

The State Port Pilot Opinion

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SKELLY

Bottom line

We can adjust to minor problems if county government is making an effort to provide equal service to one and all

The six-year solid waste contract approved by county commissioners Monday was never presented as the answer to all of our garbage concerns. Questions still linger, and they are important ones, over the \$5-million annual deal with Waste Industries Inc. and how 18 municipalities and county government can coordinate a plan that will please everyone. The contract does not address commercial accounts, and an appointed committee must study this issue after the barn door has already been shut.

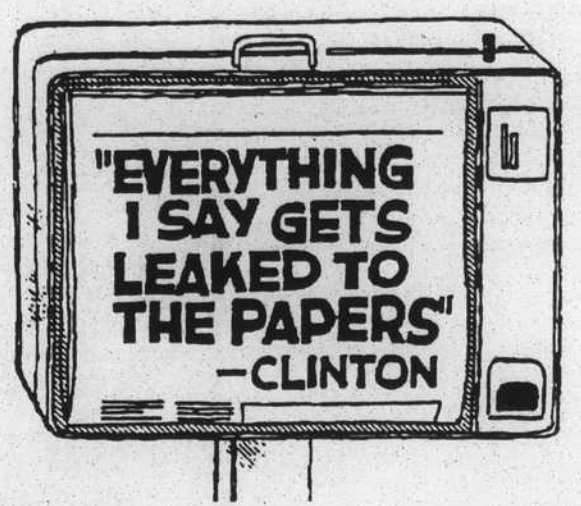
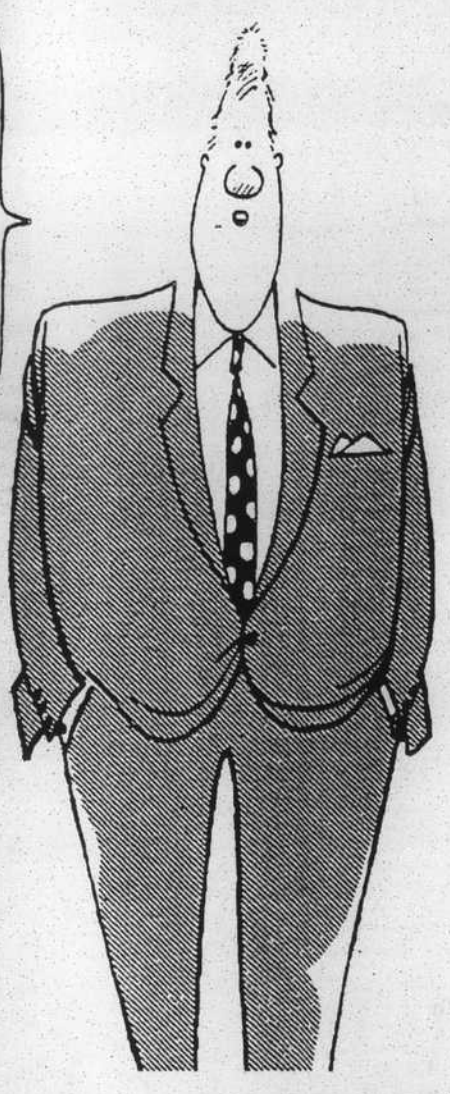
Some fear yet another breakdown, like the Vedco Co. incineration deal which got us into the business of shipping our trash to Sampson County in the first place. As District 2 commissioner David Sandifer stated, as long as our waste is being handled by somebody other than Brunswick County, we place ourselves at that company's mercy.

It shouldn't be difficult to compare what local business owners are willing to pay for garbage service with what Waste Industries has to offer. Chances are, with a \$10.98-per-month credit from the county for commercial accounts, price won't be the committee's main issue. Some commissioners claim the bargaining power is gone, while others state there is value when dealing in large numbers. Who's right, and who's wrong?

The bottom line is that there emerged from this trash episode the start of something -- perhaps the start of offering rural folks a chance to obtain better service for the tax dollars they pay for garbage collection, too. Door-to-door service will be viewed as an anomaly in the unincorporated areas and will require changes, welcomed changes for those not accustomed to the county offering anything that's actually convenient.

