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion..."

Trouble is, the second part of that sentence says, "...or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

In seeking to pray at his high school graduation, Jason Lanier wasn't trying to deprive anyone of their Constitutional rights by establishing a religion. He was merely standing up for his Constitutional right to freely exercise his own religion.

Which put the school in dilemma. If it allowed Jason to lead a prayer, it would establish a preference for his religion over others. But if it refused to allow the prayer, it would prohibit the free expression of a majority of students.

Luckily (for the school), the Supreme Court ruled last week that prayers could be allowed at graduation

as long as they are initiated by a majority of the student body and led by a student and not an invited religious leader.

It was a pretty good compromise. Although adherents to other religions might still have felt left out of such an observance, they could at least take some comfort in knowing that it wasn't being done by the government.

While I applaud the decision, I was a bit disappointed at the timing. Because I hadn't seen a spark of student political activism like that in many years (and several graduations). I was looking forward to seeing how it all played out.

You see, on the day I graduated, my high school was in a shambles. One month earlier, students (just like us) who were protesting the Vietnam War had been gunned down by national guardsmen at Kent State and Jackson State universities.

My high school was one of the first in the country to join the nationwide student strike that followed the shootings. For three days, no one attended classes. Instead, we gathered on the school lawn for workshops, lectures and debates about the war and about President Nixon's decision to expand the conflict by invading Cambodia.

Things never quite got back to normal after that. The senior prom was cancelled. A noticeable percentage of students boycotted graduation ceremonies, while many others adorned their mortarboards with peace symbols.

Needless to say, the valedictory

speech was not upbeat. For it was not a hopeful time. Our class had begun its freshman year after the long hot summer of 1967, when urban riots set our inner cities aflame.

Each school year was punctuated by reports of former graduates who went to Vietnam and came home in body bags. We saw the early optimism about the war fade during the Tet Offensive and disappear after the My Lai massacre.

With childhood memories of one assassination still fresh, we witnessed the murders of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. Our faith in the political system was shattered in a blur of nightsticks as we saw rioting police brutally club unarmed protesters outside the Democratic Party convention in Chicago.

So there wasn't any talk at my graduation about "bold new beginnings" or the "great adventure" awaiting us. After what we had seen in the previous four years, no one would have been surprised to hear a prediction that things would only get worse.

That the Pentagon Papers would prove our government had been lying to us about Vietnam. That the Nixon administration would get caught red-handed in a bungled burglary, a campaign of political espionage and an illegal cover-up. Or that the president (and vice-president) would resign in disgrace to avoid impeachment while several of their key advisers went to prison.

I can't remember if we had a formal prayer that graduation day. But I'm pretty sure we all said one to ourselves.



There's Plenty Of Money Under The Cushions

I emerge from the dream with a lunatic's grin.

In it I am standing on the State House lawn, pad in hand and camera around neck, as the members of my sleepy-time legislature gather for the session's most important public relations function. They are dressed in the Sunday finery of toddlers—bright white training shoes, little navy shorts with suspenders, crisp cotton shirts and red bow ties.

When the big guy in the bunny suit gives the cue, they all scatter and begin poking under trees and behind shrubs, shrieking with glee as they discover the multi-colored plastic eggs that hold the hidden money...

Meanwhile, back in the real world, a coalition of local government leaders, worried about water quality degradation and public health, asks for half a million dollars in state funds to study the possibility of a regional sewer and stormwater project. "Good idea, but we'll have to see if we can find the money," is one of the answers they get.

A well-meaning citizens' group, working against the clock to save one of the last undeveloped barrier islands, seeks financial help from the state to buy the property. "Good idea, but we'll have to see if we can find the money," is one of the answers they get.

This is not to knock the people who ask; in fact, I hope the state can "find the money" for both causes. I only mean to raise one curious little question: In any given year, who finds how much money and where?

In this community alone, groups present dozens if not hundreds of find-the-money requests, many of

them most worthy, to the legislative delegation. If there are 100 counties, with 100 good find-the-money causes in each, at an average \$100,000 per cause, how much money can be found to go how far and where?

In your own life, what's the most money you ever found—in the pockets of your dirty laundry, under your sofa cushions, through a mistake in balancing your checkbook? Enough to use for anything more extravagant than a tankful of gasoline? Not likely.

And if you began casually sticking significant sums of money in odd places and having to go find it whenever you need to have a tooth crowned or your car lubed, wouldn't someone in your family start thinking about taking control of your finances until you regained your senses?

The state, and most notably the feds, get away with doing this kind of thing because of a phenomenon called OPM. That's what Danny Devito called it in a movie by the same name—it's *Other People's Money*.

I'm not being self-righteous. I've only been back in the private sector for a year after having made my living off a combination of federal and foundation money, all OPM. In fact,

it was my full-time job to convince

people to give our organization OPM to do our work. And very good work we did, taking care of needy and sick people. But looking back, I can't deny that we could have done as much with a little less OPM.

Many years ago I worked in a community college under a federal grant program which was suddenly dissolved. My boss told the secretary and me—the three of us were the whole department—that we had six weeks to hang around until the money ran out, then he'd see that we got jobs in other departments.

What were we to do for six weeks, I asked? Show up and sit at your desk, and you'll continue to be paid until we place you in another job. In my experience, this type of thing does not happen in private business where there's no OPM.

See, when you're getting OPM, you tend to rationalize. It gets worse the longer you do it, and there are OPM professionals who have been around for many years—your hardcore bureaucrats who've never worked on a Saturday or faced a problem that couldn't be taxed out

of existence.

You forget that ordinary workers in the private sector often make less money than you do, have less comfortable working conditions, get fewer holidays and vacations, never get to go to conferences in fun cities, and in most cases have to get more done in a day's time than you do in a week or month. And, most importantly, that they're paying you to be there.

In the OPM game, you learn early on to ask for twice as much as you need. That way, if the budget gets cut, you'll still have enough to operate. If it doesn't, you'll have a little cushion.

It's behind those little cushions that state and federal governments "find the money." When they need discretionary funds, they can just put a tiny budgetary squeeze, 5 percent here, and 3 percent there, on a few departments.

Sure, they'll holler, but that's part of the game, too. You better believe they've got it to spare, stashed in a padded travel budget or somewhere like that.

It may not be fair, but it's the only game in town.

Worth Repeating...

- The beauty of the world has two edges, one of laughter, one of anguish, cutting the heart asunder. —Virginia Woolf
- A physician can bury his mistakes, but the architect can only advise his clients to plant vines. —Frank Lloyd Wright