

# The Charlotte Post

The Voice of the Black Community

1531 Camden Road Charlotte, N.C. 28203

Gerald O. Johnson CEO/PUBLISHER

Robert L. Johnson CO-PUBLISHER/GENERAL MANAGER

Herbert L. White EDITOR IN CHIEF

OPINION

## Choices for Mecklenburg commissioners

Tuesday's primary offers Mecklenburg County voters an opportunity to weigh in on their choices for political office, although gerrymandered districts have taken competition out of most races. Nonetheless, every campaign is worth paying attention to, especially those with qualified candidates running.

To that end, The Post offers its recommendations for Tuesday.



Ross

• **County Commissioner District 1:** This may be the most intriguing race because of who's campaigning for the Democratic nomination. Sam Spencer, a 21-year-old from Davidson, is running against **Therman Ross**, a Cornelius town commissioner. Mr. Ross, a real estate professional, has the business and political experience to merit a chance at the position in November.

On the Republican side, **Karen Bentley** is running against **Darryl Broome**, with the winner in a commanding position to win in this heavily-Democratic district. Mrs. Bentley and Mr. Broome are near mirror-images (except for public schools, where Bentley favors breaking up Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools), but Mr. Broome's advocacy of fostering growth in District 1 makes him a more attractive choice.

• **Mecklenburg Commissioner, District 2:** Incumbent Democrat **Norman Mitchell** is running against **Donna Jenkins Dawson**, who ran for the county Board of Education last year. Mr. Mitchell has proven to be a capable steward of the county's interest as a thoughtful moderate on many issues. Miss Dawson, who has been very active in community and school activities, is a feisty advocate for education issues, but Mr. Mitchell's experience in navigating government issues and dealing with fellow commissioners make him our choice for another term.

• **County Commissioner District 3:** This will likely be the most heavily campaigned race, but offers the clearest choice of candidates. Incumbent **Valerie Woodard** has been a staunch supporter of health and human services and the in supporting both. William Chandler, a county parks and recreation commissioner, has vast knowledge of county government and would like to bring together factions split along social, economic and racial lines.

Mr. Chandler is a fine servant of the people and would make a good commissioner, but Mrs. Woodard already is. Although she is a lightning rod for criticism because of her politics, it hasn't limited her ability to speak to the issues most important to her constituents. We'd like to see the

winner dedicate more time to furthering economic development of District 3, which would help alleviate some of those fissures, but taking all that into account, we endorse Mrs. Woodard for another term.

## Be aware of asthma and its impact on life and breath

By Andrew Harver  
SPECIAL TO THE POST

May is Asthma Awareness Month

The eighth annual World Asthma Day will take place on May 2, as a kickoff event for asthma education events during the month of May.

In 1999, the Global Initiative for Asthma established World Asthma Day and World Asthma Month. Organizations will sponsor asthma education events around the world to raise awareness about the indoor and outdoor pollutants that trigger asthma episodes, and how to avoid them as part of a comprehensive asthma management plan.

For many children and their families, the struggle with asthma can be challenging, stressful, and even frightening. Understanding asthma symptoms, triggers, and treatments can help families begin to take control of this common condition.

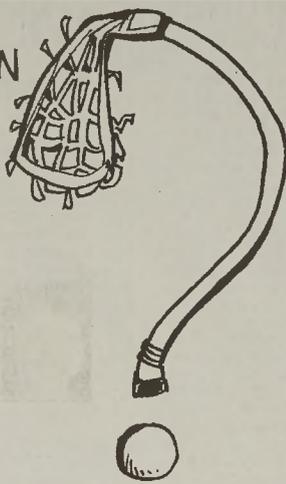
Asthma is a respiratory condition marked by chronic inflammation of the breathing passages and constriction of the muscles surrounding the airway. Inflammation is triggered by one or more internal or external irritants. When an attack is triggered, the lining of the breathing passages swell, and the mucus in the lungs fills the airways, making it difficult to exhale.

Asthma doesn't have to put major limits on your child's life. There are many things that you can do to take control of asthma and minimize its impact on your child's activities. Because each case of asthma is different, treatment needs to be tailored for each person. One general rule that does apply, though, is removing the things in your environment that you know are factors that make your child's asthma worse. These triggers vary from person to person and may include smoke, mold, cold air, physical exertion, dust mites, and other factors.

For most people living with asthma, simply avoiding triggers is not enough. Most people also require medication to control symptoms. Controller medications help prevent airway inflammation; rescue medications open the airway providing relief if symptoms flare up. Inhalers are a common means of administering both kinds of medicines. Your family doctor can help you develop an asthma control plan that's right for you and your child.

ANDREW HARVER is chair of UNC Charlotte's Department of Health Behavior and Administration and oversees Project On TRAC.

THE INVESTIGATION CONTINUES ...



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## Learning to lean on one another

After seven consecutive weekends on the road, I was glad to be home last Saturday. I decided to spend the rainy day reading, relaxing and watching TV. With few exceptions, I rarely watch television.

However, when I scrolled through the cable menu and saw that "Lean on Me," starring Morgan Freeman as "Crazy" Joe Clark, was about to be aired on A&E, I became as excited as someone watching the movie for the first time.

"Lean on Me" is my favorite movie. I've seen it dozens of times since it came out in 1989 and each time, I have had to fight back tears. It's not that I was unfamiliar with the ending — that's always the same. I find the movie so touching because with tough-love, determination and a genuine belief in the abilities of his students, Clark turns around a decaying, drug-infested Eastside High School in New Jersey.

After asking instructors for a list of troublemakers, the Joe Clark character calls a school assembly.

