READERS' FORUM

WHAT NEXT???

We were surprised by the comments attributed to Mr. McDuffie Cummings. Town Manager of Pembroke. Apparently, he "feels certain groups and individuals owe the sheriff and other officials in the county an apology". Mr. Cummings did not specify which "other officials" he had in mind so we will reserve comment until he clarifies that point, but we strongly disagree with Mr. Cummings regarding his suggestion that the Sheriff of Robeson County is owed an apology! Who does Mr. Cummings feel should apologize to Sheriff Stone and for what? Is Mr. Cummings questioning the right of individuals to ask questions of their public officials? Are the actions of public officials above scrutiny?

In our opinion, those individuals who have stood up to ask questions about some of the actions of our Sheriff are certainly within their rights to do so. Whether Mr. Cummings realizes it or not, public officials are accountable for their actions! We reject the notion that one should apologize for demanding accountability. The Sheriff of Robeson County, by his own actions, has fostered an atmosphere of confusion, distrust, and fear. In our opinion he would best serve *law enforcement* and the citizens of Robeson County by resigning. Unfortunately, Mr. Cummings' words do nothing but insure a continuation of the current atmosphere. If anyone deserves an apology, *it is the citizens of Robeson County!*

In the past couple of weeks we have witnessed an influx of 'concerned' people who have arrived on the scene, held oress conferences, and made proclamations. While we appreciate their concern and assistance we would also like to point out that several of these individuals carry "negative baggage" that will, in the long run, hurt our efforts to bring about much needed change. As well meaning as these individuals are, media attention focused on them will alienate many of the citizens we must reach & work with if we hope to achieve our goals. Rather than focusing on the issues before

the people of Robeson County, the media will rehash the history of these well-meaning individuals who come into our county. As a result, the important issues facing the citizens of Robeson County will be lost or diluted!

We would like to remind non-Robesonians that the problems of Robeson County are *our* problems and while we welcome their assistance and support, we are determined to work out these problems ourselves. We have lost two great leaders, Mr. John Godwin and Mr. Julian Pierce, but we will endure since their spirit remains with us! We have people capable of leadership. We reside in Robeson County and intend to remain in Robeson County even after the television cameras and other media have gone; we can and will speak and act for ourselves! Concerned individuals, not from Robeson County, are welcome but they are not our leaders! We welcome their assistance but the struggle is ours!

It is unfortunate that advisors for Hatcher and Jacobs have instructed them to appeal to the leader of the Soviet Union for assistance. While we understand the strategy of raising Indian and political issues at the upcoming summit, we feel it is ill advised to attempt to work with those who currently oppress many people of the world. Perhaps in more sophisticated eyes, Hatcher and Jacobs' appeal is viewed differently, but in our view this action has hurt them and their cause. We can not and do not support or ask for assistance from any individual or nation which promotes violence or oppresses the rights of any people. Too many of our people, too many blacks and whites have fought communists to now turn around and seek their assistance. This is a sad day for us!

At the precinct meeting held at West Robeson High School last week, we were once again impressed with the thoroughness and wisdom of Mr. Dexter Brooks. In clear and concise terms he explained current election law and the options available to the supporters of Julian Pierce. The words were down-to-earth and extremely valuable. Our community is very fortunate to have the counsel of such an individual. We sincerely hope he will one day consider running for public office. We were not surprised at the words of Joe Freeman Britt when he expressed his opposition to a special session of the legislature for the purpose of correcting a flaw in the election law that allows Mr. Britt to become a judge without opposition. Mr. Britt did not wish to face opposition for fear of defeat. He will not even be subject to the will of the people since he automatically becomes a judge. While he will obviously wear the judicial robes proudly, those black robes will serve as a constant reminder to many of us of the unfairness and injustice that exists in Robeson County.

People Of Good Will Can Solve Robeson's Problems

Most Robesonians are concerned about the present tense situation in our county. Most of us want to do something constructive so as to put this tension behind us. We need only address ourselves to the problem in order to determine the solution.

