

Opinions

'There has to be a better way'

By Raz Autry

A few weeks ago I wrote an article about the importance of learning to laugh at yourself.

The following article is my last one as superintendent of schools and I thank all of my friends for their support.

The children of this county, those who have grown into adults and those who are still growing, have given me the rare opportunity to witness true love and true friendship.

They have become a permanent part of my life. I have cried with them; grown with them; loved with them and a little of me has died when one of them died.

My one hope for the Hoke County Board of Education is that they will remember that their sole purpose is to do what is necessary to give the children of this county the opportunity for a first rate education, regardless of whose toes they might step on.

This would give them an even start with everyone else in the footrace of life. I hope the board will realize that this commitment must come ahead of their personal desires, their political ambitions, and their personal prejudices.

Further, I hope they will remember that the chief administrative officer was hired to run the school program and not to cater to their personal wishes. He should be given the same courtesy they expect. I wish them well and hope as they read this article they have learned to laugh at themselves.

The more I work with school board members the more convinced I become that there should be a better selection process than the Democratic way.

Every election year I get a new optimistic high and simply know that this is going to be a year in which a board is elected that will not question the integrity or intelligence of the superintendent.

Not only am I disappointed every election year, some years a member is elected who not only questions the superintendent's integrity and honesty, but his parentage as well.

After following the true democratic process for a number of years, I decided to help elect a school board member who would fit the mold desired by every superintendent.

I zeroed in on a neighbor and golfing companion, a man who was true blue. He was a good church-goer; was not quick on the trigger; one who thought through every issue; one who was more solid than a rock in tight situations.

I was fully convinced that if this man got elected he would help me set a standard for school board members that could never be surpassed.

What a glorious day this would be for education in this county.

In spite of my help, my friend and golfing companion was elected. In fact, he led the ticket.

A new-born, innocent baby could not have slept better than I did on election night.

The first Monday following the election was the regularly scheduled school board meeting. I could hardly contain myself. Not only had my friend and golfing companion led the ticket, he would surely be elected chairman. No one stood taller than I did at the swearing in ceremony. I could have very easily been a part of his personal family.

Superintendent's Desk

Since luck was running my way, sure enough, he was elected chairman. I had visions of us attending board meetings together in far away places; going to seminars and discussing educational issues that would lead to sound educational decisions.

When I stopped daydreaming I suddenly realized that it was time to start the agenda.

I had been reluctant to discuss the budget, and the reassignment of an incompetent principal with the old board. No more was I to have that sinking feeling when I'd bring up these two items.

My friend would defend me vigorously, not only to the board but in the community as well.

I decided to tackle the budget first.

As customary, I had sent the items to be discussed to the board members a week in advance. This gave them plenty of time to study them.

After giving the board time to take another look at the budget I decided to take on questions.

One of the experienced board members, in length of service, posed the first question: "What happened to the fund balance we had four years ago?" He fully expected a full budget lesson in three minutes.

I was making a feeble attempt to try to pull figures together for a four year period when my friend the chairman, or so I thought, threw in another question.

He said, "I would like to have an explanation of why we budgeted money to fill in the potholes in front of the Maintenance Shop. What are the potholes doing there in the first place? I thought that was the highway department's job. After all, Mr. Superintendent, we must be careful with the taxpayer's money. I don't intend to be a party to wasting the taxpayers money. There are a lot of things we need to cut out of the budget. Are you sure you have spent adequate time on it?"

Just as you are getting over the shock of seeing a total stranger who looks just like your friend, he hits you with another broadside statement: "I think we need an executive session to talk about the performance of the superintendent".

Since the board always splits with a 3-2 vote, even a motion to adjourn, this suggestion also lost on a 3-2 vote.

Even though I was in total disarray, I was foolish enough to think I was going to make progress with the incompetent principal issue. Oh how I had done my homework! I had caught the principal playing golf several mornings at 10 o'clock when he was supposed to be attending a meeting.

To find him asleep at his desk was commonplace.

He never made any major decisions.

