

# Editorials

## Commission smoke screen was cheap political shot

Efforts by members of the Hoke County Commission to shift the political heat by publicly questioning how the Department of Social Services became a test agency for the food stamp early reporting program were poorly timed and showed an insensitivity to the issues.

Before a packed house last week, Commissioner Wyatt Upchurch accosted DSS Director Ken Witherspoon for not informing the commission that Hoke County had "volunteered" for the program. Upchurch also noted that the food stamp situation had "embarrassed" the county and caused chaos among county residents.

As a result of the federally mandated early reporting, which will be required in all North Carolina DSS agencies in October, 30% of Hoke County's food stamp recipients are mired in bureaucratic paperwork and could lose their benefits.

It is hard to understand why members of the commission chose last week's public hearing to air their ignorance of the history of the local program, especially when:

Members of the Hoke County DSS Board were told that the state had asked the local agency to participate in the program as a test county in September. County Commissioner Neil McPhatter serves on the DSS board and attended the meeting. Part of McPhat-

ter's duties on the board are to report matters back to the commission.

DSS began implementing early reporting on a volunteer basis in November and continued until February when the program began in earnest.

Minutes reflect that early reporting was explained in detail to DSS board members in February and again in March.

In late May and early June, DSS staff members met at least twice with the commission in public, but sparsely attended, budget sessions to explain why additional staff members were needed to handle early reporting workloads.

In a regular meeting held on May 3, the commission passed a resolution which asked the federal and state governments to decrease the paperwork associated with early reporting. During that meeting, Commission Chairman John Balfour suggested that commission members write to officials in Washington for help.

Stories about the woes of early reporting in Hoke and Pitt counties appeared in this and other newspapers and on statewide television in early March.

It seems that if commission members were concerned about the history of the early reporting program and not politics, that the time to broach the subject would have been in March, not late June when the question was moot.

There is little question that the Hoke DSS could have refused the state's invitation to participate in the program, but because of

federal laws, the county would have had to require early reporting eventually.

At the time the decision was made to become a pilot county, early reporting was billed by state and federal officials as a way of improving the food stamp information system.

Not until Hoke and Pitt counties got involved in North Carolina, did the flaws in the program begin to be discovered.

It is also true that Hoke DSS officials complained loudly. However, those complaints have apparently reached Raleigh and Washington, and may have done much to correct a poorly conceived program.

Legislation, which is now pending before Congress to modify early reporting, perhaps would not have been introduced had it not been for complaints from Hoke and other pilot counties across the country.

To say that Hoke County has been embarrassed by the food stamp program's faults is inaccurate.

A more correct statement would be that Hoke County's participation and vocal objections may have embarrassed the Reagan Administration, who authored the early reporting bill, and the members of Congress, who voted for it.

Little was served by the commission's tactics used last week, and nothing was done to help the 1,400 county residents who are still waiting to receive their food stamp benefits.

## CLIFF BLUE... People & Issues

**LIGHTNING...** This year, 1983, lightning has struck more people than in any year that I can remember.

Also, drowning appears to have taken the lives of more people than ever before.

**ALCOHOL...** With the passage of Governor Hunt's upping the age for youth drinking, deaths by drinking in car wrecks should be down for the coming year.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration estimates that there will be some 2 million motor vehicle accidents this year attributable in part to alcohol usage. In the nation about 24,000 to 27,000 people will be killed -- and 700,000 injured -- in these alcohol related accidents.

With this in mind we can well understand and appreciate Governor Hunt's crusade against youths driving while drinking.

**NO-FAULT DIVORCE?** It used to be that people wanting to get a quick divorce would to Reno, Nevada, spend a short time and be granted a divorce.

Let's not make it easier in North Carolina to get a divorce. It's easy enough now, and many marriages might be saved if they had to wait a few months longer.

Marriage is supposed to be a sacred thing. Let's go slow with divorce!

**WOMEN IN STATE JOBS...** Women are making notable political gains in the states where they live.

In the past decade, the number of women holding top statewide offices governor, lieutenant governor, secretary of state and treasurer, has increased 75 percent.

There are 28 women now holding such statewide jobs, compared to 16 in 1973.

The number of women in state legislatures has more than doubled since 1973. More than half (918) of the approximately 1,666 women who ran for state legislature in 1982 were elected and took office this year, according to nationwide statistics.

**POPE JOHN PAUL IN POLAND...** Pope John Paul II, acting pretty-much as a statesman, defying the Polish government's mounting criticism of his speeches, spoke of the union by name for the first time by delivering his most direct support yet for the banned Solidarity union.

The Communist Party newspaper, *Trybuna Ludu*, indirectly attacked the Pope by criticizing those who want to "reverse the course of history."

We like the Pope's courage and independence.

**BOATING...** Drowning is the chief cause of boating deaths, and studies show that 75 percent of drowning victims were not wearing life vests. Modern life vests are light and comfortable, and the North Carolina Medical Society urges you to wear one when you're on a boat.

Here is some good advice by the N.C. Medical Society:

--Keep your speed down...you'll save fuel and you will have better control of your boat.

--Invest in a two-way radio...your ability to call for help could be a life saver.

--File a float plan with friends before leaving shore. Float plans record the name and description of your boat, your destination, and your estimated time of return.



## Letters To The Editor

### Help sought

To The Editor:

It's been a while since I've bombarded *The News-Journal* with my letters of pleas on behalf of handicapped children.