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The current tension can be traced back to the killing of Jimmy Earl Cummings by Deputy Kevin Stone. At the hastily-called inquest, upon the urging of District Attorney Joe Freeman Britt, the Coroner Chalmers Biggs refused to postpone the hearing in order to give the Cummings family enough time to hire an attorney and prepare for the hearing. The concerned citizens organization grew out of a belief, whether true or not, that there was a conspiracy among the Coroner, District Attorney and Sheriff to cover-up the details of this homicide from the public.

By the time of the murder of Julian Pierce, the situation had gotten so bad that many immediately believed that somehow Joe Freeman Britt was behind the killing. It was felt that Julian was the front-runner in a race that he was not supposed to win, and that the political establishment could not allow him to win.

At the outset, most political observers did not give Julian much of a chance of winning against Joe Freeman. They underestimated the depth of the anti-Britt sentiment in the black, Indian and white communities. Joe Freeman is a man of strong convictions who has never had to win an election at the polls. This lack of opposition and Joe's own lifestyle has made him appear aloof and distant. The public has seen only the adversarial Joe Freeman inside and outside the courtroom; Joe has apparently lost touch with the voters.

Based upon what we know about the death of Julian and the individuals involved we do not believe that Joe Freeman Britt was in any way responsible for the murder. While Joe may be cantankerous and a zealot about capital punishment, a murderer he is not.

Because of an unfortunate incident in our youth we had to appear before a panel of the Board of Law Examiners before receiving our license to practice. As district attoreny Joe came to our assistance with the considerable prestige of his office. At the time we were very much involved in fighting the controversial double-voting system for electing the county board of education and seeking to reapportion our county commissioner board to assure more minority representation so Joe Freeman's endorsement was not popular in some

quarters. Later we assisted Joe Freeman in obtaining an additional position for an assistant district attorney. He agreed to appoint a minority lawyer to the position, Gary Locklear. At the height of the controversy concerning the local highway patrol some years ago certain individuals sought an indictment against ourselves possibly because of our service on a committee seeking to improve relations between Indians and the patrol. Joe Freeman refused to use his office in such a fashion though he was unaware at the time that it was a case of mistaken identity.

People who do not learn from the past are doomed to repeat it. All of us will agree that the inquest into the Zabitosky killing was handled much differently from the Cummings inquest. On Saturday morning, March 26, 1988, Joe Freeman was actively campaigning in the Pembroke community when he learned of the death of Julian. Joe doubtlessly recognized to his credit that he had an image problem that had to be overcome if he was to become superior court judge. It was evident from the merger referendum that a united Pembroke could deliver a crushing number of votes in the judicial rase. Although he was probably too late to change the outcome Joe Freeman was prepared to put his case before the voters; most observers now feel that Julian would have won the race but for his untimely and tragic death.

We are now confronted with the question of what is to become of the new superior court judgeship in the wake of Julian's death. The seat has assumed an importance in the minds of most people unwarranted by the power of the position. A superior court judge is not nearly as powerful politically as the sheriff or the district attorney. As a member of the board of directors of legal services we said as much to. Julian about a year ago when he first talked of running for judge. Although not close friends personally we were close professionally, especially the last several years as we cooperated on the petition for federal recognition of our Indian people; the litigation seeking equal educational opportunity for all our school children; the merger of our local school systems; and the voting rights litigation against the local city school boards seeking more equitable black and Indian representation. It was our aim to bring similar such voting rights litigation against the county commissioners if they did not agree to reapportion their board on a more equitable basis. In our own mind this work was more important than a judgeship, especially since we were already working for the creation of a second such superior court judgeship. To his credit, however, Julian was always thinking about the constituency that he served through legal services. Julian knew that his election would give fresh hope to poor people of all races-black, Indian and whites-that they could make a difference through the political process.