The janitor took care of that.

The teachers arrived at school late and left early.

The board constantly had hearings involving his school.

Most of these hearings centered around the issue of whose responsibility it was when a child got hurt while the teacher was out of the classroom. I had documented proof that the teachers spent half of their time in the teacher's lounge because they knew the prin-

cipal was either off the school grounds or asleep in his office.

I knew that with all this documentation, I couldn't lose in requesting a transfer. I had long ago given up on firing him because if you mention a lawsuit the board would panic.

I made my recommendation with all the confidence of a condemned murderer going to the gallows with the hopes of a last minute reprieve. There was stunned silence from the board when they had heard my recommendation. Anyone listening would have thought I had announced that a time bomb would explode in 10 seconds. After all, they had had a copy of my recommendation for a week. Apparently that was not long enough.

My lukewarm friend, and chairman of the board, was the first one to speak. He had proven by his knowledge of the budget that he was indeed a man of wisdom and that personal interests, likes, and dislikes did not enter into his decisions.

When he cast forth his pearl of wisdom and long thought out phrase about what to do concerning my recommendation, I felt plumb ashamed because I had judged him wrongly. I only thought he was a first class jack-ass, now I knew it.

Isn't he the chairman of the board of deacons at the Baptist Church?

Are you crazy?

Do you expect this board to transfer the chairman of the board of deacons?

We are here to serve all the children, not just a few.

Yes, there has to be a better way.



US not slipping, but still number 1

by John Sledge

It is disturbing when people question if the United States is slipping in vital area, as the editors of a national news magazine did recently in an article headlined, "Is The U.S. Really No. 2?"

While that question dealt with U.S. military strength as compared to the Soviet Union, other critics suggest that our political and legal systems are unworkable, that our corporations habitually place profits ahead of people, that only the rich can afford health care, that our industries are outmoded—with non-existent quality control reflected in a continuously declining U.S. productivity.

It is time to call a halt to this foolish denial of American greatness.

We are not saying we should be happy to live with American inflation, unemployment or other problems. What we are saying is that our political system has produced a national stability second to none.