"I want all of you to take a good look at these people on

the risers behind me," Clark says, as the students behind him continue to misbehave. "These people have been here up to five years and done absolutely nothing. These people are drug dealers and drug users. They have taken up space; they have disrupted school; they have harassed your teachers; and they have intimidated you. Well, times are about to change. You will not be bothered in Joe Clark's school."

The students on stage remain unruly, but not for long.

"These people are incorrigible," Clark says. "And since none of them could graduate anyway, you are all expurgated. You are dismissed! You are out of here forever! I wish you well."

A line of security guards show those on stage to the door, some of them forcibly.

Turning to the remaining students, Clark says: "Next time it may be you. If you do no better than they did, next time it will be you."

After "expurgating" Eastside High of the miscreants, Clark explains his goal.

"My motto is simple: If you do not succeed in life, I don't want you to blame your parents. I don't want you to blame the White man! I want you to blame yourselves! The responsibility is yours!"

"In two weeks we have a

practice exam and a minimum skills test on April 13th. That's a hundred and ten school days from now. But it's not just about those test scores. If you do not have these basic skills, you will find yourselves locked out. Locked out of that American Dream that you see advertised on TV — that they tell you is so easy to get."

For the three people who still have not seen the movie, I won't give away the ending except to say it was a dramatic and happy one.

After my 2-hour movie, I knew the opening game of the playoff series between the Cleveland Cavaliers and the Washington Wizards would be less intense. And the basketball game proved to be just that. The only real question was how well LeBron James would perform in his first playoff game. In retrospect, that question should not have been raised, given James' stellar performance.

It was the half-time profile of Wizards Star Gilbert Arenas that tugged at the heart. Best known for throwing his jersey into the stands after each game, Arenas has a tender side. The captain of the Wizards has become the self-appointed big brother of Andre McAllister, a 10-year-old sole survivor of a fire last December in Washington that killed the boy's mother,

twins sister, great-grandfather and cousin. Arenas spends time with McAllister, got him a job as a ballboy for the basketball team and remains devoted to helping shape his future. He has already made plans for the youth to attend college and says McAllister is the brother he never had.

Watching "Lean on Me" and the clip about Arenas brought back memories of Robert L. Glynn, the head of McKenzie Court, my housing projects in Tuscaloosa, Ala. He spent countless days telling me and others that we could accomplish anything that we set our mind to. He told us of his poor upbringing, letting us know in the process that we, too, could overcome that barrier. I'll always remember the stories he told me about filling holes in his shoes with newspapers and how he worked his way through what is now Alabama State University.

Sometimes we forget just how much of an impact we as individuals can have on the lives of our youth. And if there were ever a time to exert that influence, it's now.

GEORGE E. CURRY is editor-in-chief of the National Newspaper Publishers Association News Service and BlackPressUSA.com. To contact Curry or to book him for a speaking engagement, go to his Web site, [www.georgecurry.com](http://www.georgecurry.com).

## Just how do we define a tax increase?

By Mike Walden  
SPECIAL TO THE POST

Few topics spark as much controversy as taxes, especially a tax increase. But what really constitutes a tax increase?

Are all tax increases created equal? To some the answer is easy: a tax increase is whenever taxes you pay rise. That is, if Joe Smith paid \$1,000 in taxes last year and this year he pays \$1,200, that's a tax increase. End of story. But what if we're talking about the income tax, and what if Joe's tax payment rose only because his income rose?

Should he still consider this a tax increase, especially if the percentage of each of Joe's dollars taken in taxes remained the same? Taxes paid result from multiplying whatever is taxed — the tax base — by the percentage of that tax base taken in taxes, or the tax rate.

For example, how much sales tax you pay equals the dollar amount of your retail spending multiplied by the sales tax rate (cents of sales tax per dollar of spending). So an increase in taxes paid can occur for two reasons: the tax base rises or the tax rate increases. But should both be considered a tax increase? If your retail spending increases, shouldn't you expect to pay more in sales tax? So tax base increases (here, retail spending) aren't usually considered a tax increase.

Only a tax rate increase

(here the sales tax rate) would be thought of as a tax hike.

Most taxpayers understand this logic with one exception: property tax. Like all taxes, property taxes paid equal the property tax base (here, the property value recorded by the county, called assessed value) multiplied by the property tax rate (cents of tax per dollar of assessed value).

However, two characteristics make the property tax different. One is that tax base (assessed property values) is not updated every year. Indeed, in many North Carolina counties the time between assessments is eight years. In between, the tax base only increases due to new construction, and even here the value of the new construction is recorded as the estimated value at the time of the last assessment.

Yet, when reassessments do occur, the increase in property values can be large because it represents the accumulated change in val-

ues over several years.

Second, there is no assurance property values and owners' incomes will change at the same rate. In fact, in recent years property values have risen much faster than incomes. This can create a problem for owners who pay their property taxes from their current income. As a result, when property values are reassessed and the property tax base rises by a substantial amount, owners will often perceive this as a large tax increase, even if the property tax rate has remained the same.

Consequently, counties will often lower the property tax rate in reassessment years to soften the blow. Yet because the costs of many local infrastructure projects, like schools and roads, are tied to property values, placing such a lid on property tax revenues can create backlogs in school and road funding.

What's the solution?

One option is to better educate property owners about

why the long lags in property reassessments create periodic big jumps in property tax payments.

Another is shorter time periods between reassessments, so owners could adjust to more frequent, yet smaller, payment increases.

A third option is to develop some creative ways to pay property taxes. For example, rather than paying them out of income, some share could be paid from profits realized when the property is sold. This could be particularly helpful to property owners with high wealth yet low income.

Tax determinations are more complicated than they seem at first glance. Keep your eyes on the underlying fundamentals of the tax base and tax rate before deciding where taxes are headed.

MIKE WALDEN is a William Neal Reynolds Professor and extension economist in the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics of N.C. State University.

