

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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Avoiding Secret Sessions Is An Essential Change

Jerry Jones and Clara Carter are capable, experienced choices to lead the new Brunswick County Board of Commissioners and Board of Education, respectively. As they begin those duties, we hope they'll make every effort to serve the people they represent by doing every bit of business that's possible in the public eye.

The N.C. Open Meetings Law is newly strengthened this year but continues to permit the crutch elected officials most love to lean on—the right to go into an executive, or secret, session to consult with attorneys. Eight other exemptions exist also, including discussion of employment contracts and some other personnel matters behind closed doors.

It would be refreshing to see both the new school board and county commissioners pledge to avoid secret sessions except under an even narrower set of circumstances than state law allows. It's not easy, but it can be done. The 1990-92 board of commissioners made such a commitment and did a pretty good job of living up to it.

Brunswick County voters last month made it clear they want change and accountability from the men and women who serve them. Letting the sun shine on official business is a good place to start.

Animal Control Supervisor Commended For Work Here

It's an awful job, but Greg Thompson did it and did it well. Thompson left last week as Brunswick County's animal control supervisor, a job to which he brought an admirable level of professionalism in Brunswick County. He approached his work with the combination of firmness and tenderness it takes to be a person whose job is to save a few animals and destroy many more—a supervisor faced every day with the ugly evidence of man's capacity for neglect and cruelty.

He made many positive changes in Brunswick County's animal control program. The most important may have been taking the message of responsible pet ownership and safety into Brunswick County's public schools, where students responded eagerly to this truly nice guy.

Greg Thompson was offered a great job as Durham County's animal control administrator where he'll be enforcing an animal control ordinance he says is state-of-the-art. He won't be involved with pet euthanasia on a daily basis.

He earned the break, and his position will be a difficult one to fill so well.

Is U.S. Manufacturing Dying?

BY MIKE WALDEN

As heated discussion over the proposed GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) overtook the airwaves and print media, the state of American manufacturing again became a topic of discussion.

Some opponents of GATT said approval of the treaty would be another "nail in the coffin" of American manufacturing, while GATT supporters said the trade pact would actually mean a boost to America's factories. But both of these positions beg the more basic question of whether America manufacturing is in trouble. Do we have reason to believe that America manufacturing is slowly dwindling away?

If we measure the importance of American manufacturing by employment in plants and factories, then we do have reason to be concerned about its continued viability. Employment in American manufacturing rose from 15 million workers after World War II to 21 million workers in 1979. However, in the 1980s and early 1990s (through 1993), America lost more than 3 million manufacturing jobs.

Furthermore, as a percentage of all U.S. workers, manufacturing's share fell from 35 percent in 1946 to 22 percent in 1980 to 16 percent in 1993. More people now work in government at all levels (18.8 million) than in manufacturing (17.8 million).

It should be pointed out that these trends aren't unique to the United States among the industrialized world. All major industrialized countries, including Japan, are experiencing a shift in jobs out of manufacturing and into the service sector. In fact, the shift has been slower in the U.S. than in many other industrial countries.

So should we play "Taps" for America manufacturing? Not necessarily. Despite the fact that fewer people are working in manufacturing, the output of our plants and factories continues to increase. Even after taking out inflation in prices, the value of American-manufactured products increased fourfold in 1947 to 1992.

In other words, the volume of American-manufactured products went up by a factor of four in the 45 years from 1947 to 1992. Also, as a share of our total economic output (called Gross Domestic Product), manufacturing has not slipped. Over the past 40 years, manufacturing's share of the total economy has ranged between 20 and 23 percent.

How can this be? How can the number of workers in American manufacturing be declining and yet the volume of output be increasing? The answer is easy—the productivity of people working in manufacturing has increased dramatically.

Productivity is the average volume of output produced by each worker. Indeed, between 1960 and 1991, productivity of the average American manufacturing worker more than doubled. Furthermore, despite public perceptions to the contrary, a recent survey by the McKinsey Global Institute showed that American manufacturing workers continue to be more productive than their counterparts in Japan and Germany.