It is apparent to all of us that Julian through his death has indeed changed our lives and our county forever. We now feel that we must put the bitterness and divisions of the past behind us. The offering of a reward by the Town of Red Springs for information leading to the arrest and conviction of Julian's murderer epitomizes this new sense of brotherhood. For years we have heard of a black and Indian coalition that was going to change things in Robeson. The success of the merger referendum demonstrated the strength of a new tri-racial coalition composed of progressive-thinking people who realize that we are all in the same boat, and that we will either float or sink together.

This spirit was evident on Thursday night, March 31, 1988, when over 600 persons of all races gathered at West Robeson School to discuss how people throughout Robeson could organize from the precinct level to make the political process more responsive. As a speaker at that meeting we explained the options available to the effort. Under existing law Joe Freeman Britt became entitled to be declared the democratic nominee for superior court judge at the moment of the death of Julian Pierce. Only the General Assembly can change that either through a special session (called by the Governor or the legislators themselves) or at the short session already scheduled to convene in June of 1988. When we first explained the law (not only to that group but beforehand to the Committee to Elect Julian Pierce) most people simply wanted the General Assembly to change the law to re-open the filing period for the judgeship so that a black or Indian attorney might file in opposition to Joe Freeman Britt. We submit that such a special act would be unfair to the minorty attorneys. A year ago none of us wanted the position; none of us can, step into the shoes of Julian now, especially on such short notice. If the judgeship is so important why not have the General Assembly to delay the primary election until May of 1990? This would give any minority attorney who is now interested in the position the time to close out their practice and to convince the public that they have qualities for the office other than the fact' that they are running against Joe Freeman Britt. This postponement would also permit Joe Freeman to again take his case to the voters. Under existing law the questions as to . whether Joe has the confidence of the people will remain. Also Joe Freeman will have ample time to decide whether he really wants to be judge or district attorney; he cannot run for both offices at the same time two years hence.

We submit that the county does not need the divisiveness of an election for the judgeship at this time. Robeson has endured a stage of siege for so long that most of us are suffering from combat fatigue. We all need a time of healing from the wounds of the past. There are more important things to concern ourselves with, such as making sure that the recent school merger is a success.

People of goodwill, in the spirit of Julian, must continue the process of healing already set in motion by the Red Springs officials and countless others. Government works best that is representative of all. On Tuesday, May 3, 1988, each of us can personally support this effort. The single most important step to sweep away the current tension would be the election of an Indian to the district court bench and the restoration of tri-racial representation in our local state house legislative delegation.

Gary Locklear is running for a newly-created district court judgeship. He enjoys and merits the unanimous support of the Robeson and Scotland bar. Presently three whites and one black sit on the district court bench; simple fairness and good sense will be served by his election. Although recognized as a decent individual, Julian never enjoyed the confidence of the local bar because he was not a courtroom warrior; the feeling was more of comradery rather than race. Gary has been accepted by the local bar as one of their own. All of us yearn for the calmer days when each racial group was. represented in our local state houselegislative delegation. We had a gentlemen's agreement to that effect. People of goodwill should work to restore that agreement and that balance. -We must learn to respect candidates for public office as individuals rather than as racists seeking to "take over" or preserve the old order. No racial group can dominate Robeson. We are all minorities in the sense that we need each other to make a majority. Upon the dismantling of the old double-voting system for the election of the county school board many predicted or expected wholesale racial firings by the new majority Indian board. Yet those same Indians implemented a district method of electing the county board of education so as to assure the election of whites and blacks. Indian people have demonstrated many times, most recently with the candidac of Jesse Jackson, that they are willing to support non-Indians seen as progressive. Although white the Rev. Robert Mangum and Eric Prevatte enjoy immense popularity in the Indian community; the same is true of the Rev. Sidney Locks and Dr. Joy J. Johnson who are black. Prior to the killing of Jimmy Earl Cummings Sheriff Hubert Stone ejoyed immense black and Indian support. Let us remember that without fanfare the Sheriff totally integrated the personnel of his department; ene-third black, one-third

Indian and one-third white. No other law enforcement agency and no other county department can make that claim. His recently promoted chief of detectives is Indian. Upon learning of Julian's death to his credit the Sheriff immediatey requested the assistance of the FBI and the SBI Like all of us the Sheriff apparently felt that this was one murder that had to be solved. Based upon what we know about the death of Julian and the individuals involved we do not believe that Hubert Stone was in any way responsible for the murder. While he may have been guilty of poor judgment in the hiring of his sons and speaking on behalf of persons charged with or convicted of drug offenses, a murdereer he is not.

