

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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Don't Let Disdain For Politics Keep You Away From The Polls Tuesday

Those who make a science of watching politics predict an especially low voter turnout for Tuesday's general election.

One ballot in Brunswick County starts with the race between extremely incumbent Congressman Charlie Rose and third-time challenger Robert C. Anderson, then continues with 32 judge-ships, 20 of which are unopposed and all of which are an absolute mystery to the average voter not in the practice of law.

The other ballot leads with Senator R.C. Soles (unopposed), Reps. David Redwine and Dewey Hill (unopposed), District Court Judge candidate Tom Aldridge (unopposed), District Attorney Rex Gore (unopposed) and Clerk of Court Diana Morgan (unopposed).

It takes that long to get to the real races—for Brunswick County sheriff, county commissioners, school board and, on the ballot's flip side, Brunswick County Soil and Water Conservation District supervisors. But the sheriff's race has been sullied by a controversy of questionable origin and veracity. And the county commissioners and school board can't seem to communicate except in the presence of a judge, a jury and a set of attorneys.

It's tempting to stay home in protest on election day and prove the experts right, isn't it? Don't.

Brunswick County's local races—all of them—are pivotal to the county's future direction. We're a county at a crossroads, with bigger and graver challenges in the field of criminal justice, education, and county government than we've ever faced. It would be a shame to let the next crop of leaders be chosen by only the political zealots, party faithfuls and staunchly good citizens without a true cross-section of Brunswick providing its input.

Local government touches our lives in daily ways. This is particularly true in Brunswick County, where rapid growth and change make sound long-term decisions particularly difficult to make, and bad short-term decisions especially uncomfortable to live with.

No matter how weary you are of politics from Washington to the Waccamaw River, you have a right and responsibility to cast a ballot. See you at the polls on Tuesday.

Next Time, Why Not Take The Scenic Route?

1-40 may be faster, but interstate isn't for all of us, all of the time. There are days when we feel obliged to take the four-lane, spurred perhaps by the urgent movement of numbers or hands on the face of a clock. Other days invite rambling side trips.

Don and I have made those glazed-eye speed journeys, but over the last several years we've been making a special effort to take the back roads when we can.

Why not choose to savor dappled sunlight on curving country lanes, rattle happily over narrow one-bridges that cross murky blackwater swamps or rushing mountain streams, and follow doublebacks twisting up a craggy mountainside?

Sometimes we plan an outing, other times we make a U-turn on a whim. After managing on several occasions to get thoroughly and pleasantly lost, arriving home well past suppertime, we've learned a few things. We go prepared, whether it's a Sunday afternoon cruise or a vacation day-venture. We stock up on fruit and trail mix, and pack a small cooler with cheese, veggies and drinks, just in case.

Most of the time we remember to tuck in a camera, binoculars and a few field guides. You never can tell what's out there, from tiny Episcopal mountain missions with elaborate trim and red doors to rare glimpses in the Green Swamp of a black bear, alligator or orchid.

We've invested in back road guide books and county maps—first individual maps for selected from the state Department of Transportation, then the privately-published books that include maps for all 100 Tar Heel counties.

The next time we ramble out we'll have a new guide in hand, a booklet describing North Carolina's 31 newly-signed "scenic byways." Together they comprise 1,500 miles of pleasant to travel roadway. Two of them are in Brunswick County. The longest is N.C. 211 starting just north of Supply near Royal Oak Swamp and continuing through the 140-acre Green Swamp across Columbus County and into Bladen County. Also designated as scenic is the short, but beautiful entrance road that leads from River Road (N.C. 133) past Orton Plantation to Brunswick Town State Historic Site.

The 211 trip is about 55 miles long and takes about an hour, ending at S.R. 242 east of Bladenboro. Catch the timing right and you're likely to see deer grazing along the right-of-way, turtles sunning in a borrow pit pond or some other type of wildlife.

What makes a road a "scenic byway?" Outstanding intrinsic quality—historical, cultural or aesthetic, or a combination of both, in the case of these first 31. In other words, something worth taking the time to enjoy. Future byways will be brought into the program under broader guidelines set by the state legislature, including geographic and recreational values.

Why have scenic byways? To offer residents and visitors alike an alternative to the faster-paced roads, says program director Bob Kopetsky. To lure the traveling public into smaller towns and communities they might otherwise miss. In the future Bob says the program plans to work as closely as possible with the Division of Travel and Tourism.

And while it's not DOT's "job," the byways also tend to call attention to the intrinsic qualities that led to their designation—and the value in maintaining those qualities.

So far the program is proving to be quite popular. Kopetsky's office is almost out of the new booklets that list each byway, but has more coming from the printer's. You should be able to pick up a copy soon at the Southeastern Welcome Center in Shallotte or from the N.C. DOT Roadside Environmental Unit, Scenic Byways Program, P.O. Box 25201, Raleigh, NC 27611, or call 919-733-2920.



