

VIEWPOINTS

Somebody make him put it back

That the chairmen of our county commissioners would take it on himself to remove a plaque from a new school because he didn't think it properly recognized the sitting board, and that no one is doing much about it, defies belief.

Forgetting how tacky it is for a public servant to make such a bold move for public recognition, the seemingly silly incident has serious implications for the two boards that must work together to see that our children are educated.

How is the board of commissioners to deal with a chairman that acts so publicly and improperly without the knowledge or blessing of the board?

How is the school board to handle the matter when it must maintain good relations with commissioners who provide them much of the school system's funding?

The commissioners answered it this way: they've ignored it, at least publicly as a board. They held their regular Sept. 2, and not a word about it was spoken. (And we're left to wonder what else the chairman does on his own without censure.)

The school board did a little better last night when it issued a tame statement in careful-not-to-offend lawyerese that in essence said, "Put the plaque back and we won't take action against you," but then decided to cave in and place two versions of plaques on the building - one as it was, another as Leach wanted it to be - forever holding the school system up to ridicule by all who enter the building.

But nobody seems brave enough to say, "Leach, have you lost your ever-lovin' mind?"

Old timer tells stories

A two-day fishing trip on the Roanoke River was the only vacation I took after peach season. I journeyed to Plymouth, which sits on the Roanoke River, with my two sidekicks, Henry and Lloyd.

We spent two nights at the Holiday Inn Express. This is the same motel where a year ago, a lady of the night tried to get Henry to go for a ride with her. I don't know what kind of ride it was to be, but Henry took off to his room, which wasn't what she was after. Regardless, Lloyd came in and reported to Henry that the same lady was in the parking lot looking for him. Henry disappeared again. If we go a third year and she is still around, I am sure Henry will have aged out by then, which is just as well. Then she will do him like she did with me - just shake her head and walk off.

I have been trying to tell Henry as he gets older he will find it takes half as long to get tired and twice as long to get rested. The iron in his blood has turned to lead in the seat of his pants. There is an old saying that life begins at 40, which I am long past. Regardless, at 40 life may begin but so does lumbago, bad eyesight, arthritis and the habit of telling the same story three times to the same person.

A 92-year-old man came by to see me last week. He was complaining that I didn't have any peaches and he had driven a long way to get some. I tried to explain

A View from the Country

Raz Autry



that we had a six-and-one-half week peach season, and the time had already passed. I informed him that we did have some ice cream. He replied he didn't like ice cream and wasn't interested in any flavor. I began to feel toward him like I felt toward the lady who I could have sworn came to the orchard on a broom. Since I wanted to be kind to one older than I, I sat down and started a conversation. He grew on me after awhile, and was quite friendly. He could tell a story with the best of people, although I must confess that his approach to people was quite different from mine.

Naturally our conversation turned to politics. Being a southerner I stuck my nose in his business by asking him who he was going to vote for in the presidential race. He replied he didn't like any of them, especially a woman who wanted to be president. Before I could argue with him, he stated that women should stay in the kitchen where they belong. When he told me had been married six times I could understand why. As I said before, he was a great storyteller, some stories I can repeat, and some of them probably caused one or two of his six wives to leave him. He told a story I had heard

many times and perhaps it is a repeat to you. Regardless, here goes.

It seems the man was single and wished to remain so, but his buddies and their wives would not let him alone. They were constantly introducing him to women, and sure enough, one of those became his wife. His objection to marriage, as he told those who wanted to get him married, was most women were naggers, and unfortunately, his chosen wife filled the bill.

One bright morning he was at his mule stable and his wife of a few years came out and started nagging him about something he hadn't done. Evidently his old mule got tired of the nagging and kicked her, killing her. At the funeral people would come by and speak to him. When the ladies came by he would nod his head; when the men came by he would shake it from side to side. The preacher got curious and asked, "Why were you nodding to the women, and shaking your head to the men?"

He said, "Preacher, the women were saying what a fine lady she was and how they were going to miss her, and I nodded my head. The men wanted to know if the mule was for sale, and I shook my head."

I told you it was an old story.

My parting thought: My uncle had the shortest will ever. It read, "Being of sound mind, I spent all my money."

Experience not resumé counts

Last week at the dedication of a new school building, Davidson Mayor John Woods was doing one of those things that small town mayors everywhere are expected to do. He was making a short speech to congratulate the officials of Woodlawn School on their success.

There is more to the connection between Mayor Woods and the school—a poignant story that I will tell you at the end of this column.

Woods' father was a much-loved family doctor in Davidson. Although he has worked hard to earn his own spurs, he would tell you that his family connections have been a big plus.

R. D. McMillan represented the University of North Carolina before the state legislature for many years after a successful career in elective politics.

McMillan was also the son of a beloved small town doctor. Like Woods, he acknowledged that his father's reputation was a big help when he ran for mayor of Red Springs and won.

After celebrating his victory on election night he went back home, tired, happy, and ready for a good night's sleep and a few days to rest up after the campaign.

