

# THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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PAGE 4-A, THURSDAY, AUGUST 4, 1994

## Taxpayers Are Certain To Demand Accountability For 'Whole Ball Of Dough'

The children deserve it. That argument apparently led to a jury's swift decision to hand the Brunswick County Board of Education the whole ball of dough in its court battle with the county commissioners last week.

Speaking generally, there's no question that the youth of Brunswick County deserve more than they've been getting from the experience of attending public school. The blame for that lies many places, including the lap of a local population which simply has not valued and demanded top-quality education as it should have. Even in rural Brunswick, it's a new brave new world where fishin' and farmin' by themselves will neither support the economy nor keep the best and brightest young people here when they're grown. Until that undercurrent of apathy is history, the federal, state and county governments can pump all the dollars in the world into the system and still have too little to show for it.

Without solid support from parents and the whole community—not the monetary kind of sustenance, but the being-there kind—no school system can be more functional than a three-legged chair. To borrow an idea from elsewhere on this page, if money alone could solve problems, the IRS would be compassionate, the postal service would be efficient and the Pentagon would be thrifty.

Contrary to lofty ruminations in daily newspaper editorials, the problems of poor test scores, run-down buildings and obsolete equipment—though they all exist—cannot be blamed on mean, miserly old county commissioners who hate children and whose favorite sports are saying no and hanging out in court. That's a simplistic point of view no one could have who's really been paying attention to events on this side of the river.

This and previous boards of commissioners have resisted raining unchecked tax dollars on the public schools, not just in deference to the annual feud tradition. There is a genuine doubt in the minds of more than a few Brunswick Countians about how their education tax dollars have been spent in the past, and there's evidence to justify those feelings. When they hear educators defending the system's needs, they don't get plain English—they get "Eduspeak," a maze of jargon that sounds suspiciously like all bureaucratic song-and-dance designed to separate you from your money. They are skeptical about Superintendent Johnston's "bottoms-up" budget plan, not because of any ill feelings toward the superintendent, but because they've been made promises before about how just this much more money will solve some problem or another.

But it worked on the jury, and that's all that counts. There's not much reason to believe the decision or award will be changed. And most Brunswick Countians—with and without kids in the public school system—probably agree that if paying 10 cents more on the hundred gives the community's children a better future, it will have been worth it.

Those whose doubts linger will be watching closely and expecting profound changes, not just in their tax statements but throughout the Brunswick County Schools. The children deserve it, and the people paying the tab do, too.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Learn From Misfortune, Capsized Boaters Advise

To the editor:

Our gratitude goes out to the Shallotte Volunteer Rescue Squad who responded to our boat accident in the Intracoastal Waterway at Long Beach July 4. In light of our devastating total loss of the boat and a lot of personal items, God was a passenger on our boat that evening, and no one had major injuries.

The Shallotte Volunteer Rescue Squad ambulance boat was in front of us and a smaller rescue boat was behind us when we went down. The young people on these rescue boats were going to Southport to enjoy the fireworks, as we were, when a pontoon broke off our boat and all seven people aboard ended up in the water.

The volunteers on both rescue squad boats immediately responded to our dilemma and assisted each of us out of the water and onto one of their boats. They were extremely helpful, sympathetic and professional in their handling of this situation. After helping the people out of the water, they took the time to gather our belongings, at least the ones that were floating in the water. They then took us to a nearby dock and called the U.S. Coast Guard for us. Our thanks to each of them for their concern.

We urge each person who has a pontoon boat to check with the manufacturer to make sure it is salt water approved. According to the man-

ufacturer of our boat, it was not salt water approved, but we had no way of knowing this because there was nothing on the boat to indicate it was not for use in salt water. Apparently cadmium bolts were used to attach the pontoons to the deck, and these bolts failed due to a chemical reaction with salt water, resulting in a pontoon coming off and the boat sinking in a matter of about 30 seconds.

Please, we urge you to check your boat so that you might prevent an accident like this from happening to you.

Bill and Frances Cierpiot  
 Long Beach  
 (More Letters, Following Page)

### Write Us

We welcome your letters to the editor. Letters must have an original signature and must include your address and telephone number. (This information is for verification purposes only; we will not publish your street/mailling address or phone number.) Letters must be typed or written legibly. Address letters to:  
 The Brunswick Beacon  
 P.O. Box 2558  
 Shallotte NC 28459  
 Anonymous letters will not be published.

