

Opinion

The fabric of Bertie County since 1832

Jones must take job...

Two important things need to happen, quickly, at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

1. Nikole Hannah-Jones needs to join the faculty. Her qualifications and the times demand it.

2. The university's board of trustees MUST go on the record and vote on her tenure request — which has been routine for others in that job. No credible board would dodge their duty.

As is evident from the outpouring of support from the UNC faculty, not to mention hundreds of academic leaders nationwide, Hannah-Jones will be welcomed as a member of the academic community.

The university's administration and trustees cannot stay silent on the tenure issue. Failing to act is denial, but keeps those responsible from being accountable. They cannot dodge their responsibility or the obligation. Trustees must each go on the record. They must state why Hannah-Jones is being treated differently.

Hannah-Jones has other offers for professorships from the nation's top academic posts. Her failure to join the UNC faculty will be Chapel Hill's loss and the others' gain. The already stained reputation of UNC, from a variety of administrative missteps over the last decade, will make it indelible.

She cannot let the ideologues win. She needs to be UNC's next Knight Chair in Race and Investigative Journalism.

She cannot let the legislative leadership — who directly and indirectly hold power to name campus trustees — and their minions show they've wrested control of a nation-leading system of higher education that's taken a century to build.

In that tradition of higher education leadership and academic freedom, she will teach her students to identify facts, understand complicated nuance and to have the skills to be independent thinkers.

In a UNC classroom she will show those who want to silence her, really are seeking a system of higher indoctrination — not higher education. Every day those seeking to close the minds of those searching for knowledge at UNC will look and see in Hannah-Jones someone who — regardless of who the students are, where they come from or their personal perspective — is devoted to opening minds and welcomes dialogue from diverse points of view.

That will be a victory for the University of North Carolina, for academic independence and for Nikole Hannah-Jones. Ideologues and education bureaucrats cannot be allowed to chase her away and give comfort to those who seek to put a limit on academic freedom.

The controversy over Hannah-Jones' appointment isn't about qualifications. She's won a MacArthur genius fellowship. She's been elected a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Society of American Historians. She's won a Pulitzer Prize for commentary along with Peabody and Polk awards. Her career, vast body of work and accomplishments merit her appointment.

Others previously appointed to the Knight chair at UNC — who similarly to Hannah-Jones didn't come from an academic background — were tenured. The late Chuck Stone, a Tuskegee Airman and newspaper columnist was tenured as the Walter Spearman Professor at the school.

Because of a statement in an essay that was part of The New York Times 1619 Project she oversaw, Hannah-Jones has become a lightning rod for ideologues seeking to abridge teachings about slavery, segregation and racism in schools.

The essay Hannah-Jones wrote was the subject of a March 2020 clarification, "to make clear that a desire to protect slavery was among the motivations of some of the colonists who fought the Revolutionary War, not among the motivations of all of them."

If anything, this is testament to her openness in contrast to the ideological rigidity of her detractors.

Hannah-Jones cannot let the detractors keep her from taking the job.

Today's editorial is from Capitol Broadcasting Company. The views expressed are not necessarily those of this newspaper.



We all have need of special traits...

For most people, 16 West Jones Street has a far less familiar ring than 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. But what happens inside the Legislative Building on Jones Street in Raleigh is just as critical to the lives of North Carolinians as what goes on in the White House or on Capitol Hill.



BOB PHILLIPS
Common Cause NC

Within the columned walls of the legislature, 170 lawmakers make decisions that directly impact our state's 10 million residents. From our schools and roads, to health-care, water quality and access to the

ballot box, these legislators play a central role in determining the direction of our state.

It's vital that the people of North Carolina have a front-row seat to keep tabs on their representatives and weigh in on the lawmaking process. Of course, most folks don't have time to travel to Raleigh to sit in committee meetings or floor debates. And the COVID-19 pandemic has made venturing to the legislature especially challenging this past year.

Thankfully, we're fortunate to have some outstanding journalists providing solid coverage of

the legislature. Due to the ever-changing landscape of the news industry, there's a smaller number of reporters assigned to the General Assembly beat than in times past. But the brave few who do remain put in long hours, sometimes well into the night, helping to make sense of the crush of bills and shining a light on what our lawmakers are up to.