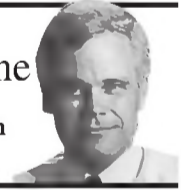
His good night's sleep was interrupted about 2am by a phone call.

"There is a dead cow in the road in front of my house," the caller said.

"I am so sorry," the ever polite and gracious McMillan replied. "But why did you call me about it at this hour?"

One on One

D. G. Martin



"Well," said the caller, "you're the mayor, ain't you? You said you'd take care of us. So when are you going to get the cow out of the road?"

McMillan had not even been sworn in, but some people already expected him to take care of everything immediately.

Small town mayors work on people problems from beginning to end of their times of service - solving problems, adjusting differences of opinion, and working out ways to improve town life within the confines of a limited budget. Often, they are amazing political creatures.

The past few days, American voters have begun to ask, does being a small town mayor prepare someone to be a president of our country?

Probably not, I would say. But, neither does being a U.S. Senator, an effective community organizer, a brave member of the armed forces, or the governor of a state. All these are good experiences, but they are not, by themselves, sufficient to prepare a person to be our president.

On the other hand, I bet there are hundreds, maybe thousands, of small town mayors who would make good presidents. They would make good presidents. They would make good presidents for the same reasons they are good mayors: hard working,

sensitive to the conflicting aspirations of their constituents, and patient and persistent in working to meet their goals; they have good judgment, a sense of humor, a keen and practical intellect, good character, and a feet-on-the-ground stability.

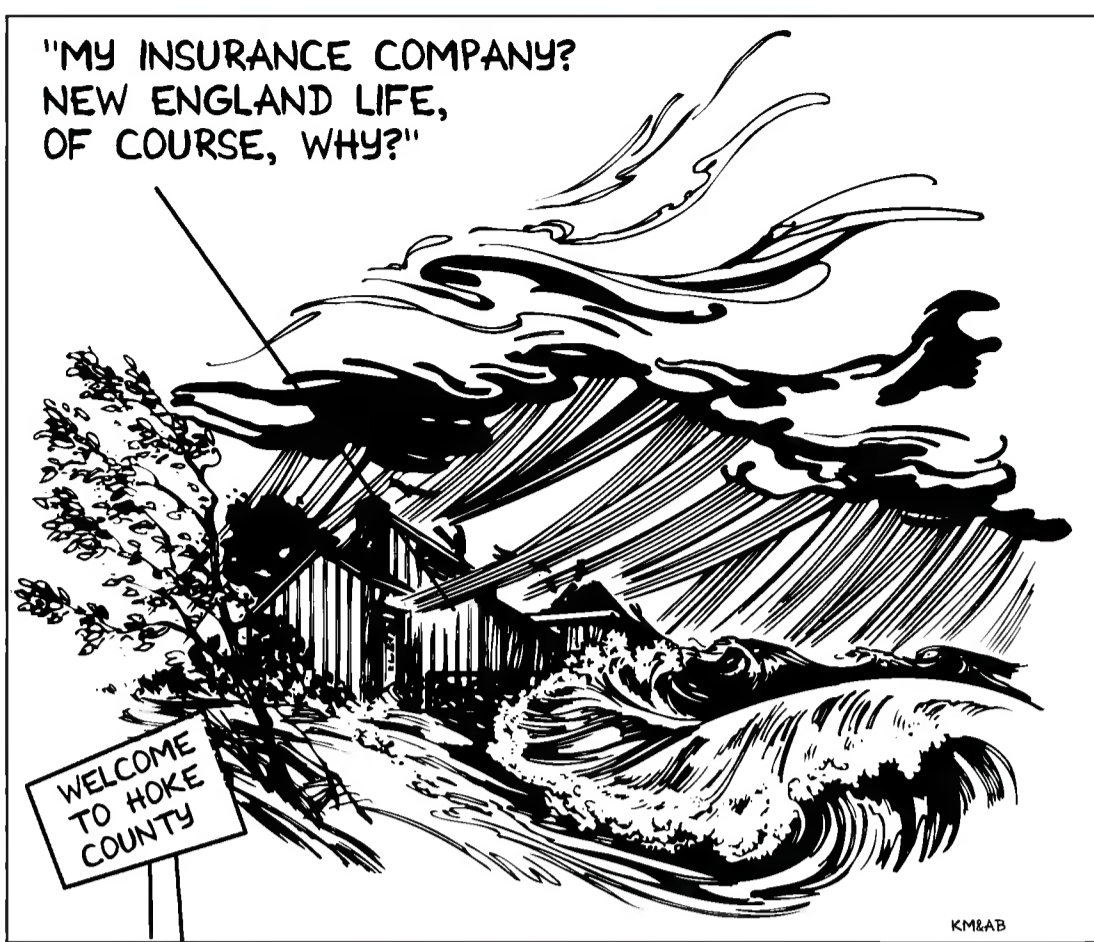
There are governors, senators, representatives, governors, former members of the armed services, and many other Americans who have these qualities, too. Most of them would make pretty good presidents.