In fact, what has been happening to American manufacturing during the past 40 years is similar to what has transpired in American agriculture. In the late 1940s, one in five workers was working on the farm; today, only 2 percent of workers are on the farm. Yet over that same time period, the volume of America farm output has more than doubled.

So whether you think American manufacturing has declined or not depends on how you measure it. Clearly there are fewer jobs in manufacturing, and that trend will likely continue. But the volume of American manufactured output is increasing and will probably continue to do so. Also, the relative importance of manufacturing to the national economy has not diminished. You decide.

Dr. Walden is a professor and N.C. Cooperative Extension Service specialist at N.C. State University. He teaches and writes on economic issues, public policy and personal finance.

Spending Christmas On The Front Lines

Many newspaper people enjoy making a really big deal about how hard they work.

Listen to them talking to one another—to anyone who'll listen, actually—and you'll hear this kind of bellyaching or boasting, depending upon the context:

"My husband/wife and I haven't had a vacation/meal/conversation together since the late 1970s."

"I haven't seen my children with their eyes open in six months."

"I've only taken one Christmas day off since I graduated from college; luckily I kept my scanner on, because a fire broke out and I was able to get up from the dinner table and go cover it."

"If I ever get sick enough that I can't come to work, you can just take me out and shoot me."

"Heck, I fractured my skull and was in a coma for three weeks, and I still never missed a single day on the job."

These declarations are meant to foster kinship among people of common purpose. This worldview signifies commitment to an almost divine calling, despite inevitable profound sacrifice to oneself and one's loved ones.

Yeah, sure it does. Might as well



Lynn Carlson

carry a banner that says, "I'm a well-adjusted person. And so is Woody Allen."

Truth is, newspaper work these days—all of it but the actual printing process—involves these primary tasks: talking, taking notes, driving, sitting through meetings, typing and maneuvering a plastic "mouse" around on your desk to make things happen on a computer monitor. This can be tedious, annoying and excessively time-consuming, but, face it, it really shouldn't send us all scrambling for antacids, analgesics and adult beverages like it does.

This time of year I try to give pause to think about people with the really hard jobs—people who work in stores. I'm not talking about the people behind the counter watching a ballgame or a soap opera on TV while you select your purchases. I'm

talking about the ones who have been instructed they must offer to help you.

Waiting on people is a fine art consisting of either a naturally generous nature combined with infinite patience, desperation, or a capacity for denial that's even more finely-honed than Lisa Marie Presley-Jackson's.

I have written for newspapers, raised a child, been married twice, taught school, cooked in a restaurant kitchen, transcribed medical records, and attempted to assist in the immigration of people whose language I did not speak. Not one of those jobs was as difficult as the seemingly simple but frequently excruciating act of waiting on customers in a retail store.

The customer is always right. But NOT.

Nothing is quite as challenging as being instructed over the telephone by VISA to somehow discretely confiscate a customer's credit card, especially when there are nine people behind her with cash, good checks and authorizable charges tapping their toes and glaring at you.

There's nothing like spending a half hour with a sweet little old lady who's looking for the perfect \$3 gift

for her church circle "secret pal" while a big spender with several hundred dollars worth of purchases in hand waits at the register, glaring at his Rolex, for you to get free and simply ring him up and let him leave.

