

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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South Carolina's I-73 Fight Could Hurt Down The Road

"I can't even believe this is being debated." That's what one participant said last week when South Carolina Transportation Secretary Dan Fanning spoke out against North Carolina's plan to route proposed highway I-73 into Brunswick County and point it toward the mutating traffic nightmare we know as the Grand Strand.

But as silly as it may seem to those of us in the interstate-deprived Far East of the Carolinas, South Carolina could conceivably foul the plan for federal funds to study the still-nebulous I-73 by continuing to insist that the highway run through Florence, a small city already served by both the north-south route I-95 and east-west I-20.

This despite the fact that the federal legislation which created the I-73 project was intended to bring interstate highways to areas that don't have them. One would be hard-pressed to pinpoint any South Carolina location more in current need of relief from its transportation crunch than the Grand Strand.

North Carolina's Department of Transportation board, whose local representative is Ocean Isle Beach developer Odell Williamson, unanimously agreed to push the original I-73 route 90 miles farther east to better serve long-neglected southeastern North Carolina and, presumably, our neighbors to the south. Our DOT backed up its revised plan by offering to pay for the route with its own money or regular federal highway aid. That's a pretty solid offer considering the fact that many states are counting on extra federal dollars to build the highway.

In a world that made sense, South Carolina would follow through and eagerly seize the opportunity to improve the north-south route from Wilmington to Charleston.

The new proposed route has, understandably, been endorsed by numerous local governments in Brunswick County who see the economic boost an interstate highway could bring. But it's more than that. Looking eight to 10 years down the road, to coin a phrase, it's frightening to imagine how desperate this region's transportation needs will be if no such major highway project is implemented.

County Work Camp Part Of The Solution?

There's only one prisoner work camp left in North Carolina, in Guilford County.

Gov. Jim Hunt wants that to change. He'd like to see a minimum security work camp in every county, and a boot camp as well in many of them. From the shape of the system we now have, I'd say he's on the right track.

Last week during a brief stop-over at the Rural Tele-Forum at UNC-Wilmington, Hunt talked about the Information Highway and its potential impact on the state, then held a press conference. Accompanied by Attorney General Michael Fasley, Hunt talked at greater length, not about fiber optics, but crime prevention and punishment. You could tell what's foremost in his mind this month, as he prepares for a special legislative session in March on crime.

The work camps and boot camps are just two of the alternative forms of sentencing being eyed as the state looks at ways to make the criminal justice system work better.

One way is to assure that those who commit violent or otherwise more serious crimes receive greater punishment than those who do not. Currently that isn't always the case. We have teen-agers serving longer sentences than adults, and some criminals going virtually unpunished.

Over the next 18 months the state will add another 7,500 beds to the prison system, but that won't be enough to solve the problem.

The state will also be working with counties so that as jail space is built, consideration is taken to add space for some of the misdemeanants now being served in state prisons.

As Hunt noted last week, the crime rate in North Carolina has doubled over the last five years. He believes we face a crime "crisis," if something isn't done quickly in terms of deterrence and punishment.

One way to improve the situation is to free existing high-priced prison beds for felons by sending misdemeanants back to their home communities to jails, work camps and boot camps. Those facilities don't have to meet the same federal standards as prisons, where inmates serve longer terms. That in itself would save the state money.

Misdemeanants serve terms of two years or less.

Hunt said these minimum security camps would be similar to the old county prison camps. (Like the one that used to be on Mulberry Street outside Charlotte) where inmates had to work every day. Prisoners could grow their own food, as those at Guilford do, and do other productive work instead of laying around and doing nothing.

Hunt said using the camps would guarantee some punishment for these offenders. That's important in a system that adult criminals—misdemeanor and otherwise—now "volunteer" for by asking that their probation be revoked and that they be allowed to serve active sentences.

Criminals know that in the existing prison system they'll be on the streets again in a matter of months, weeks, or even days, depending on when the number of people in prison reaches the federal "cap" and some must be released to make room for the others arriving each day. That's a much better deal for a criminal than having to make restitution, complete community service and stay out of trouble.

The state has an idea for fixing that problem as well. A bill before the N.C. House of Representatives would have the court decide when probation could be revoked rather than giving criminals a say in the matter.

I'll be watching, and I'm sure the rest of you will, to see how far the state legislature goes in helping forge a more comprehensive criminal justice system that addresses the need for a variety of minimum security facilities to house non-violent offenders.

Most of us would agree with Hunt that it is "a moral outrage" to let prisoners out early under the existing prison cap. "Few," he says, "can be let out that aren't dangerous."

So we've learned as just-released prisoners commit additional crimes, knowing the punishment will be light and the living easy until they're back on the streets again.