If this contract is the starting point and not the final product, we can live with what's been offered. We can live with changes. We can adjust to minor problems if county government is making an effort to provide equal service to one and all.

EVERYTHING I SAY GETS LEAKED TO THE PAPERS.



Deregulation

The judgments of the debt-filled 1970s and 1980s were the judgments of all North Carolinians

Some serious debate over approaches to deregulation of the electricity industry was begun locally late last week at a public hearing conducted by a legislative study commission of the General Assembly.

The commission met in Wilmington and several local leaders attended. From that session, we think it is pretty safe to say this serious issue of electricity deregulation is one that is going to be vigorously promoted and enormously oversimplified by some of its advocates.

In theory, in a deregulated electricity market, electricity customers would be able to pick and choose their electricity providers much like they now pick long distance telephone companies. The customer would be free to shop for the best electricity rate available among many providers.

Again, in theory, deregulated companies in the electricity business would specialize, some opting to be generators of electricity, some brokers of electricity, some distributors of electricity. Free of regulation, large power brokers will be free to purchase minute-by-minute the cheapest available electricity via a vast network of producers and deliverers. The electricity markets will become just like markets serving other commodities, so the theory goes.

Those who would oversimplify the deregulation process would have North Carolina strip the industry of all regulation today.

There's just one hitch. A good segment of the state, its cities, its citizens, have a stake in electricity industry debt. More than 50 cities in North Carolina share over \$6 billion of debt assumed to help ailing power generators build -- indeed overbuild -- expensive nuclear power plants in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Until now, their markets have been protected and they have been able to slowly pay on this mountain of debt. Their markets, however, will be severely eroded, they fear, when deregulation comes.

Those who would oversimplify will tell you these cities made bad investments and can now shoulder their bad fortune as they will.

In reality, however, the debt of the cities is everyone's debt. The debt which built nuclear power reactors at Carolina Power and Light Co. near Southport and Raleigh, and also built Duke Energy Company reactors, came as cities used their unique standing to sell state-endorsed general obligation bonds. These bonds are backed by the full faith and credit of all North Carolinians.

Will the state allow default on these obligations?
No way.

The next time someone tells you deregulation of the electricity industry in this state is a ticket to cheap and plentiful electricity, remind him that the judgments of the debt-filled 1970s and 1980s were the judgments of all North Carolinians. All North Carolinians must stand by those judgments today.

Not exactly news

"That's why ... they play ... the game," is what Chris Berman of ESPN dramatically says about lesser teams winning over big-time favorites, and his observation is right on the money this week. Imagine Rhode Island defeating top-seeded Kansas for the right to meet Valparaiso -- yep, Valparaiso -- and the winner of that game just one victory away from going to the Final Four. That's what's so great about NCAA tournaments: Anybody has the chance to win in this sport where, except for the two hours it takes to play the game, attention is focused almost entirely on the Carolinas, Dukes and Kentuckys of the college basketball world... We still look for the Blue Devils and Tar Heels to advance to the Final Four, but Duke must be wary of Kentucky if the two should meet. North Carolina must get past Michigan State and probably Connecticut to get there.

There is new construction going on in downtown Southport, most notably at the corner of Howe and West streets where Larry and Laurie Driver are building a two-story structure that will house, among other things, another antique shop. Farther downtown, between the former Amuzu

Theater and the present Security Savings Bank, a narrow storefront is being erected. We don't know the purpose of that one... And out the road, work is nearing completion on a new, improved and larger parking lot for River Run Shopping Center, as pace is kept with the new Hannaford project underway across the street... And still farther out the road, another phase of St. James Plantation has opened along the Intracoastal Waterway, best viewed from the area of East 20th Street in Long Beach.

We had occasion to be with Maynard Owens, operator of the self-service blueberry farm on Highway 211 near Supply, as he tried to save his budding crop during last week's record-setting cold by sprinkling with water, and we checked with him Monday to see how he'd come out. Not good, by his judgment. "I feel about all the buds were killed," he said, "and a lot of my bushes were broken down by the ice. I normally prune twice in a year -- in July or August and again in January. This time I've pruned in March, too..." In the dozen years Owens has been in the blueberry business -- supplementing his retirement income -- he's been done in by weather two other

times: Once in another hard freeze, and five years ago -- to the day -- when the March Storm of 1993 coated his bushes and the rest of Brunswick County's foliage with deadly salt. We commended him on his spirit in this thoroughly dispiriting time, and he replied, "If I had 100 acres of bushes and my whole livelihood depended on it, I'd be a lot more downcast than I am."