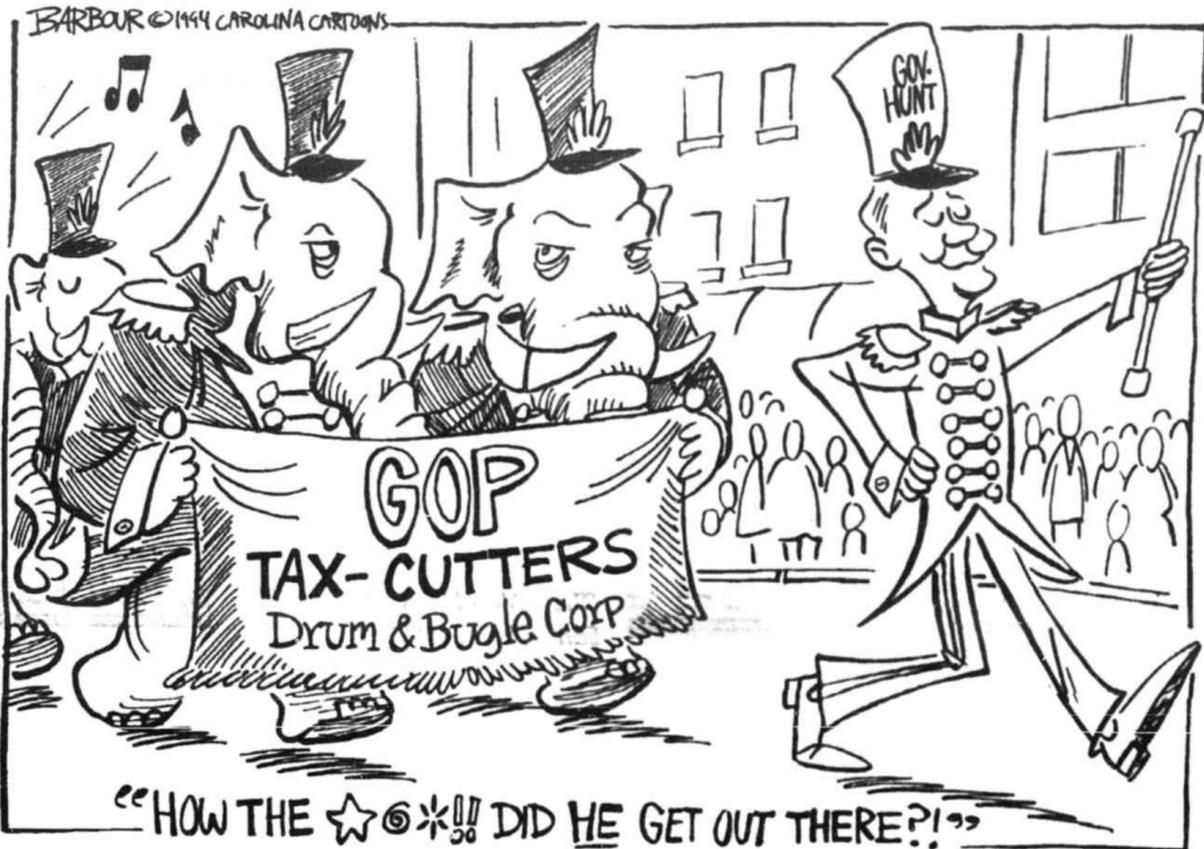
Try standing on your feet, 12 hours a day, six days a week, plus Sunday afternoon, watching for shoplifters, running off rowdy teenagers, listening to complaints, straightening up displays torn up by people who didn't buy a thing.

Endure the ear-splitting shrieks of toddlers. Smile as their grandparents proclaim it's cheaper at the discount house down the street. Tell them Merry Christmas as they leave. Act like you mean it.

Imagine that when the last customer's order is rung up, the last package wrapped, the displays salvaged, the glass Windexed and the floors Hoovered, you have to go home and try to capture (or at least feign) some of the warmth of the season for you and yours who expect and deserve it.

And then show up the next morning for 12 fun-filled hours of returns and exchanges and the last, biggest clearance sale of the calendar year.

Ho, ho, holy cow!



Is There A Doctor In The House? Should Be

WANTED: Physician to serve on Brunswick County Board of Health.

Must be willing to attend monthly meetings and participate in occasional workshops and committee assignments. Concern for public health, a must. Patience, a plus. Apply to board of commissioners. Post available immediately.

Imagine having a county board of health without a single member who is a medical doctor. Sound absurd? Welcome to Brunswick County.

That's right folks. The governing board that oversees the county's restaurant inspections, immunization programs, child and adult health clinics and tuberculosis screening efforts does not have a physician among its advisers.

OF COURSE the health board is SUPPOSED to have a doctor. State law mandates that the membership of every local health board should include a physician, a nurse, a dentist, a veterinarian, a pharmacist, a professional engineer and a county commissioner. Three other seats are reserved for members of the general public.

