

VIEWPOINTS

Rural counties struggle to survive state's abuse

By Chad Adams

It is well known across North Carolina that the great metropolises of Charlotte, the Triangle, and the Triad are rising in economic and political prominence at an astounding rate. Comprising more than 50 percent of the population, four counties account for half of the entire elected leadership at the state level.

So one has to ask, "How do rural counties vie for equality in such a reality?" More often than not, this question will land on deaf ears. Thus the fiscal situation in rural areas goes from bad to worse with nary a whimper from the Houses in Raleigh.

It's not that "we" (rural residents) don't like "you" (metro folks). Perhaps it is only that the rural communities of the state don't often get to share their views with you, the citizens of the great cities. We know that urban areas are an important part of this state's development. But rural areas must be seen as more than mere retreats from the big cities. That is why we need to begin looking at issues like geographic representation and unfounded mandates more closely.

I live in Sanford, the heart of Lee County, the heart of North Carolina, on a family farm that has been in the family for five generations. We are unique in that Lee County has many of the benefits of a metropolitan area because of its proximity to Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill and the Research Triangle Park. However, Lee County has many rural characteristics as well. Sanford itself isn't Mayberry with our 25,000 city and 50,000 county residents, but much of the county is still working farms or underdeveloped land. Juxtapose

this against our significant manufacturing base and you can begin to see our economic diversity.

While rural may mean "backward" to those in big cities, I prefer the word "dynamic." I have been fortunate to work in wireless technology and as a financial advisor, so I understand 21st century progress. Yet as a county commissioner I know that critical needs and burdens faced by rural communities in education and health care often leave areas like ours behind.

We need look only at Medicaid to see quickly but one example of the encumbrance of mandates upon the rural counties. North Carolina is one of two states (New York being the other) that require local matching of Medicaid at the county level. Thus a federal and state program becomes a line (or several lines) on a local budget. In large urban areas like Wake County that budgetary lien is about 9 percent of an annual budget. In Robeson County that line exceeds 30 percent of a local budget.

It doesn't take an MBA to figure out why schools and other services might be better, per capita, in areas like Wake. In Columbus County there are more folks on Medicaid than working. Imagine how much more effective county like Robeson County or Columbus could be if it had that extra 21 percent in its budget? Having balanced four budgets in my home county, where Medicaid eats up 14 percent of our budget, I can assure you that community colleges and schools would benefit and tax rates would likely decline.

But there seems to be no end in

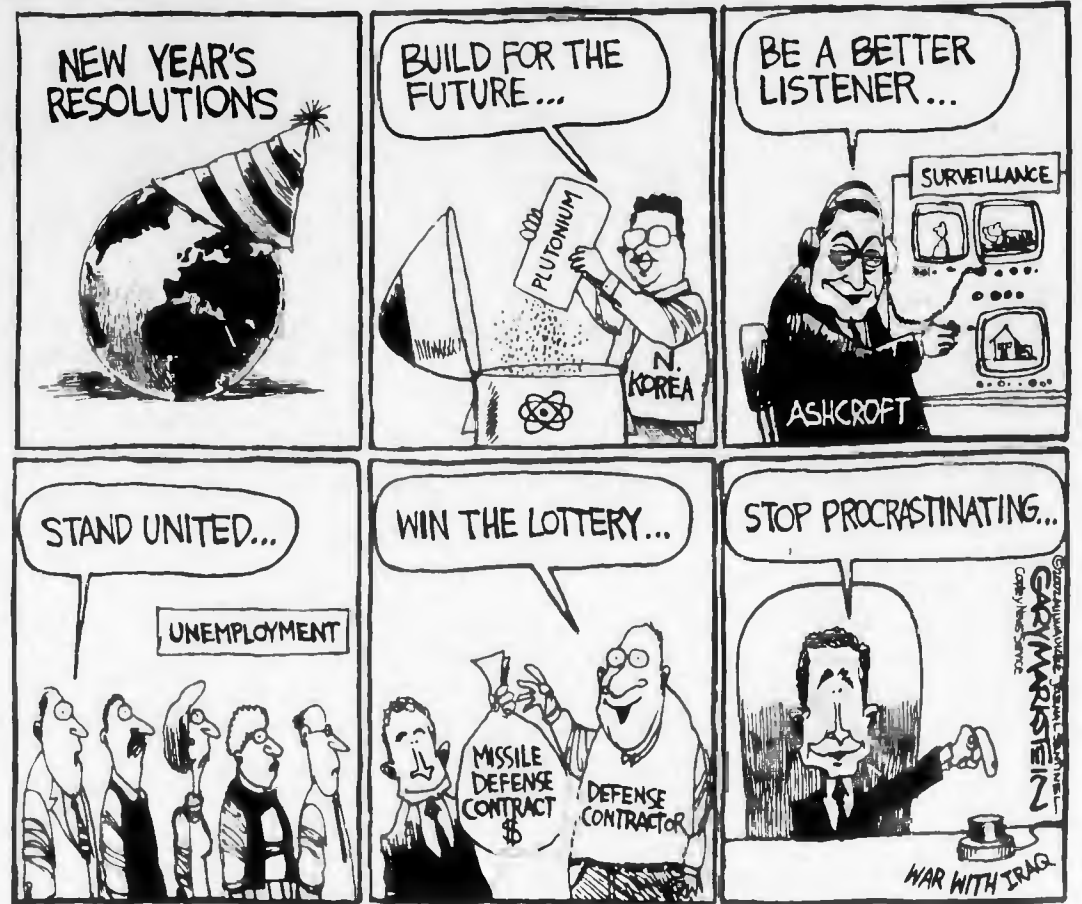
sight as the mandates from the state continue to erode rural areas' ability to deal with their respective budgets. State officials' "stealing" of the reimbursements was but the latest attack on all counties, but particularly damaging to rural areas. The mismanaged state budget severely affects the ability of rural communities to fund law enforcement or other public-safety and security records, or even to build new schools. Parity in education, law enforcement, and social services is dwindling at an alarming rate. So, while the budget crisis at the state level angers large North Carolina cities, it not only erodes but also undermines the solvency of many rural communities.

