

VIEWPOINTS

Hard times call for hard look at spending

Our local government is looking at some hard times. But, the fact is, most of the residents they serve have been looking at even harder times all along.

For instance, in 1999 the median income of a Hoke resident was less than \$13,000 (and that's a whole lot less than our commissioners are compensated for their "service").

A study conducted in late 2000 by the N.C. Justice and Community Development Center and NC Equity showed 45 percent of Hoke's population is below the living income standard.

For years, Hoke County has been considered the poorest county in North Carolina.

And if that is not bad enough, Hoke's unemployment rate almost hit 10 percent earlier this year.

These sobering facts and the faces behind them should be fore-

most in the minds of those who are in the process of preparing the county budget for the upcoming fiscal year. Robeson County has a handout chart listing the organization of government there. At the top of that chart is listed "the citizens of Robeson County."

These "citizens" are the folks who should be remembered as the tax dollars are doled out for services. To take that a step further, perhaps budget planners might borrow from a suggestion made at the newspaper academy sponsored by the N.C. Press Association last week.

At the academy, retired professor Raleigh Mann suggested reporters not write their articles for all the readers but keep just one individual — a friend, a neighbor, an acquaintance — in mind.

Perhaps those creating and de-

liberating on Hoke's budget might keep just one individual in mind. It might be a single mother juggling the rearing of children with a job. It can be an elderly resident on a fixed income; or just an average family — both parents working — with two or three children and college looming in the future. It can be a head of household who has lost his or her job and is on unemployment until he or she finds work — if he or she is able to find another job.

What practically any person chosen has in common is he or she makes every penny count. Every penny of the tax dollars they pay should also count.

Government business has been run too long on a careless approach to spending the residents' tax dollars. Let's get back to the basics and, like Robeson County's chart, put the taxpayers — or at least one taxpayer — at the top.



We've lost something dear

Right now, outside the window of my study, I hear the steady, mournful cry of a bluejay. It was annoying. I couldn't concentrate on my study. When I looked outside I saw two bluejays. One was continuously crying, with clockwork precision. The bluejay had its head bowed toward the ground as each cry was punctuated with the partial spreading of its wings.

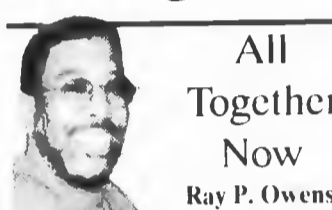
The other bluejay was walking around the same area over and over again, as if looking for something that it lost.

It was no longer annoying to me. Now I understood what going on, and I, too, was melancholy, as if I had lost something dear to me.

You see, these birds had lost their home. And most likely their offspring as well. They made their home under the edge of the roof of our house. When repairs were done, their home was lost (it appeared that their chicks may have been hemmed in). The parent birds flew away when the crewmen began repairing the house, but the chicks were not able to fly. Unknowingly, their nest became their tomb. Sure enough, when I undid the repair work, the chicks were inside, dead.

Could it be that modern technology (television, video games, playstation, virtual reality, etc) and our fears (our child being kidnapped, molested, physically assaulted or even killed) have hemmed in our youth and our homes have become tombs where their imagination, and sense of adventure has died.

I never thought I would see the day when parents would rather their child stay inside and watch television than to go outside and play. But it is happening in many neighborhoods across America. Parents as well as some kids believe that the world has become so violent and uncertain that some things that were considered normal are unheard of now. Such as having your teenage child walk five or six blocks to and from school every day, or allowing your child to investigate or adventure in their immediate neighborhood. Even playing in the neighborhood park or playground is forbidden. It is time for parents to say "enough is enough" and organize. Parents together can make all the difference.



All Together Now
Ray P. Owens

Why should the world hem our kids in and kill their naturally curious and adventurous spirit?

Worth Repeating

"The budget I am presenting takes drastic steps to address a drastic situation. In preparing it, I have followed two mandates: (1.) Your explicit directive to me not to raise the tax rate, and (2.) Your standing order not to invade the fund balance." — Hoke County Manager Mike Wood in his FY 2002-2003 budget message to the board of commissioners.

Making people mad is down to a fine art

Needless to say Harry Truman was one of my favorite presidents. He was known as "Give 'em Hell Harry." When he ran for president in 1948 I campaigned for him. His opponent was Thomas Dewey, it was reported by all the major papers that he would lose. President Harry celebrated by going to bed.

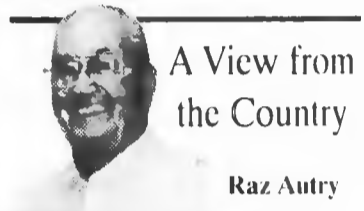
When I received all my favorable publicity, instead of going to bed, I went fishing. A lot of good thoughts can come out of fishing. When I catch a fish and the hook is set deep I always give the fish the name of one of my critics and yank real hard. You would be surprised how this helps to put everything into perspective.

I have decided at my age I will start a new business. I am going to be a consultant to people who want to make folks mad and don't know how. You see, I have a lot of experience at it.

I managed to make my wife mad when we were young. I am sure I have done it many times in 51 years, but those I am not going to write about. She, at one time, bought my pants; Ireni can hold on to a buck with the best of them. Regardless, back in those early days an eight-dollar pair of pants was a good price.

