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Yesterday was when a bottle warmer was just the thing when it came to serving Junior his formula feeding, but it took a boiling political pot to assure him of extra special affection.

There's been no change in the pattern. Office seekers currently on the prowl are unanimously anxious to kiss any infant in sight, posing a greater menace to defenseless babies than a bad case of diaper rash.

Good or bad, young or old, fat or skinny, a politician develops an overwhelming love for children the moment he throws his hat in the ring. Nothing short of chicken pox will make him keep his distance.

Naturally, any candidate would rather cuddle a freshly scrubbed kid who is right out of the tub, rather than a brat who has just come up for air out of an ice cream cone that is inevitably chocolate.

And of course it is easier to muster enthusiasm if the child's nose isn't overdue for attention, or his bottom wetter than an ocean liner at the far end of a six-day cruise. Such favorable conditions are rare.

Be that as it may, in New Bern and every other city, town and hamlet in America, a lap youngun would have to look worse than Frankenstein's monster to get the brush off. That is, if either parent is around.

A toddler is safest if he is alone, when the office seeker spies him. A politician doesn't waste much time on a child who isn't accompanied by an adult. The exceptions are recognized offspring of a known registered voter.

To criticize New Bern and Craven County candidates for indulging in this sort of campaigning might be proper, but hardly realistic. You don't win in politics by passing up any gimmick available, in the stress of battle.

Kissing babies too young to protest or protect themselves is just like slipping a quarter to a panhandling drunk, in the hope that he'll be momentarily sober on election day. It's all part of the business.

If it disqualified a man for office, George Washington, Abe Lincoln, and a lot of other guys of more recent vintage never would have gotten their pictures on postage stamps and legal currency.

Maybe there's a guardian angel or a good fairy, up there in the sky, shielding the young and innocent. To our knowledge, no baby has every contracted measles, mumps, or even the itch from a caressing candidate.

This we can appreciate. Less understandable is the kind of good fairy who bothers to protect the politicians from disease in much the same manner. Can it be that office seekers are blessed with built-in immunity?

What plagues North Carolina's candidates on the state level, as May 6 approaches, is the strong evidence



THE WAY IT WAS—Independence Day comes and goes now, without so much as a ripple of excitement. No parades, no fireworks, no bands, no racing, and no patriotic speeches to set hearts to pounding and spines to tingling on the Glorious Fourth. Except for young folks heading for the beach, and old folks staying off crowded highways, you'd swear it is just any old day. To give you a

rare glimpse of how it used to be, in 1901, we bring you this picture of pretty New Bern girls and starchily-dressed small boys, perched on a fire wagon. We feel sure that one of our dear friends, Mattie Turnbull, now past 90, is included in the smiling group, and maybe she can identify the others.—Photo from Albert D. Brooks Collection.