Strangely to some, I don't believe the solution is to demand more of the urban areas. I believe the first step in uniting North Carolina is to appreciate the fierce independence of our people.

For that reason, it is important not to simply explain a point of view on the rural life of our state, but to demonstrate why it is critical to give local communities the ability and means to determine their own destiny, while sharing only the most critical state-wide burdens.

It is important that we make a renewed effort to bridge the divides of the mountains and Down East, of urban and rural, and of "Metropolis" and "Mayberry." We are not one North Carolina, and dialogue is the first step to understanding why these discrepancies exist and now we solve them so we can all benefit in the new century.

Chad Adams is a Lee County commissioner and a fellow of the North Carolina Institute of Political Leadership.



We Get Letters Lott's political strategy

To The Editor:

Your December 18, 2002 political cartoon accurately indicated that anything Trent Lott says in the future will be scrutinized by Democrats and spun, if possible, into an inflammatory racist statement to the further embarrassment of an injured Republican party. Even to the extreme of dreaming of a beautiful blanket of snow at Christmas as excluding blacks from the holiday celebration. You made a good point, because it is just about as absurd as the Democrat's interpretation of the statement Lott made which started this political dilemma in the first place.

Democrats and a number of Republicans have assumed that Trent Lott put his foot in his mouth at Strom Thurmond's 100th birthday party. Not true! Lott's statement was by no means a "slip of the tongue" or a "poor choice of words." Lott's statement was planned and deliberate — a well-worded masterpiece spoken by a political genius! And his numerous apologies will not erase the affect it achieved, in spite of his apologies.

You see, Republicans run against Democrats in elections, but they run against Republicans in primaries. Do you really believe a white Republican candidate who does not still endorse "Dixiecrat" segregation can win against one who does in Mississippi? If there are any, can a black Republican even get on the ticket on Mississippi?

Even though the state of Mississippi has the largest black population it is less than 40 percent of the total population. Trent Lott was not elected by the voters of our nation. If he is elected again, it will be by the white voters of Mississippi. And he just sent many of them not only the message they want to hear, but a message that will bring politically apathetic racists "out of the woodwork" to register and vote for their new hero!

Yes, President Bush criticized Lott's choice of words, but did he ask Lott to give up the position of Senate majority leader? Will the Republican party ask Lott to resign, knowing Mississippi's governor could appoint a Democrat to fill the vacancy, and upset the Republican majority in Congress? What we are witnessing is political strategy at its finest! The Republican Party cannot afford to do more than disagree with the words that will insure Trent Lott's reelection. (See CURRIE, page 3A)

Ready for justice

To The Editor:

Each week I look forward to receiving the current edition of The News-Journal hoping to see that some action is being made to recover the moneys allegedly embezzled from the county by a former employee or employees.

It seems to me that ample time for investigation has passed, and that an attempt to recover this money should be made and the guilty persons or persons prosecuted. I am wondering if this alleged misdeed will be covered up like the pyramid scheme.

As a property owner in Hoke County I feel that some attempt to recover alleged embezzled moneys should be made and the guilty person or persons should be punished.

If this grave misdeed is overlooked, others will surely follow and confidence in Hoke County government will further erode.

Sincerely,
Raymond M. Worrell

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 as a postscript when we believe a correction, explanation or amplification 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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A matter of checking the tongue or into a home

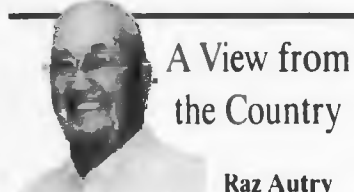
Dr. Jack Britt, the former superintendent of Cumberland County Schools, didn't stay retired long; he now hangs out at Campbell University, where he holds the position of the number two man.