I gave everyone a break, but here I am again fighting desperately, not only for my husband and myself, but for thousands of farmers who are financially unable to pay back operating loans they got through the Farmers Home Administration.

The sad result is that FmHA, is foreclosing on hundreds of farmers' equipment, land and even their homes.

Many of you are aware of this happening in the mid-west, but how many of you realize that it's happening more and more in the eastern regions.

There are several cases in our area where FmHA has foreclosed on, not only land, but farmer's homes.

I'm sure many residents of Hoke County are aware that my husband, Bill, who owned a growing business (a greenhouse operation)

has no longer been able to maintain his business.

Consequently Farmers Home Administration has begun foreclosure.

This week his business vehicles were taken to be sold. Next will be the 12 acres of which the greenhouses stand. What hurts me so much is that Farmers Home Administration loaned my husband an astronomical amount of money on 12 acres of land as security. He even questioned this to them, but was told that was all the collateral he needed.

About two years later, Bill's grandmother died, leaving him her house and approximately 200 acres of land. When my husband received his loans, all he had was 12 acres. He had no idea he would end up with a house and more land.

After the sale of the 12 acres, Farmers Home Administration will probably begin foreclosure on our land and our home.

What would they do if my husband had not received farm land and a house?

My purpose in writing this letter is to ask, plea and beg for your help. The Rural Advancement Fund, which provides training, moral support and information about farm borrowers' rights, are trying very hard to get people involved in saving farmers land and homes.

I would like to get a group started in Hoke County.

The Rural Advancement Fund will come to Hoke County and provide much needed training. We need to make some changes, but a few people can't do it.

Please call me at 875-2055 if you're having loan problems, know someone who is, or if you just care.

When I watched a program on a local T.V. station called "Our Daily Bread" a few weeks ago, and saw a farmer standing in front of his house with tears streaming down his cheeks as his farm machinery was being auctioned off, I cried and then decided to fight back.

There will be petitions distributed throughout Hoke (See LETTERS, page 3B)

## For \$100 per day, there's no frills

By Warren Johnston  
The hotel's brochure said something about how the "grand old lady of the mountains" promised golf, tennis, swimming and attention to every wanting need.

After a few scorching weeks in the Sandhills, nothing seemed more appealing than three days, lounging around the pool, sleeping under blankets in the cool mountain air and dining on sumptuous delights provided by the hotel's highly touted dining room.

"We won't even have to leave the building," I said to my wife, who was a little dubious about our ability to pay the "top of the line" rates charged by the grand ole lady.

"It'll be great. All we'll have to do is relax," I cajoled, assuring her that we could tap the vacation savings account for the three-day jaunt.

With a sense of eager anticipation, we phoned for reservations. Little thought was given the desk clerk's request for a credit card number.

"Just a precaution to make sure you show up," he said in a chipper voice.

"And sir, a coat is preferred in the dining room," he added.

We were set for an elegant weekend. I could see it. There would be fresh cut flowers in the rooms, baskets of fruit and champagne, compliments of the hotel, and as the temperature reached 90° during the drive up, the thought of a cool dip in the pool was more than just appealing.

"Don't get your hopes up. You remember what happened the last time we stayed in one of these fancy hotels," my wife cautioned.

Our last experience in an "opulent" hotel had been on our honeymoon.

That trip had started downhill after the management of the \$140-a-night coastal Georgia inn asked us to move our car from the guests parking lot because the 10-year-old Ford didn't fit in with swankier autos parked there.

As I remember, the bellboys at that hotel had also been a little reluctant to carry the "Samsonite" grocery bags we had packed for suitcases.

On first appearances, this mountain grand hotel appeared to be everything we imagined.

### The Puppy Papers

The desk clerk was friendly. There were no snooty bellboys and the atmosphere seemed relaxed.

"You're in Room 225," the desk clerk said.

With grocery bags tucked under our arms, we entered the elevator, chatting excitedly about our plans for the weekend.

"This hallway's a little dark," I said as we maneuvered around a pothole in the well worn carpet.

As we opened the door to the room, the horrors of the honeymoon came flooding back.

Small would not be an appropriate adjective to describe Room 225. There was barely enough space to walk around the sagging double bed.

Not only were there no flowers or champagne, but the half window had an excellent view of the side of the adjoining wing, and if you craned your neck you could see the hotel's trash dumpsters below.

"Oh, yes sir. We will be glad to allow you to check out. However, we will have to charge a reservation deposit to your credit card," the desk clerk said.

A deal was struck. We were given another room. It was spacious and had a "verandah" overlooking the pool, but still no flowers.

After dumping our grocery bags, we hurried to the balcony to survey the pool and the view.

The pool was empty, no throngs of laughing guests. It had a strange dark green glow, and reminded us of a farm pond covered with algae.

"Oh, the pool is closed temporarily. We've had a little problem with the water, but it should be cleared up any time," the desk clerk said.

At dinner, my wife's \$14.95 "medallions of beef delicately topped with a light wine sauce" turned out to be a hamburger steak swimming in a can of mushroom gravy.

It was difficult to find my sirloin strip amid its impressive collar of fat.

The next day after a breakfast of coagulated eggs and burned toast, we relaxed on our verandah, watched the pool change colors and dreamed about our next vacation.

## The News - Journal

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