Susan Usher

What Ails Health Care Is Insurance System

BY JOHN McALEER

Now that the socialist frenzy dedicated to destroying our health care system and its delivery is over, maybe reason will prevail.

Our system of health care and its delivery are the finest in the world and must not be the subject of academic social engineering; nor can it much longer withstand constant attempts at power-grabbing by greedy politicians desperate to expand their constituencies.

Not once have any of these stalwart defenders of the poor mentioned limiting malpractice awards, a major cause of inflated health care costs. Why? Could it possibly be that the present administration, more than any other in history, is overwhelmingly staffed by lawyers trying to make work for other lawyers?

Why should we put our lives in the hands of the very same incompetent people who are destroying our military and have destroyed our post office, courts, police, etc.?

Instead let us treat the problem, not the symptoms.

Do we need health care reform? No!
Do we need health care insurance reform? Most certainly!

Must it dramatically dilute our quality of life? Certainly not!

In any reworking of our health insurance system, several factors are mandatory:

■ Allow currently insured citizens who are satisfied with their coverage the option of keeping that coverage. Many persons are perfectly satisfied with the benefits that they worked for and planned on. Why should they lose these had earned benefits?

■ There must be continuity of insurance when persons change jobs. It should be incumbent on the insured to ascertain that coverage on the new job is comparable to the present coverage. If not, he or she should be allowed to pay a reasonable premium in order to keep his or her present coverage.

■ A pre-existing condition must not be the basis for refusal of insurance. Persons with illnesses that have a high cost potential should be placed in a pool, similar to the assigned risk motor vehicle insurance pools. The cost then would be shared equally by all carriers.

■ A problem that must be dealt with is the tremendous cost of health care to illegal immigrants. They must not be accepted into our benefit system! The cost is too high! Look at the costs which are presently threatening the financial stability of the states of Texas, California and Florida. For our own salvation we must be hardhearted in this matter.

Assure those who enter our country illegally

that the honest, taxpaying citizens of this country will not subsidize their adventures. Citizens of this republic have rights under our constitution; illegals have no rights whatsoever!

■ Society has an obligation to care for those unable to care for themselves; not so with those who refuse to care for themselves! There must be a limit on how long healthy persons, and those who constantly drain our welfare coffers, can be allowed free medical care. One year? Two years? Some type of limit must be imposed. Those who refuse to take part in their own betterment and that of society in general must be given a rude awakening.

■ Paperwork is insane! So much paperwork is either redundant or totally unnecessary that it is difficult to even estimate its cost. Simpler forms and procedures must be devised.

Finally, the real dollar cost of medical care is too high! Some doctors and hospitals are little more than money machines. Any future increases must be keyed to the inflation rate minus some factor such as one half of one per cent until costs return to 1950 real dollar levels.

If these changes are studied objectively, it will be found that any American citizen who chooses can be covered for all necessary medical care at less than present costs.

The writer lives in Calabash.



He Tracks 'Extinct' Species For 50 Years

Charles R. "Buster" Humphreys has never seen a coastal panther—blond or black, alive or dead. But he's spent 56 years talking to people who say they have, trying to make good scientific sense out of their stories.

The octogenarian is waiting for delivery of his self-published *Panthers of the Coastal Plain*, 250-plus pages describing his research and conclusions about the legendary animal the Cherokee called Pa Koh and that North Carolinians have known as cougar, mountain cat, catamount, lion, panter' er cat, painter, wildcat and red tiger.

Ask anyone in the government's wildlife establishment, and they'll tell you the last breeding pair of coastal panthers died in captivity in the early part of this century. Buster Humphreys will argue that's absolutely not the case—that the government's scientists ought to list to laymen's claims.

Using techniques honed during his career as a DuPont researcher in locations around the globe, Humphreys concentrated his study in a 40-mile radius of downtown Wilmington—an area encompassing parts of Brunswick, Columbus, Bladen, Sampson, Duplin Pender and Onslow. Visiting my office on Friday, he showed me his large map decorated with red and black dots—210 of them, red for the large tan or tawny long-tailed cats sighted, and black for the black cats.

The largest clusters of are at Military Ocean Terminal Sunny



Lynn Carlson

Point and, oddly (I thought) in the sprawling Landfall golf resort community near Wilmington. "These cats aren't afraid of humans," Humphreys advises.

Why, I ask, isn't the Green Swamp—the wildest habitat in southeastern North Carolina—dotted with reds and blacks?

"Well, it's not because there aren't cats in the swamp, it's because there aren't very many people to see them," he answered.