Everybody is familiar with the umpire holding up a ball game to ceremoniously sweep off home plate (though nobody except the occasional baserunner approaching from third ever looks for the thing), but the other day at a South Brunswick softball game we saw ritual taken to a whole new level as the base umpire walked to the center of the diamond and swept the pitcher's plate clean... Yet another fine moment in the Odell Williamson Auditorium entertainment year comes Friday with the appearance of the Preservation Hall Jazz Band. The echoes from Mardi Gras will be just grand... Baseball season is drawing nigh for Southport's Quinton McCracken. He'll be in centerfield Tuesday, March 31, when the Tampa Bay Devil Rays open their inaugural season against the Detroit Tigers.

Public opinion

Conflict
To the Editor:

Do you suppose commissioner Dick Marshall has more than a passing interest in the development of a resort hotel in Yaupon Beach?

He has been quoted in the Pilot as saying he "saw no wrong" in reducing the town sewer impact fees for this one developer as an inducement to build. Fortunately other board members seem reluctant to agree.

Last I knew, Dick Marshall and/or his wife worked for and owned the Coldwell Banker Southport-Oak Island Realty firm. Not long ago I believe that I observed their "for sale" signs on most of the large, empty lots on Ocean Drive near Barbee Boulevard. Does his firm still serve as agent for the property owner(s) or perhaps act on behalf of the potential developer? If so, it seems that commissioner Marshall would have a clear conflict of interest with his proposal.

To put forth such a plan for a single project is, in my opinion, doing a disservice to the taxpayers of Yaupon Beach. Marshall should consider resigning.

Dave Durr
Yaupon Beach

Racial clarity

To the Editor:
Conspiracy is a judgmental word which titillates readers of mystery books, and on the other hand can threaten the suspicious. I am told that my recent letter to the newspaper caused some of our citizens to feel suspected of racist collusion and resentful. My object was the planning board.

I wish to clarify my feelings about racism. To me it is the "original sin." We all should share in its guilt and power. Most of us are "fearfully taught" from childhood to beware of strangers. The North practiced this superiority just as firmly as the racist Southern "Jim Crow" laws. It was even more insidious in its real estate "red-lining," school segregation and job

opportunities -- and still is. We know our churches have been made by us the most separated "holiness" in existence with real racial barriers left from slavery.

Follow Jesus to the cross. See the risks He takes to invade every human barrier, comforting always the weak and fearful and speaking truth to power and status. It is in this context that I accuse us all of being weak-kneed in our own happily growing churches and in our community planning of Southport and Oak Island.

Springing from the Martin Luther King breakfast on January 19, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Southport-Oak Island Interchurch Fellowship and the City of Southport are engaged in a several-month peace project. Each church will plan joint intergenera-

tional service projects. Children and adults will design events of Easter life and peace far beyond the bunnies and the eggs.

All who wish to join in can come to the diversity and multicultural workshop at the ILA Hall on Lord Street on March 24-26 from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Help bring a new kind of peace to our community.

Walter Welsh
Southport

Horse ride

To the Editor:
Many thanks to all of those who supported our Long Beach Volunteer Fire Department horse ride last week. We had many volunteers who gave their time and talents to make this ride a real success.

Local merchants and businesses in the Oak Island and Southport area donated generously to make it a true community project. The participants had a great time and look forward to returning next year to enjoy the hospitality of our beach. Please join us in thanking the following "Friends of the Horse

See Letters, next page

Letters to the Editor...

The State Port Pilot invites its readers to share opinions on matters of public interest. Letters should be limited to 250 words; longer letters will be edited for space, or will be returned to the writer if editing would significantly alter the content. The writer's address and/or telephone number must be included in case verification is required. No letters will be published without the name of the writer; addresses and telephone numbers will not be published.

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