# One Parent Screams Into The Void

As I write this, a jury is deliberating the case between the Brunswick County Commissioners and Board of Education. By the time you read this, the school system will have received either a nice piece of change or a good comeuppance.

I don't fully understand the relationship between tax dollars and academic achievement. Nor, I suspect, do you or the judge or the cadre of assistant superintendents whose names are engraved on the schools' administration's letterhead.

But I know one important thing. I know what it's like to be a frustrated parent who can't seem to get an answer.

Here's my story:  
 My son transferred into the Brunswick County school system this past January, having attended kindergarten through half the tenth grade in the Henderson and Dare County public schools. In all those years, I had exactly two beefs, both minor, with those school systems—one involving lunch money and the other a problem on the bus.

I made phone calls and wrote letters, as any concerned parent would, and both times got a response—not necessarily what I wanted or thought was fair, but a response, and a prompt one.



Lynn Carlson

This year the problem was more serious. I had two concerns about one of my son's classes—the first being that after five months, he had received no grades in it. The second was that he did not appear to be learning anything about the subject.

I was assured by my son, his friends, parents of other students, and even by two teachers, that this was because he wasn't being taught anything in that particular class.

I should have listened to the student who showed us around on the day my son enrolled in Brunswick County. He warned, "Don't let them put him in (her) class—he won't learn a thing. It's a zoo in there."

But I advised my son not to ask for a schedule change on his first day, that it wouldn't be right to pre-judge a teacher on the basis of one student's allegations.

My son immediately liked his

new school, even though it was vastly larger and more culturally diverse than the small, nurturing Cape Hatteras School and the bucolic Edneyville School, surrounded by apple orchards at the foot of Bearwallow Mountain. I was pleased not only by his ease of transition, but by the concern and professionalism of his school's guidance staff and all his teachers except the aforementioned.

On May 11 I expressed my concerns about that one class, in writing, to the assistant principal, balancing my complaint by telling him how impressive the other teachers had been. Never heard back from him.

A couple of weeks later, I spoke with one of the assistant superintendents who said he'd look into the matter and get back to me. He didn't bother.

Then I wrote the Superintendent Himself, the head guy, enclosing a copy of my letter to the assistant principal. Again no reply, not even an acknowledgement that he got the letter.

My son finally got a grade, a passing one. It came on that last report card, the one they send by mail after school adjourns for the year. I'm still convinced he didn't learn anything in the class, but even that's