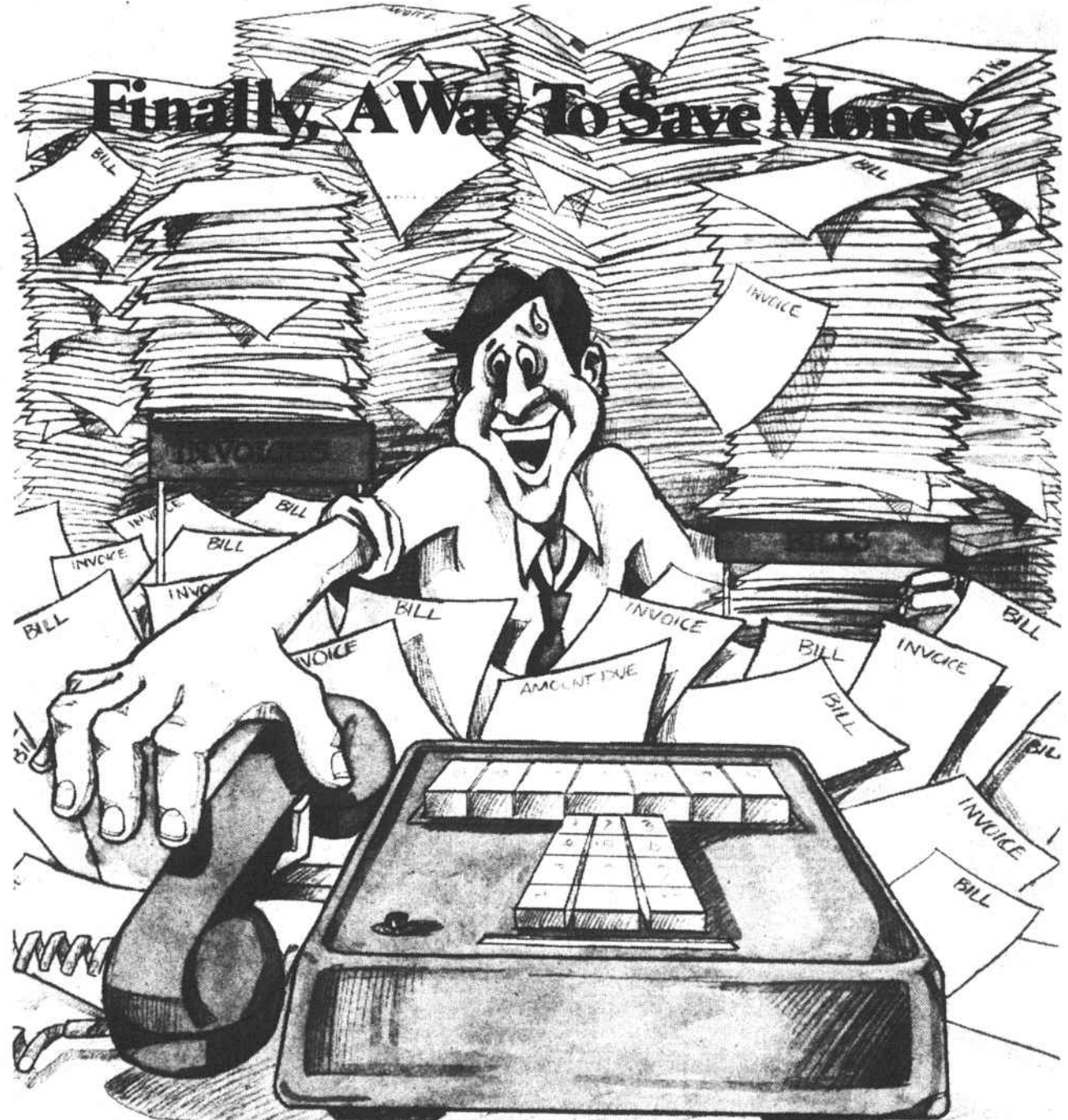
Perhaps a letter-to-the-editor by a Soviet immigrant provides the perspective we need.

He wrote: "If Americans knew what it is like to search for a piece of meat and never find it; how it is not to be able to buy a refrigerator

unless you stay on a waiting list for ten years; what it is like, by mandatory registration, to be committed forever to living in one place; how easily people are put in jail for complaining about it; what it is like to live in constant fear and to struggle for survival every day in a country where courts are designed to protect the government and justice is formulated in one simple concept of guilty unless you can prove otherwise ...

"If they knew all this ... they would whisper, as I do: 'God bless this land and its people.'"

We ARE number one. Never forget it.



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Arts Festival Scheduled For Laurinburg April 17

The 13th Annual Arts in the Park Festival is scheduled for Sunday, April 17 from 2 p.m. until 5 p.m. in Laurinburg's Hammond Park.

The Festival will feature crafts exhibits and demonstrations as well as crafts for sale; a juried art show; children's art show as well as a puppet show and musical entertainment.

Applications are now available for craftspersons who would like to exhibit at the Festival. You may secure them from Scotland County Parks & Recreation in Laurinburg, the Scotland Arts Council or Arts Works in the Scotland Square Mini-Mall.

There is no entry fee. Exhibitors who sell will be charged a \$10 fee. Ample shady space will be available.

For further information and to obtain an entry form, contact Scotland County Parks & Recreation Commission, P.O. Box 1668, Laurinburg, N.C. 28352. Telephone (919) 276-0412.

The Arts in the Park Festival is co sponsored by Parks & Recreation and the Scotland Arts Council with partial funding through a Grassroots Grant from the N.C. Arts Council, a state agency.

NEW SUBSCRIPTION RATES (Effective Immediately)	
1 YEAR:	
In County	\$10.00*
Outside County	\$12.00*
Sr. Citizens (In County Only)	\$ 8.00*
(*plus N.C. State Tax for N.C. Subscriptions)	