Susan Usher



Is There Hope For Children Without Childhood?

"Boyfriends held in slayings," the headline reads.

Under it are smiling school pictures of the 15- and 13-year-old sisters whose bodies were found in a shallow grave outside Gastonia last Tuesday. To my motherly female eyes they look like babies, but obviously they weren't.

The 15-year-old was dating a 32-year-old; the 13-year-old was dating an 18-year-old. The "boyfriends" are accused of having tied them up, slashed their throats and buried them near Crowders Mountain in the middle of December 1993.

Their mom is quoted as saying she distrusted the heavily tattooed guys, who "looked like boys maybe trying to be in some kind of cult." But she just couldn't control those girls. They fought with her over discipline. They'd skip school and stay gone for weeks at a time.

At first, she said, she didn't worry when they stayed out all night Dec. 9. She thought it unusual that the younger daughter didn't even call home on her 14th birthday Dec. 11. Then on Dec. 13 she finally called the police.

The younger man charged in the girls' murder has no criminal record. The older one spent two months in



prison in 1983 for breaking and entering. Their picture was in the paper, too, taken as they were being led back to jail following a first appearance in court. The 32-year-old is wearing a sleeveless T-shirt that says "1993 World Tattoo Tour Chicago. Where The Weak Are Killed And Eaten!"

"New fears and pressures are robbing a generation of its childhood," proclaims a headline in the current issue of *Newsweek*.

With it are statistics about changes in the family and outside influences over our children, plus a list of what kids ages 9 through 17 say they fear most. Forty-two percent said it was contracting the AIDS virus; 24 percent said having to fight in a war; 14 percent said becoming homeless.

Their major economic worries included not being able to find a good job, not having enough money, not being able to get into college, and having their parents lose their jobs.

The author reminds us that the actual mortality rate among children 5 to 14 has dropped steadily for decades, to less than half the 1950 rate, but that fear of crime is "almost a separate phenomenon from the real danger it poses."

"...What we've lost goes beyond the fear of crime," he writes. "It is the unspoken consensus that held children to be a privileged class deserving protection from adult concerns and responsibilities. Increasingly they are left to fend for themselves in a world of hostile strangers, dangerous sexual enticements and mysterious economic forces that even adults find unsettling."

"Your mother is on a business trip, your father is skiing with his other set of kids and your teacher has been suspended for telling a seventh-grade girl she reminds him of Veronica Lake. Now, go do your homework."

Here at home, a group of nine young adults—some of them teenagers or still in high school—are charged with having been present at

the scene of a killing. Four of them are charged with first-degree murder.

For the second time since a man was found dead in his driveway following something apparently resembling gang activity, family members have protested to reporters that the kids are being treated unfairly.

They couldn't all have done it, says a mama or a sister; my boy was there but did nothing wrong. The only reason no one reported a man's death, they rationalize, was that the kids were all afraid of each other.

I'm not old, but I can remember when children were taught to respect life and, that in decent people, conscience overrides fear.

When acne was the worst thing troubling your average middle-class adolescent.

When you weren't allowed to leave the house with anybody your parents didn't like the looks of.

God help our children. And if we as parents don't pitch in, too, we'll all find ourselves living the John Lennon phrase that has been playing in my head ever since I started writing this column:

*Instant karma's gonna get you,
 Gonna look you right in the face.
 Better get yourself together, darling,
 Join the human race.*



LET'S KEEP IT SIMPLE, OK?

GUEST COLUMN

Commercial Fishermen Fight For Their Livelihood

The following is a letter to Governor Jim Hunt from the president of the newly reactivated Brunswick County Commercial Fisherman's Association. It is reprinted as a guest column with permission of the author.

BY LLOYD WARD

Governor Hunt:

You probably won't remember me, but we met in Raleigh during your first term in office. My name is Lloyd Ward. I was then the president of the Brunswick County Fisherman's Association. You and your staff were very helpful to our cause, and we would like to thank you, but now we are in more need than ever.

Governor, we the commercial fishermen are being regulated out of our livelihood.

Our way of life is not only endangered by pollution (we understand that), but by your appointed officials in Morehead City. They seem to thrive off of making things miserable for fishermen.

It has gotten to the point that if you try to make a living as a commercial fisherman, you take a big gamble every day in trying not to break any of Morehead's rules. Governor Hunt, I wish you would have someone from your staff to read the regulations we have to live by. Here is what it takes to get one bushel of oysters to sell:

■ North Carolina boat license and Marine Fisheries license on the boat. Then a life jacket for every person and a throw preserver, a whistle, fire extinguisher, and a light on the front and back of the boat.

■ Now the boat is ready, but you are not. You now need an oyster and clam license for yourself. You must buy tickets to let people know your name, location of oysters, and buyer.