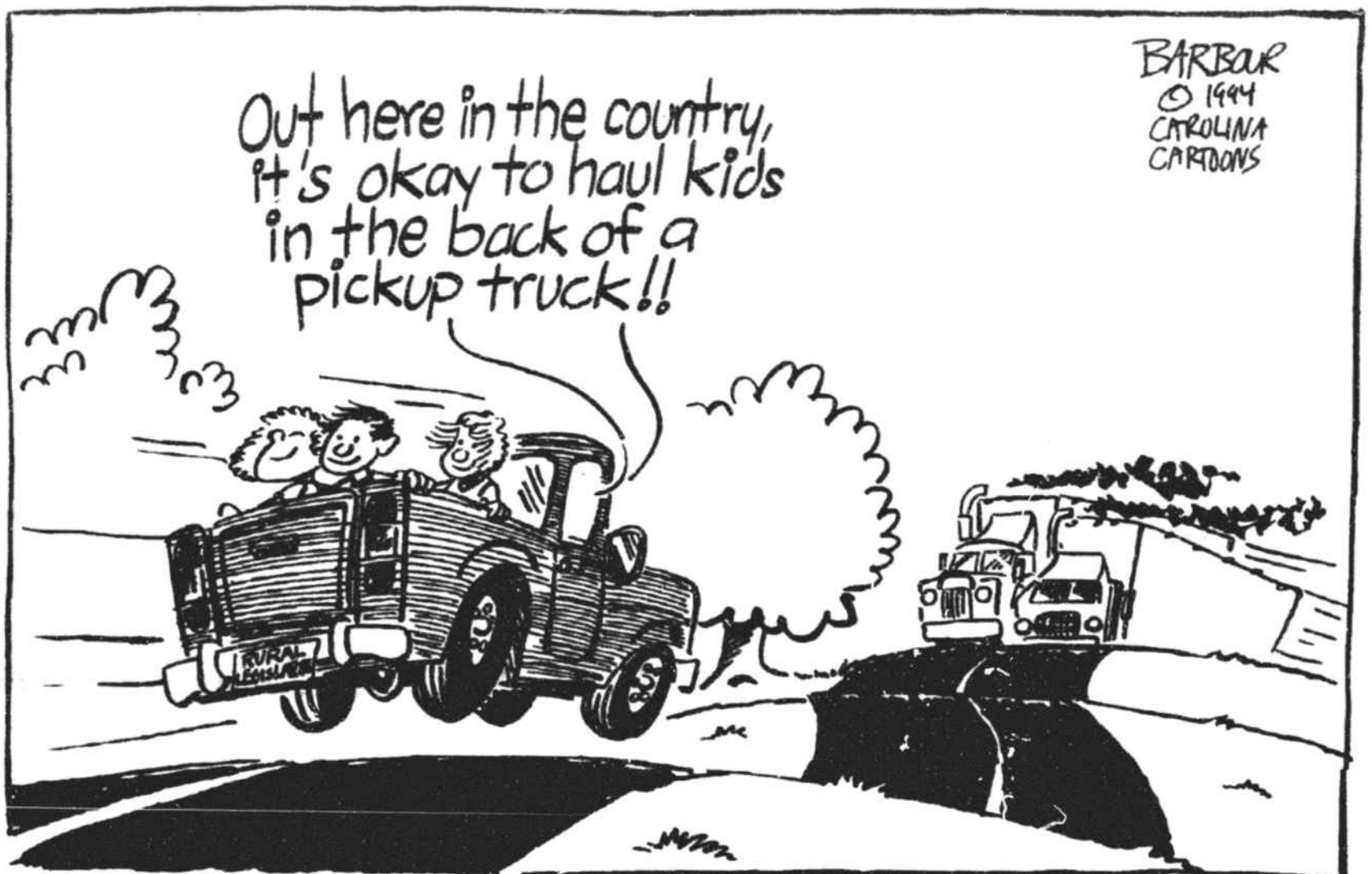
not the end of the world. He'll just have to double up somewhere else down the line to make up for a semester lost in "the zoo."

The point is this:  
 As I told superintendent, way down here in the private sector, we don't have the luxury of ignoring our public. If a reader comes in with a grievance, I'm expected to hear it, and I do. If there appears to be a legitimate goof, I'm expected to make it right, and to let the reader know I have done so. If there's nothing I can do, I'm expected to explain why. Period. No excuses accepted.

I've asked people with close ties to the schools how it could be that three administrators up the chain of command would deliberately ignore any parent's sincere verbal and written concerns. Some have speculated that because the teacher has tenure (for reasons I'd love to hear justified), there's nothing they can do and prefer not to admit to that.

Others have said it's because administrators assign a higher priority to scrapping for bucks than they do to the parents and other taxpayers who cough up those bucks.

Either way, I'd call it a truly sorry state of affairs. Either way, I'd say if you or I operated our businesses that way, we'd sink like a stone.



BARBARA  
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 CAROLINA  
 CARTOONS

## Something Funny Going On In There

If you have any teenage children, or can still remember being one yourself, imagine the familiar scenario of parents pulling into the driveway an hour earlier than the youthful inhabitants expect.

As you walk toward the front door you hear a mad scurrying inside, like roaches fleeing a late-night kitchen visitor: running footsteps, doors slamming, furniture being moved about.

Then you enter and find—to your amazement and satisfaction—that your young cherubs are all studiously engaged in some worthwhile, nurturing endeavor, like reading Shakespeare or watching Masterpiece Theater.

It's not until weeks later that you discover one of your antique end tables balanced on a broken leg, a favorite porcelain pitcher with a handle clumsily glued back on, a strange stain on the carpet under a throw rug.

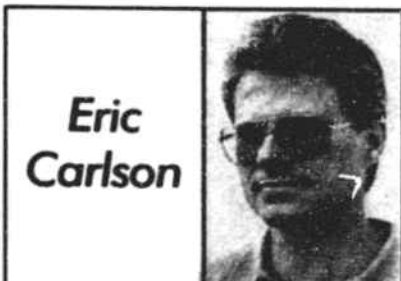
When you ask your young ones about these curiosities, they simply shrug innocently and say, "Gee, I guess that must have happened a long time ago."