Jack and I attended East Carolina back in the dark days. We also were on the same football team. He was a freshman and I a senior, therefore he uses this age difference to his advantage; it gives him the opportunity to tell everyone we meet that I am his father.

I could be if he is as young as he tells, but I know better. Besides, I tell him that if I was his father he would be a better man than he is.

Like all men, Jack married above himself. His lovely wife, Jane, keeps him straight and I must admit this friendship is one I greatly cherish. Nevertheless, Ireni and I were invited to be his guests at the East Carolina-Campbell basketball game — which incidentally the Pirates won.

It hasn't been a joyful time for me since the football season ended. The wheels fired our coach, prompting me to write a letter to the chancellor, in which I expressed my concerns to this gentleman in terms he could understand. After my letter I didn't receive



Raz Autry

A View from the Country

a Christmas card from him and I am sure I am not on his Christmas list. Regardless, Ireni and I enjoyed the time spent with our friends, although I didn't start the evening right. I spotted David Webb, who was a former student of mine working at a concession stand. A young lady was helping him and I remarked, "David, you and your wife make a great pair." "David said, "Thank you, but she is not my wife, she is Marty's." When she turned around, I realized I had the wrong woman." I knew Linda well. Just goes to show you when you talk too much, the results can be embarrassing.

Things didn't improve a lot after the ball game. We went to one of our favorite restaurants. When the waitress arrived, Jack said, "I would appreciate you getting our food as quickly as possible, I have to get my dad back to the home by 9 o'clock. I just checked him out for an hour."

Sadly, she believed him. Just to show you I was in full form, as I passed the paying booth a pretty young woman was in charge. I asked, "What are you dreaming about, your boyfriend?"

She smiled and said, "No, I am dreaming about my husband."

Not knowing when to move on, I replied, "How old are you?" "Eighteen," "My, you are not old enough to have a husband."

Which naturally she didn't agree. During our meal the lady in charge of the restaurant came by — she is a good friend. I remarked to her, "I asked the young lady outside if she was dreaming about her boyfriend. She reminded me that she was dreaming about her husband, which I said, you aren't old enough to have a husband."

The good friend (I hope she still is) said to me, "Wait a minute, that young lady is my daughter-in-law."

There's nothing as pleasant, just before Christmas, like putting your foot down your throat. I have put mine down there so much that Ireni doesn't say to me anymore, "Why can't you learn to keep your mouth shut?"

Now she just looks as me and shakes her head. Jack may be right in that he did check me out of a home.

Happy New Year.

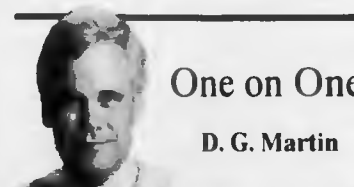
Resolving to celebrate 100th anniversary of flight

One New Year's resolution that every North Carolinian should consider is a visit to the site of the Wright Brothers' first successful flight during the upcoming 100th anniversary year.

"Of course, I'll be there." This is what Chuck Yeager and Neil Armstrong and lots of other aviation heroes are telling Larry Belli, the National Park Service Superintendent of Outer Banks Group that includes Wright Brothers National Memorial.

Belli had oversight responsibility for the celebration a few weeks ago of the 99th anniversary of the Wright Brothers' first successful powered flight at Kill Devil Hills on December 17, 1903. The recent event was a great one — including a flyover of 99 airplanes at the Wright Brothers Memorial, with all kinds of historic planes and modern ones, too.

Next year's celebration is when Yeager, Armstrong and other living heroes of flight all expect to be there. In addition to the legendary aviation heroes, Belli hopes and expects that



D. G. Martin

One on One

former President George Bush will be there, "maybe even flying an aircraft like he did in World War II," and if the old president comes, his son, the current president, will certainly be there too.

"Everybody wants to come," Belli says. "Patty Wagstaff, the great female stunt pilot, is planning to come. And John Travolta has told us he wants to fly his private DC-7 across the monument next year."

Planning next year's event sometimes pushes the Wright Brothers' great achievement into the background.

But Virginia pilot Ken Hyde never forgets them. He has been working for several years to produce a duplicate of the aircraft the Wright Brothers

flew 99 years ago. It has to be ready to fly at next year's celebration.

Belli explained to me why this task is so difficult and complicated. One big problem is that the plane the Wright Brothers flew was a "work in progress." The Wrights were successful because they were constantly testing and modifying their kites, gliders, and their flying machine — making on-the-spot changes and corrections based on their experience.

Also, Belli told me, after the Wrights' successful four flights on December 17, 1903, a wind gust caught the airplane, turned it over, and damaged it so severely that it was virtually destroyed. The brothers packed up their damaged plane, took it back to Ohio, and used it as a source of spare parts for the planes they built later on.

Fortunately, the brothers kept comprehensive records and plans, which Hyde is using. His goal is an "exact duplicate." Certainly, his plane will be much closer to the original than the model on display at the Smithsonian

(See MARTIN, page 3A)