■ Just starting the first of the year, we have to buy a card giving us an ID number which we must have to sell seafood to a dealer. That costs \$25. Altogether licenses cost from \$75 up.

■ But with all this you may still get a ticket. If you have one clam undersize, your whole load will be taken and you will be charged \$85; or if 10 percent of oysters are undersized or too many shells on them, you get charged \$85 and they take your whole load. If flounder is under 13 inches, it's another \$85 or for any other undersize fish. You always have this threat hanging over you, from the time you go to work until you get home.

I was even stopped one day, (after driving over 100 miles to go oystering) in the middle of the town of Shallotte by two Marine Fisheries officers driving two automobiles with sirens going

and lights flashing. You would have thought I robbed a bank by the way they acted. They couldn't find anything wrong, so they let me go.

If things weren't bad enough, our state is being flooded with out-of-state oysters (Florida, Texas and Louisiana) and underselling us since they don't have Morehead City regulations. If the people only knew the oysters they ate at our North Carolina Oyster Festival came from out of state—and that the seafood from our restaurants not only comes from other states, but also from other countries—they may not be so eager to visit our coastal counties.

Governor Hunt, it seems to me that instead of trying to help the commercial fishermen, that the Marine Fisheries Commission is trying to stop us altogether.

First of all, how can anyone tell you how to do your job when they have never been a commercial fisherman? I doubt that most of the commission can tell between an oyster or clam, a spot or a mullet. I don't believe any of these have ever set a gillnet, used a clam rake or culled out a bushel of oysters. Yet they tell us what to do.

It's like me being in an operating room telling a brain surgeon how to operate. I'm afraid the patient would die the same way we commercial fishermen are doing.

I know, you are probably saying that before they pass any ruling, they have held meetings for public input. That is a laugh. I have been to those meetings. I even sat in on their closed-door meeting when they were ready to vote on an issue. They would generally sit back and laugh at how some of the fishermen looked and talked while he was asking them to please not put anymore regulations on him. After everyone quit laughing, they would then say, "Let's vote on this issue." The commissioners would ask the Marine Fisheries director what he thought was the best choice. He would tell them, and that is the way the vote went.

To my knowledge, we have no elected officials from our county commissioners in the House or Senate in Raleigh doing anything to help commercial fishermen.

I would like to share this story with you. When I was going from meeting to meeting to try to get help for our industry in this county, there was one in particular I will never forget. We were in Morehead and a committee to allocate monies to different coastal counties was in session. I sat in and listened as different counties were being named. After a while, the committee started to adjourn. No one had mentioned Brunswick County. I asked them why. One of them looked at me and seemed very amazed. "Brunswick County," he said. "Isn't that in South Carolina?"

After we have done the best we can not to break any laws, I recommend to everyone before you do any commercial fishing:

1. Take the Morehead regulations book with you.
2. Take a lawyer with you to help you understand it.
3. Carry a ruler to measure everything.
4. Take someone with you that knows how to pray that a new law you don't know about hasn't gone into effect.

Governor Hunt, I am not trying to be funny. This is how fast a new regulation can be made in Morehead. Marine Fisheries Commission has delegated, it seems, most of their authority to the director. He can, at any time he feels like it, put us on the welfare line. He can limit us to as many bushels of oysters we can gather in a day just by a strike of his pen, which, by the way, is five bushels a day. Last year it was seven. We have been threatened with possibly three per day, and then one.

Governor, you are our last hope. While I have been writing this letter today, when I went to Shallotte to pay for my brand new right-to-sell seafood license (\$25), I was told I had to turn in my oyster and clam license (cost, \$4) even though it was still good until June 1994, and pay \$16 for another set which expires in June 1994.

The people of North Carolina should be told why they have to pay \$25 and up per bushel of oysters. It is not our fault.

As I said, Governor, your staff did such a fine job helping us that we disbanded the fishermen's association, but now I am calling it back again—not only for everyone concerned with commercial fishing, but for the general public who want to be able to buy local seafood at reasonable prices and to those that are concerned about out-of-state seafood coming into our state and being sold as local.

Election time is near. We should ask those that are running for office how they plan to help this situation. We should ask those that have been there for a long time when they think it will be safe to swim again at Sunset Beach and Calabash, and what, if anything, can be done to stop the Morehead City gang from completely destroying the commercial fishermen.

One more thing before I close. I am fully aware that by writing this letter I will be on the Morehead City's ("look out for these people") list. They are given to Marine Fisheries Officers. You can guess the rest. But if I can do something that will help our effort and to give my children and grandchildren the chance to be able to make a living from our natural resources that God gave us, it will be worth it all.