I have a hunch our United States Senators and Congressfolks are behaving a lot like those teenagers these days. And in few years, we are going to experience the same sinking feeling about what they've really been up to.

Take the much-touted crime bill, for example. The one that Attorney General Janet Reno claims "will make our streets and neighborhoods safer" by encouraging urban gang members and crack dealers to play late-night basketball instead of getting rich by robbing people and selling drugs.

The crime bill is supposed to do some good things, like build more prisons and hire more police. But I have a sinking feeling that the first priority will be to make sure the \$7.4 billion designated for "crime prevention" gets into the hands of big-city politicians who need some dough to line up more patronage jobs (i.e. votes) for re-election campaigns.

This legislation also includes the first phase of a carefully orchestrat-



Eric Carlson

ed effort to outlaw private firearms ownership. The so-called "assault weapons" ban is described time and time again by the President, the television news networks and every newspaper on earth as a prohibition against "19 types" of military style weapons.

This is a lie. One they love to tell. At one time or another, all those news services have reported that the legislation actually outlaws hundreds of currently legal firearms designs and millions of ammunition magazines. Yet after once acknowledging the truth, they continually ignore it and propagate the falsehood.

Which gives me a sinking feeling there may be other unpleasant things in the crime bill that we won't discover until it's too late.

Now, like lemmings to the sea, the honorables are falling over each other to adopt some kind (any kind!) of health care legislation before the next election. As if life as we know it will cease to exist if their efforts are thwarted by those who take a go-slow approach.

Why is that? Could there be broken table legs and carpet stains they don't want us to discover until we are forced to pay for them?

For that matter, what does anyone REALLY KNOW about the countless ever-changing versions of pending health care legislation? The only thing we can be sure of is that the front-running proposals would create the largest tax-funded bureaucracy the world has ever seen.

Another thing is certain. The most powerful political action committees in the country—representing hospitals (\$409 billion industry), doctors (\$195 billion), pharmaceutical manufacturers (\$100 billion) and insurance companies (\$62 billion)—

aren't throwing big buckets of money at legislators for nothing.

I have a sinking feeling they will want something in return. Call it a piece of the pie. A tasty dessert purchased with our money, whether through taxes, employer mandate or perhaps a health-care lottery.

It seems every person I talk to has a problem with what little they understand about health care reform as currently conceived. So do I.

Take employer mandates, for example. This might sound like a great idea to anyone who has never been an employer: "Oh boy! I get free health insurance while the mean old boss pays for it."

Sorry, folks. It ain't gonna work that way. We will all pay for it, one way or another.

Lynn and I had the misfortune of running a small business once. One that barely kept its head above water (on good months). We employed a handful of people we struggled to keep on the payroll while seeking

someone (anyone) to buy us out.

If we had been required to provide health insurance to all employees, we would have been forced to lock the door immediately. Period. No doubt about it. Our employees would still have to find some way to pay for their own health care—while at the same time looking for another job.

Let's face it. The only reason Congress is in such an all-fired hurry to pass health care legislation is to prevent you and me from expressing an opinion about their efforts at the next election.

Powerful incumbents who stand to profit most from doling out the proceeds of a bloated nationalized health care system—like a certain N.C. Representative who wants to be Speaker of the House—are justifiably afraid that not enough voting allies will return to assure them the keys to the cupboard.

Hence the scurrying behind closed doors.

## Worth Repeating

"Fame," O.J. said, walking along, "is a vapor, popularity is an accident and money takes wings. The only thing that endures is character."

"Where'd you get that from?" Cowlings asked.

"Heard it one night on TV in Buffalo," O.J. said. "I was watching a late hockey game on Canadian TV and all of a sudden a guy just said it. Brought me right up out of my chair. I never forgot it."

—Paul Zimmerman  
 Sports Illustrated, Nov. 26, 1979

The compassion of the IRS and the efficiency of the U.S. Postal Service at Pentagon prices: that's health care reform.

—bumper sticker

I have spent half my life trying to get away from journalism, but I am still mired in it—a low trade and a habit worse than heroin, a strange seedy world full of misfits and drunkards and failures. A group photo of the top ten journalists of America on any given day would be a monument to human ugliness.

—Hunter S. Thompson