She bought a pair and I took them to New York on a trip with a group of high school seniors. I even ate a 12-ounce steak wearing those pants. However when I returned home, she washed them. The next time I wore the pants, the bottom of them came up to my knees. Naturally I complained. She never bought me another pair of pants.

One can talk so much it will come back to haunt him, I have also been guilty of doing this. It was the same fix my father got into when he told my



A View from the Country
Raz Autry

mother after she made him a pineapple cake that it was "so dry dust came out" of his mouth; she never cooked him another. I should have learned by his lesson.

I will be a good consultant, they can come to me and I will do the job. You see I am a master at it. In fact, not many people can have a radio show and not be a participant. Sometimes my name is mentioned for a two-hour period. I lend my name to the program and don't get paid for it. Now if my name were Izquierdoile, I wouldn't be on the air that long. It is harder to pronounce izquierdaile than it is Autry.

I will share my secret gladly; it really is simple. You can make a lot of people mad if you tell them the truth. The truth is a powerful weapon and will ruffle a lot of feathers, but is the best message I have found. Radio talk hosts usually tell people what they want to hear; this makes good music to their ears. Even our friends will ask us for advice after they have made up their minds on the action they are going to take. They will feel a lot better if you solidify what they have already decided to do. My secret is out. Call me — the door is always open.

We just celebrated Mother's Day. Celebrating Mother's Day should be a weekly event. As you can tell, I am

high on mothers. Sure, we have some mothers who shouldn't have been mothers in the first place, not many, most mothers hang with their children, whether they are right or wrong, the rest of the folks will walk off especially if they think we are wrong. Your mother is the best friend you will ever make throughout your lifetime. In fact, I thought so highly of Mother's Day that I put on a white coat and a white pair of pants.

One lady in church said, "Raz, you look like a dressed-up gangster." Another said I looked like a preacher from a way-out church.

We had a good service on Mother's Day. A large crowd was in attendance, which makes our preacher smile. I told some of my fellow back row pew sitters that the Baptists would surely beat everyone in the Methodist church to the restaurant, because Reverend Rich enjoys preaching to the masses and besides they had to play one of the six-verse songs through once so the congregation would know what they were singing.

I decided to tell my preacher that I had to leave early because Ireni and I were going out of town to celebrate Mother's Day. It didn't seem to upset him, because I am sure even though he didn't mention it, he was thinking 'you leave early every Sunday before the last song is sung.' True statement. Once again, you don't have to apologize for the truth.

Most of us in the congregation are a lot like the keynote speaker at a convention of priests who came to speak. He shuffled his notes, scanned his audience, and said thoughtfully, "Where to begin? Where to begin?"

A voice in the crowd yelled, "As close to the end as possible."

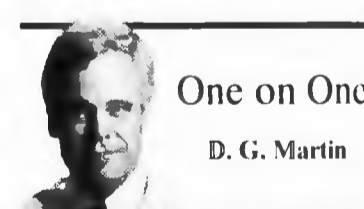
Will Memorial day be different this year?

What does the holiday on the last Monday in May mean to you?

- A trip to the beach?
- The car races?
- A family picnic?
- An extra day off?
- A lot of good prices at special Memorial Day sales?
- Great.
- But why?

Is this all there is to Memorial Day for us — even after September 11 of last year and the events that followed it?

Originally, there was a day for laying wreaths on the graves of the fallen on both sides of the Civil War. During that war, some southern women began to dedicate soldiers'



One on One
D. G. Martin

graves each May 30th. In 1868, Union General John Logan designated the same day to be used to honor the graves of Union soldiers.

Because it was a time to decorate the graves of Civil War veterans, this day of honor was first called Decoration Day.

Later, it came to be a time for remembering all those who died in any war.

For a long time, the various states

chose different dates to observe Decoration Day, but it was observed, solemnly, almost everywhere. People remembered and were grateful.

Now it is called Memorial Day, and it is taken on the Monday closest to the end of May.

What will you be doing this Memorial Day weekend?

Will you be there by a soldier's grave? Or at a memorial service?

Most of us will not.

So, have we forgotten?

In his famous address at Gettysburg battlefield, Abraham Lincoln said of those who fought there, the world can never forget what they did here.

Was Lincoln wrong? Have we forgotten? Have we forgotten those who fought and died for us in Vietnam, Korea, the world wars, in other conflicts, and now in Afghanistan?

Think about it. Think about what they did for you.

Take a minute. Do something.

Display your flag. Attend one of the graveside ceremonies. Or visit the grave of a friend and leave a wreath or flower or flag. Call the family of someone who gave his life and let them know that you care.

Say a prayer.
Lest we forget.

Editor's note: A Memorial Day ceremony will take place at 11 a.m. Monday, May 27 at the Veterans Monument on the Hoke County Courthouse lawn.

Letters to Editor policy

The News-Journal welcomes letters to the Editor and encourages readers to express their opinions.

Letters must be signed and include an address and phone number. The street address and phone number will not be published, but are required so we may verify authenticity. The name of the writer and, in some cases, the town the writer is from will be published at the end of the letter.

We reserve the right to edit letters for grammar, as well as those that exceed 300 words. We will not publish letters that we consider to be in poor taste or slanderous. In some cases we may add an editor's note or a postscript when we believe a correction, explanation or clarification is warranted. We may also, at our discretion, limit the number of times an individual writer may submit a letter for publication.

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