"I haven't seen one yet, and the chances are pretty slim I will," he added. "You could wait in the wild every day and every night for a thousand days and nights, and not see one; or you could go out and see one on your first day. It's pure and simple luck."

Humphreys estimates there are only 50 panthers living in the 3,900 square miles he studied. "In that amount of space you could hide all of Rommel's corps, much less one little kitty kat."

The 210 sightings Humphreys documented represent 121 cats, including 17 kittens. "Several sightings in a cluster were of the same cat

by different people, thus corroborating the existence of the cat," he declares. About half, he says, were black, "the melanistic phase." Each adult female occupied a territory of about six square miles. A tomcat's territory included the territories of two females. Each of 58 female territories was occupied for specific time periods.

In his summary and conclusions, Humphreys said, "An analysis of those territories on a yearly basis showed a gradual increase in the number of female panthers from two in 1952 to 34 in 1990. This increase paralleled the growth of the deer population, but at a slower rate."

I asked why there has never been a road kill. I got this answer: "A panther can run very fast for short distances and can leap 20 feet horizontally and 12 feet vertically. It can clear a secondary road in one leap. Panthers have been seen to crouch at the side of a busy road and wait for a break in the traffic before crossing."

The most recent sighting he documented took place this summer—July 18, 1994, at 9:15 a.m.—when a retired forester and another man were in the Green Swamp checking gypsy moth traps.

"A coal black panther walked out the woods in front of their car," Humphreys said. It was 7 to 9 feet long including its tail. It was 60 to 75 yards away from them, and it was thin, with its ribs showing." Both men saw the animal and agreed it was a panther, he added.

They were so sure, in fact, that when the big cat sprang out of sight, the men took off for town, bought plaster, came back and made molds of its 3-to-4-inch-wide pawprints.

Humphreys is looking forward to looking at them.

"How'd you get into all this?" I asked. He replied, "I'm a born naturalist. My father was a civil engineer, and I come from a family of civil engineers. The Waccamaw Lumber Company hired him to survey and map the Great Green Swamp. They wanted to drain it and convert it to farmland."

Young Buster helped his dad's crew did a line of canals from Bolton to Shallotte through the swamp which, he says "was utterly different then." He says he's spent even more time in the swamp in recent years than he did then.

Humphreys doesn't seem to bother much about trying to convince those who doubt his work. He's considerably more intrigued by panthers than by people.

"The panther population is in good shape and does not need to be managed at the present time," he writes. "However, human population needs to be regulated in both numbers and location if we expect to achieve a proper relation with other forms of life and maintain a quality existence for ourselves."

"I am exceedingly pessimistic about this. The species homo sapiens has an exaggerated belief in its own intelligence. Human history believes such a belief."

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Why Direct Drivers Through Shallotte?

To the editor:

Eric Carlson's column of a few weeks ago should be required reading for all persons concerned about traffic in Shallotte.

After reading that most of the tourist traffic went right through Shallotte on to bigger and better attractions, I drove out to the bypass to try to figure out why it was not being utilized.

As you approach Shallotte from the south heading north on U.S. 17, the first sign you see directs you to Holden Beach through Shallotte. No mention is made that you could get to Holden Beach via the bypass. Shouldn't it read "Shallotte—Bus-

iness; Holden Beach via Bypass 2nd Exit Right"?

I went up the bypass and approached Shallotte heading south. The sign directs me to Shallotte Business and Holden Beach N.C. 130 East.

When I got to the light at Holden Beach N.C. 130 East and looked a few yards down U.S. 17 South I found to my surprise a sign directing me to Myrtle Beach and Whiteville THROUGH Shallotte. It seems to me that this sign should read "Shallotte Business."

Wouldn't it make a little sense to put a sign at the light directing traffic from Holden Beach Road (N.C.

130 East) to go north a quarter of a mile and pick up the bypass to go south to Myrtle Beach and Whiteville?

Approaching Shallotte from N.C. 130 West the directions to get to Holden Beach are across the bypass, once again directing traffic through Shallotte. Shouldn't the sign on N.C. 130 West directing Myrtle Beach traffic south also indicate Holden Beach north via the bypass, next exit right?

It seems we could initially save millions of dollars by putting up a few green signs directing traffic instead of waiting seven years for roads to be built. We are directly re-

sponsible for the traffic mess by directing tourists through town to reach destinations beyond Shallotte.

Local businesses do not have to lose business by directing traffic around town. Isn't that what the bypass was built for? There are green exit signs with logos of the various food, gas, lodgings on every major highway and bypass I have ever traveled.

Tourists might be more inclined to stop and shop, to quote Eric, "in our quaint boutiques" if they knew they could get in and out of the traffic.

V.R. Lauzon
Shallotte
(More Letters, Following Page)