

VIEWPOINTS

OMG I was so wrong

BY KEN MACDONALD

Here I was thinking the N.C. General Assembly had precipitously and arrogantly scrapped the Teaching Fellows program—the crown jewel, the shining light, the one thing we do as a state to tell high school students that teaching is an important career. “We want and need good teachers; it’s an honorable career; and we’re going to put our money where our mouths are by recruiting and paying for the best, brightest and most passionate to show it,”

is what I’d been thinking the Teaching Fellows program said before the knife-happy general assembly slashed it. I thought when the legislators announced last year they would phase it out that they were being negligent and partisan.

OMG I was so wrong. House Speaker Thom Tillis cleared it all up last week with this revelation, just after declining yet again to revive the program: “I do think, and it’s in Sen. Berger’s education plan, that we’re...we see the need for

something that facilitates the development of new teachers, and we’re having discussions still as to whether or not there will be some more details and some measures that will pass next week to kinda give some specifics around the uh the kinds of programs that we’re working with superintendents to figure out how we get them a good pipeline of new teachers coming into the schools.”

Phew. Glad that’s all cleared up. You superintendents chill, and kids aim high to be a teacher!

We need more vocational classes

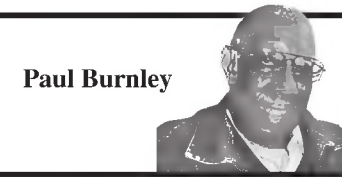
This year’s crop of high school graduates is facing a difficult task when it comes to finding employment in our area. The unemployment rate here is much higher than the national level. There was a time that when you finished high school in this area, you could go to work at a textile plant and feel your future would be secure. Now with these jobs no longer available, these young people have a dim outlook as far as obtaining a job that will support themselves and later a family.

One advantage that has been overlooked by the public as well as the educators is vocational training. I am not aware of what happened in this area years ago, but in cities where I grew up vocational training was taught in high school. For the boys, there were classes in carpentry, electronics, plumbing, etc. For girls, there were classes in cooking, sewing and secretarial occupations such as typing (today it would be computers).

The thing that is preached to our young people today is go to college and get a degree.

The thing that is being overlooked is that the majority of those graduates from this area cannot afford to go to college. Also, there are a number of young people with college degrees that are not able to find a job.

There are some skills that will always be in demand. Living in



Paul Burnley

a rural area, such as Hoke and Robeson counties, can be an advantage, because if you need service and your serviceman has to come from Cumberland or other distant areas, the service call or mileage charged, in some instances, will be more than the repair cost.

If you were able to obtain these services by local servicemen, the cost would be less and revenue would remain in the area. If we are forced to pay outsiders for basic services that could be supplied by our own people, we do not improve the economy of our area. If we had trained people to do repairs for these basic problems in this area, young people would be able to remain in this area after graduation and be able to earn enough to support themselves and a family. This is one of the things our political and civic leaders should be looking into.

I do not know what the cost would be to introduce vocational programs to our schools, but in the long run, I am sure it would pay for itself. Hoke County has grown in the last few years with the expansion of Fort Bragg and the new residents relocating here.