As a nonpartisan, grassroots organization, we at Common Cause NC also strive to keep the public informed about what's happening on Jones Street, with an eye towards holding lawmakers accountable to their constituents. A half-century ago, we were founded as "the people's lobby." We take that mission seriously, working to ensure everyday folks are not forgotten within the halls of the legislature.

Meanwhile, legislative leaders deserve some credit for making the General Assembly's activities a bit more accessible for the public, with live streaming video of committee meetings and House sessions now available through the legislature's website at NCleg.gov. There's still much more to do on the transparency front, however, such as posting video recordings of legislative proceedings online for those who can't tune in live. And the NC Senate should follow the House's lead in turning on cameras in its chamber.

At NCleg.gov you can also find information on bills and how to contact your legislators. It's important to let lawmakers know what you think about the issues that matter most to you.

The transparency test will also be key later this year as lawmakers begin the process of drawing new congressional and legislative voting districts. Will legislative leaders shortchange the people of North Carolina through a rushed and partisan redistricting process? Will they craft gerrymandered districts behind closed doors, with politicians trying to shield themselves from accountability to the public?

Or will lawmakers break from the sordid past of gerrymandering? Will they hold meaningful public hearings, actually listen to community members and draw districts that let voters choose their representatives? That would be refreshing and what's needed to avoid more illegal map-rigging by politicians.

We'll get an answer to these questions in the coming months. If history is a guide, we the people will need to be vigilant, speak out and demand full transparency from legislators drawing our voting districts.

For now, keep an eye on Jones Street.

Bob Phillips is executive director of Common Cause NC.

Where were the cool tents...

My children did not do much camping growing up, which seems odd because their mother



MARK RUTLEDGE
The Daily Reflector

and I have fond memories of camping trips with our parents.

Sharon and I even met on a camping trip in the Florida Keys with seven of my closest friends. One of my friends worked with my future wife at the time and invited

her along.

Although my friend Paul and I had mapped out the trip during previous adventures in the Keys, a few of the friends had second thoughts once we got there. It was oppressively hot, and the insects were vicious.

The fact that I was skilled at co-existing with Florida mosquitoes earned immediate points with Sharon. It helped also that each of us had stories of family vacations with pop-up campers, sunburns and bug repellent.

My parents pulled a Cox fold-out camper behind a 1965 Chevy Impala across half of the country. Most often we went to Morrow

Mountain State Park near Albemarle, North Carolina, where we lived during my earliest years.

Morrow Mountain is where I learned to swim, build campfires and watch out for snakes and spiderwebs along the wooded path to the pool. Sharon had those same experiences at Indian Lake in northwestern Ohio.

During the earliest years of raising our daughters in eastern North Carolina, we assumed that we would carry on those family camping traditions that shaped our own childhoods. Although we did pitch tents with friends on North Carolina's Ocracoke Island once, that was pretty much the extent of our family camping.

It's true that the mosquitoes on Ocracoke tried to carry away our children. But that's not why we didn't go camping more. Our vacations during the child-rearing years mostly alternated between visiting her family in Ohio and mine in Tennessee.

For several beach trips with Ohio cousins, we rented vacation houses — where the adults sat around and reminisced about childhood family vacations that didn't feature luxuries such as private bathrooms and air condi-

tioning.

Our daughters did not exactly feel deprived hearing those stories in the comfort of a fancy vacation rental. But our oldest always wanted to go camping.

Carly was the one who pitched tents in the backyard, built tree-houses and asked to go fishing. Her sisters enjoyed those activities too but always with Carly as the driving force.

Our frustrated pioneer turned 21 this month. For her birthday she bought herself a "tent-on-top" camper. It's a foldout tent that installs on the luggage rack of most any vehicle. Coolest thing ever.

"This is the best investment I have ever made," Carly said proudly after installing it atop her Jeep. She decided to leave it up there for the summer.

Sharon and I recently put in a request to borrow Carly's tent rig for an outing in the North Carolina mountains.

"Oh, so I get the gear and now y'all want to go camping," she said. "I don't think so."

I guess we had that one coming.

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