

Forum

Believe me, this is no joke

Sometimes arguments for or against an issue happen in the strangest places.

Both sides of the abortion argument might do well to follow the outcome of the appeal of James A Bivens in Palm Beach County's Circuit Court.

Mr. Bivens, you see, was convicted in March of poaching more than 1,000 turtle eggs, which is illegal in Florida. He was sentenced to 60 days in jail and fined \$500 plus \$100 for each of the 1,093 turtle eggs he took from the beach at John D. MacArthur Beach State Park on Singer Island.

Mr. Bivens' appeal is not one claiming innocence or an unfair trial, but one based on the premise that the fine is illegal because the \$100 fine imposed by the judge is, according to Florida law, permissible "per unit of marine life." Mr. Bivens says a turtle egg is not marine life. In fact, his question is: "When does marine turtle life begin?"

Louis Carres, an assistant public defender writing on Mr. Bivens' behalf, said, "Just as a chicken is not an egg (and when one eats an egg for breakfast, one is not eating a chicken), a marine turtle is not a turtle until it comes out of its egg." Mr. Carres added that the fine is unfair because Mr. Bivens was caught with turtle eggs, not turtles.

Jan. 18 has been set for oral arguments on the question of when marine turtle life begins.

Mr. Bivens' motive seems rather simple. If he loses his appeal, he will have to fork over \$109,300 in fines. But the determination of when marine turtle life begins could have implica-

the line because no one knows where to draw it and any line at all would be simply an arbitrary one.

Perhaps dealing with an issue as impersonal as turtle eggs and



AGAINST THE GRAIN

By ROOSEVELT WILSON

tions far beyond that courtroom.

That has been one of the primary arguments in the abortion issue, particularly that of the anti-abortion forces who say that life begins at conception. Some oppose abortion under any circumstances and even oppose birth control because they say that even before conception the sperm and egg are alive. But others say, "Yes, they are alive, but are they a life?"

Barbara Schroeder, a sea turtle recovery coordinator for the State Department of Natural Resources, said, "If you kill an egg, it is not going to become a turtle, obviously."

Many lawmakers nationwide have been wrestling with the question of how to impose sensible limits on abortion because they cannot agree on where to draw the line in terms of where life begins. Likewise, pro-choice factions have been saying forget

marine life will permit those hearing the arguments to make a decision not weighted by the strong emotions involved in the ever-so-personal and human issue of abortion.

But once that decision is made, drawing parallels with the abortion issue will in most likelihood be inevitable.

Sea turtles are an endangered species in Florida and lawmakers tried to enact legislation to protect them. And no one, not even Mr. Bivens' attorney, supports him for stealing the turtle eggs.

But the bigger issue is the question raised by the legislation, one that virtually demands someone to decide when marine life begins.

And isn't that the same burning question about human life in the abortion issue?

Roosevelt Wilson teaches journalism at Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, Fla.

A manifesto for schools that work

It must be campaign time because the sound of meaningless platitudes on "quality education" from the lips of elected officials is in the air. The future of the Afro-American community is at stake as the performance of the public school system continues to decline. Educational opportunity is the civil rights challenge of the 1990s and nothing short of prompt, meaningful and radical restructuring of public education will save our community from dire predictions of 70 percent black male unemployment and 70 percent female-headed households.

The following is my manifesto for change.

• Empower parents to choose the school that best meets their children's needs.

Greater parental choice will immediately identify schools the customer supports and those that have no buyers. Rather than offering the same program in every school, offer a 31-flavor choice of teaching styles and subject emphasis. Black parents will choose schools that have role models in the classroom, that set high expectations for all students, that nurture their kids' culture, that do not track and do not abuse the children with rebel flags and Jim Crow newspaper cartoons.

• Redefine the meaning of school.

A school is not the physical plant in which it resides. A school is a shared common vision of education, one shared by the instructional team and the parents. Therefore, it is desirable to have several schools within one physical plant. The smaller schools of choice built around a shared vision cannot but meet the needs of our community at a much higher level than is the case today.

• Elementary schools must be created within the Afro-American

community.

The proximity of the school to the home drives the likelihood of parental involvement, particularly with regard to disadvantaged kids. There is no justice in using black

and state education budget should be allocated to each school and the instructional team allowed to decide what, if anything, will be purchased from the central office. When I asked a principal what he



ANOTHER VIEW

By VERNON ROBINSON

5-, 6- and 7-year-olds to solve the real challenges of race relations at the expense of their education. These kids should be able to choose a school 13 blocks from home rather than 13 miles away.

• Tie funding to the students.

Gross discrepancies in funding are what made racially identifiable schools unequal in the past. Racially identifiable schools may re-emerge because of housing patterns and legitimate parental choices. Equal educational opportunity must be insured by tying equal state and local funds to the student in a choice arrangement. Today's sad reality is that classrooms are resegregated with white kids in the AG classes. So are the prison cells.

• Abolish school attendance zones and use a lottery to decide who will attend.

Everyone will have an equal chance of getting their first, second or third choice.

• Give teachers the entire budget.

The education industry is the only one left being run Soviet-style: fat with unneeded back office folk and with long lines for good schools and the few choices that are allowed. The instructional teams in the schools with the right dose of staff development are best able to make decisions about how to use resources. The entire local

would buy from the central office, after taking three minutes to think about it he answered: "I guess I'd keep the mail service." I couldn't have said it better myself.

• Abolish teacher education degrees and change the way teachers get certified.

The only way to get more blacks into the teaching profession who can teach is to strip away the education course requirements, and require that those who wish to teach get a bachelor's degree and pass a test in the desired teaching area. I think I'd make a great social studies teacher, but I can't be one because I haven't studied Bulletin Board Building 301. After successfully completing a one-year internship, like doctors, the new teacher would be certified by a board of teachers, again like doctors.

These seven reforms hold the last best hope to create schools that work. I hope anybody who agrees with me and wants to run for the school board, county commissioner or the General Assembly will call me, be ye Democrat, Republican, black or white.

To paraphrase the Last Poets, wake up, brothers and sisters, or we're all through.

Vernon Robinson is a former candidate for the N.C. Senate.

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