The most important law enforcement problem confronting all of us is not unsolved murders but the pervasive drug dealing and usage that is destroying our county. The problem is simply too much for local law enforcement to handle. We must all make a common effort against this menace. The assistance of state and federal authorities is necessary if we are to be successful.

Let us not be too quick to condemn nor come to hasty conclusions before all of the facts are known. We are reminded of how the concerned citizens lost much credibility when they seemed to equate the Edward Zabitosky and Jimmy Earl Cummings killings. If law enforcement learned from the Cummings inquest then the concerned citizens should have learned from the Zabitosky inquest.

Cannot we recognize that as human beings all of us are subject to error and mistake? What is needed now more than anything else is a spirit of cooperation among our local people of all races and communities. Our problems can best be solved by ourselves rather than by outsiders, especially General Secretary Mikhail Gorbachev of the Soviet Union. Mr. Gorbachev is much too busy fighting against freedom in Afghanistan to aid the cause of brotherhood here in Robeson County.

In a democratic society people ultimately have the kind of government that they deserve. Public officials are responsive to an aware citizenry that exercises the right to vote. In May of 1990 there will be a primary election for our most important county offices. During the next two years we will have the opportunity to consider the responsiveness of these officials. Let us gauge the fitness of each on their qualifications rather than emotion. Let us also work to involve all racial groups in the decision-making process. If there is a vacancy by reason of the creation of a new position or retirement then let us strive to fill that seat with a minority; but let us not vote against persons simply on the basis of race if those persons are otherwise qualified and responsive. Responsive incumbents of any race are hard to be voted out of office. If a public official is not qualified or responsible then they should be replaced at the polls regardless of race.

Upon reflections most of us will agree that few persons are all good or all bad, including our public officials; many positive changes are occurring. Well before the current tension our clerk of court appointed a black and an Indian as magistrates. Yet most of us will agree that more remains to be done. If the supporters of Joe Freeman Britt are opposed to holding an election for that superior court judgeship, then, in a sense of fairness and compromise, could not we all support the creation of an additional such seat to be filled by a qualified minority attorney? The need is already here. Cumberland County has four superior court judges serving a population of about 256,000. Robeson County has a higher case load per capita yet we only have one such judge serving a population of about 106,000. We submit that the cost of such an additional judgeship would be a small price to pay for racial harmony. The positions of district attorney and sheriff are the most powerful local offices in our system of justice. If Joe Freeman Britt becomes a judge we will need to replace him as district attorney. Why not fill that position with a qualified minority attorney? There are several such attorneys who enjoy the confidence of the local bar, most notably Arnold Locklear. While Arnold has not expressed any interest in the position, he best serves to illustrate the point.

There is no problem too difficult for people of goodwill to

WHAT NEXT???

At times during the orbital motion of Uranus, the north or south pole is aligned nearly face on toward the Sun. During those times, the poleward hemisphere receives nearly constant sunlight, while the other hemisphere languishes in decades-long darkness.

EDITORIAL EXPRESSION

Mary Russ Letter Dramatically Illustrates The Climate & Beliefs Of Some Individuals

We recently published a letter from a "Ms. Mary Russ of Lumberton". We later learned someone used this fictitious name to conceal their identity. The writer of the letter attacked the character of Indians as a people and suggested that Indians belonged out west.