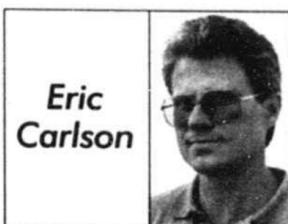
The law also requires the health board to include an optometrist. But we don't have one of those either. The county commissioners said they couldn't find one. So they appointed a building contractor instead.

Brunswick County has three builders on its health board. But no doctor. And no optometrist.

Past and present commissioners tell me they have tried to find a willing eye care professional to serve, but have been unable to locate one. Under such conditions, state law allows the commissioners to fill the designated slot with another member from the general public.

A South Brunswick area builder has occupied the optometrist seat since June 1993. He has been an active board member who frequently offers his advice about septic systems, which are regulated by the health department.

Another South Brunswick area builder, who is also a farmer and former county commissioner, was



Eric Carlson

recently reappointed to the health board. He frequently offers his advice about septic systems, which are regulated by the health department.

A third South Brunswick area builder was recently appointed to the health board. Perhaps he, too, will have some advice to offer about septic systems, which are regulated by the health department.

A doctor named Harry L. Johnson used to be a member of the health board. But he resigned in March, citing increasing responsibilities in his medical practice. In his letter of resignation, Dr. Johnson named another physician who had indicated a willingness to serve.

His suggestion was ignored. The vacancy remains.

At every meeting of the county commissioners, there is an item on the agenda marked "Appointments." It lists all the county committees and advisory boards that have vacancies. The empty seats remain listed on the monthly agendas until the board votes to fill them.

In the past nine months, the commissioners have appointed dozens of people to all kinds of positions ranging from the Brunswick County Fishermen Advisory Committee to the Calabash Extraterritorial Jurisdiction representative.

But not once in the past nine months has the health board's doctor position been listed as vacant on the agenda. So naturally, the physician slot on the health board has remained unfilled.

However, when two of the public positions on the health board came up for appointment last month, the commissioners addressed them im-

mediately and appointed two South Brunswick area builders to fill the seats. But again, the doctor vacancy was not listed.

Now we have three new county commissioners. Perhaps they will remember to put the health board's physician vacancy on their agenda and keep it there until the seat is filled.

The new board of commissioners will also appoint one of their own to represent the county on the health board. It is a decision that should not be taken lightly.

Brunswick County has more small sewage treatment systems than any other county in the state. Since the health department is responsible for their inspection, it makes sense to have some health board members who can offer advice about installing septic systems. Three such members should be sufficient.

We need more people on the board who know something about other aspects of public health. The appointment of a doctor would certainly help. But these commissioners are in a position to do even more.

One of their newly elected members, Leslie Collier, is a nurse and a

former member of the county's nursing home advisory board. Appointing her to the health board would provide an articulate liaison between the two boards while enhancing its expertise on public health issues.

Naming Collier to the health board would also provide the group with something else it needs: another woman. Nurse representative Patricia Nutter is only female adviser on the 11-member panel.

The commissioners should also closely consider another appointment. Pharmacist Joey Galloway has been a valuable health board member at the meetings he attends. But due to other commitments, Galloway is frequently absent.

Before renaming him to the health board, the commissioners should find out whether Galloway feels he might be too busy to actively participate.

Brunswick County is one of the fastest-growing counties in the state. It needs a knowledgeable and aggressive health board that can keep up with the pressures increased development will bring.

Let's keep the health board healthy.

Worth Repeating...

Most all the time, the whole year round, there ain't no flies on me,
 But jest 'fore Christmas I'm as good as I kin be!
 —Eugene Field

Oh, but he was a tightfisted hand at the grindstone.
 Scrooge! a squeezing, wrenching, grasping, scraping,
 clutching, covetous old sinner! Hard and sharp as flint,
 from which no steel had ever struck our generous fire;
 secret, and self-contained, and solitary as an oyster.
 —Charles Dickens

At Christmas I no more desire a rose
 Than wish a snow in May's newfangled mirth;
 But like of each thing that in season grows.
 —William Shakespeare