Of course, experience on the firing line in government or other places where these qualities are tested can provide some good training for a potential president. More important, how the candidates handled these challenges can give voters an idea about which of these important qualities the potential presidents have.

So during the next few weeks before the election, we should be looking not so much at the candidates' resumes as what those experiences show about their presidential qualities, or the lack of them.

Back to Davidson Mayor John Woods. The building being dedicated at Woodlawn School is named for Woods' brother (and my childhood friend) Jimmy. Officially, Jimmy was Major James B. Woods. His career as an army officer was tragically cut short when he was killed in Vietnam.

Mayor Woods, by the way, would make a great president someday, as would Major Woods, had he lived.



We Get Letters

Plaque removal was vandalism

To the Editor: I'm writing this letter in response to the article in the paper concerning "Leach doesn't like \$822 plaque, has it removed."

In my opinion this should be viewed as vandalism.

Why does Mr. Leach think that he has the right to enter a government-owned building and do damage in this manner?

I feel that this matter should be investigated by the Hoke Co. Sheriff's Department. If Mr. Leach is allowed to act in this manner then others in our community will feel that they can do the same. Thank you for allowing me to write this letter.

Sincerely,
Lou Anne Banks

Leach isn't above the law

To the Editor: Hello to all. I hope you take the time to read this and please keep me informed as to what is going on. I am a lifelong Hoke County resident,

but with my ties to the military they keep me on the road at times.

I'm currently working at Fort Dix, N.J. training young men and women to go off and serve their country. I was home during the Labor Day weekend, and I picked up a back issue of the News-Journal, and I was shocked and stunned at what I read.

So now county commissioners are above the law - they can go on school property and commit crimes? (because that is what James Leach did when he went onto that school ground without the school's permission and removed property and damaged property). If that had been one of the students they would have gone straight to jail.

Mr. Leach has gone too far, and the people of Hoke County should be outraged.

There should be charges brought on Mr. Leach for his action. How can you be a leader when you are going around committing crimes? And don't think for one minute that the young people of Hoke County are not watching.

The law is for everyone and no one is above the law, not even a county commissioner.

Letters 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 are not able to publish letters that are essentially thank-you cards.

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 libelous. 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.

But when is it a conflict of interest?

BY SCOTT MOONEYHAM
Capitol Press Association

Laws designed to prevent ethical lapses by elected and appointed officials require that distinctions be made between actions benefiting classes of individuals and those benefiting only individuals.

So, when a legislator who happens to be a marina owner pushes legislation regarding boat towing, is that a conflict of interest? That's what happened when Sen. Clark Jenkins, an Edgecombe County Democrat, supported revised boat towing rules eventually vetoed by Gov. Mike Easley and then put into law when legislators overrode the governor's veto.

Jenkins, though, represents a class of individuals - marina owners. Passage of the bill benefited him no more or no less than any other marina owner in the state. He had no conflict of interest.

Still, full disclosure regarding a public official's background and involvement in the policy issues that they decide is never bad for the public or the public official. It allows the public to understand that person's perspective.

Those perspectives can be a benefit in crafting policy. When state Rep. Danny McComas, a Wilmington Republican, talks about issues involving trucking, people listen. He knows the topic as a trucking company owner.

Other legislators also offer that view from the inside. Rep. Walter Church, a Burke County Democrat, is a banker and knows banking. Rep. Nelson Cole, a Rockingham County Democrat, was a car dealer and understands issues surrounding the profession.

Each is part of a class of individuals based on his profession.

The distinctions don't end with a person's profession. After all, any boat owner could enjoy benefits from new boat towing rules. But again, the benefit is no greater or no less than for any other boat owner.

And what about legislation on gas taxes, car inspections or speed limits? Legislators, and most adults, are part of that class of people known as car owners.

So, these classes can be large or small. They're ultimately about how people are defined, professionally or personally.

No one, though, is defined based on owning a specific piece of property. And no legislator should vote on a piece of legislation that specifically benefits that property.

The Charlotte Observer says that's what David Hoyle, a state senator and developer from Gastonia, did when he voted on legislation funding a proposed toll road in Gaston County. Hoyle and two family members own 327 acres, intended for residential and commercial development, near a planned exit along the route.

Hoyle is co-chair of the powerful Senate Finance Committee. Affable and sharp, he's been a driving force on tax policy and key advocate for government openness.

In this instance, he made a mistake. He can claim to be a member of a class, developers. He could even claim a more specific class, Gaston County developer.

But a developer who owns property along a specific road that is specifically mentioned in a piece of legislation is hardly a distinct class of individuals.

Any ethics law worth a hoot should make the distinction.

The News-Journal
 Published every Wednesday by Dickson Press, Inc.
 Robert A. Dickson, President • Anne Dickson Fogleman, Secretary/Treasurer
 119 W. Elwood Avenue, Raeford, NC 28376 • (910) 875-2121

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