We published the letter as the legitimate and sincere expression and belief of a fellow Robesonian. However objectionable and personally insulting the letter was to us, we felt it deserved publication since it dramatically illustrates the climate and beliefs of some individuals in Robeson County. Racism is alive and well in our county. The Robesonian even went on record as stating that racism appeared to be a primary reason for opposition to the school merge referendum. So the writer of letter obviously enjoys some support for the sentiments expressed, otherwise, the Glenn Millers (former leader of the White People's Party) of the world would not be able to attract such a following. Only later did we learn the writer of the letter had used a fictitious name. The name chosen by the writer was "Mary Russ". We do not know of the motive in choosing this name or why the individual would choose to hide his/her feelings. In this case, a coward caused innocent people needless pain.

Unfortunately, some individuals acted in just the way the writer of the letter probably hoped. Some individuals made threatening calls to one, Mr. Danny Russ of Lumberton. Mr. Russ lost his mother two years ago and his mother's name was Mary Russ. Needless to say, we are sincerely sorry for the pain and threats Mr. Russ and his family received, but we also would like Mr. Russ to know that we too have received threatening telephone calls. Our families have also suffered so

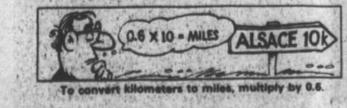


Steak is 74 percent water by weight.

we can and do fully sympathize with him and his family. However, we cannot accept the accusation that we have "caused great turmoil in our community". The turmoil has existed for decades. Newspapers are not responsible for the evil that occurs everyday in our world. Only by refusing to remove your blinders will you feel all is well in Robeson County. It is not irresponsible to portray or relay the true feelings of individuals. Some take out their anger on the bearer of the message; in our view, the message is what should be attacked. Obviously some readers acted irresponsibly by making threatening calls and we publicly condemn such acts.

We find it somewhat ironic that The Robesonian declined to print the letter in question. The Robesonian stated that "because the letter was in such poor taste and irresponsible, we will not reprint it" but they chose to print responses to the letter. Hatred exists in our county. You can not censor such expressions and hope they will disappear. Only by exposing the hatred for what it is, only by letting people see the evil that exists, only then will the people of Robeson County be aware and hopefully come forward to repudiate and condemn such views.

Mr. Russ, we are sincerely sorry for the pain you and your family has suffered. We would hope you would receive just as many calls apologizing for the irresponsible actions of a few. But we still reject your contention that we are somehow responsible for the evil that exists in Robeson County. We will continue to report on it, identify it, and fight against it. In that effort we will need your help and the help of other citizens who truly wish to make Robeson County a better place for all of us.



Brushing Up on Dental Care

By Marilyn Miller DDS If you have good dental care habits, it's probably due—at least in part—to your dentist's advice about brushing, flossing and using fluoride toothpaste.



Dentists help people prevent tooth problems by teaching them to brush and floss properly.

Many Americans benefit from their dentist's care and attention. The staff at the Princeton Dental Resource Center, which reports breakthroughs and forecasts how research will affect dental practices, advises us that scientific advances are giving teeth a new lease on life. Dentists recommend that patients brush twice a day with a fluoride toothpaste. Fluoride in an ADA approved

toothpaste is the single most effective weapon in the battle against tooth decay. solve. Lumbee Regional Development Association (LRDA) has been holding a series of community hearings in order to determine the concerns of Indian people. After the conclusion of these meetings the Board of Directors of LRDA plans to adopt a political agenda behind which Indian people can rally. LRDA will then seek to meet with representatives of the other racial groups and other organizations in order to find areas of agreement. Once such areas are found, hopefully, a common effort will resolve many longstanding local problems.

Robeson not only needs a human relations council but also a summit conference between the supporters of Joe Freeman Britt and Julian Pierce. We have nothing to lose but our prejudice and our poverty. Together we can make our nation and our state proud of Robeson County.

> Dexter Brooks Pembroke, NC

ON HUMAN ISSUES

To the Editor:

Here in Robeson County one hears a lot about issues. There are political issues, legal issues, economic issues, health issues; all kinds of issues. And then there are the issues associated with certain groups: Indian issues, Black issues, elders' issues, children's issues, teachers' issues, parents' issues, city-residents' issues, county-residents' issues, any-

READERS' FORUM Continued on Page 6

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