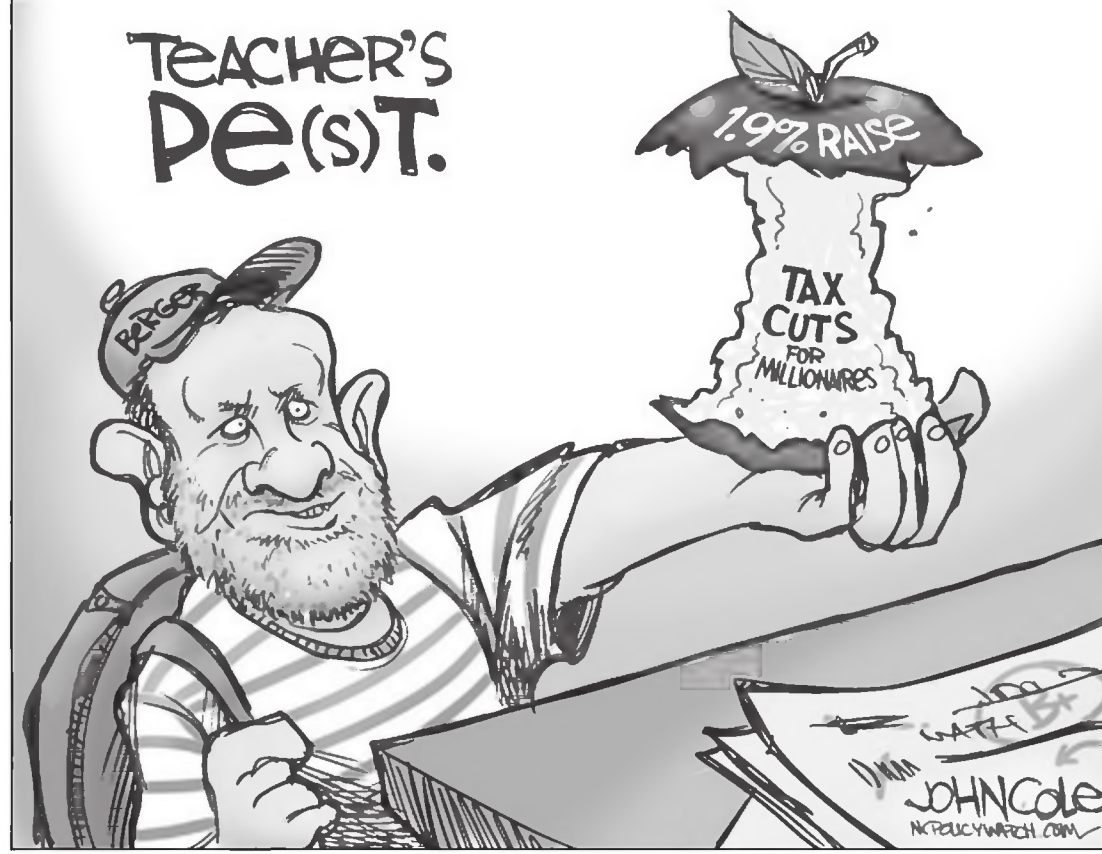
This only points out the advantages of a program that will equip our young people to make a better living and to move forward with other areas that have progressed in the state.

As I have stated in earlier columns, if opportunities and jobs are filled by people other than the residents of Hoke County, the economy of our area isn’t improved. With the county growing, there will be an urgent need for carpenters, plumbers, electricians, and all types of repairmen. These are well paying jobs. Today, these types of jobs pay much more than some “white collar” office jobs. There are cases where some plumbers and carpenters have incomes compared to some doctors.

Programs such as this should be examined by our educational and political leaders.

This could not only be an answer to an economic problem but also a way for our youth to remain and grow to build a future here. Most young people leave this area because they see no future. If an opportunity was offered that would assure them of a decent life and an opportunity to raise a family and prosper, more would remain and work to improve the image of our area.

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More layoffs coming to schools

BY CHRIS FITZSIMON
N.C. Policy Watch

The Republican spin machine has kicked into hyper drive, making all sorts of absurd statements about the final budget agreement between House and Senate leaders, most notably that the budget adds \$251 million in funding for public schools.

That is simply not true, no matter how many times they say it. Public schools in North Carolina will have almost \$200 million less to operate next year than they have this year. That comes to roughly 3,400 teaching positions.

That will be one of the tragic and enduring legacies of this Republican budget, that it forces schools to make another round of layoffs and damaging cuts after last year’s budget slashed more than 3,000 teachers and teacher assistants from the classroom.

After last year’s budget, schools’ superintendents testified before the State Board of Education that they were at the breaking point and couldn’t take another round of cuts without seriously hurting the education of their students.

Legislative leaders may have heard their pleas, but they didn’t listen. Another round of deep cuts is on the way.

The second enduring legacy of this session’s budget is that it ignores several thousand living victims of the state’s forced sterilization program that operated until the 1970s, maiming people the state decided were unfit to have children.

The House passed a plan to give

\$50,000 in compensation to each living survivor of the program, an amount agreed to by members of a bipartisan commission created to his credit by House Speaker Thom Tillis.

It should have been a signal when almost half the Republican members of the House voted against the plan sponsored by their own Speaker. Senate leaders never let things get that far. They simply refused to consider the eugenics compensation and it was left out of the final budget deal.

And it was not a financial decision. The compensation plan from the House would have cost \$11 million in a \$20 billion budget. They could have easily found the money if they had wanted to find it. They chose to ignore the victims, to make them wait even longer.

And maybe most telling of all, the legacy of this budget is who it helped while making more deep cuts to schools and leaving the eugenics victims out in the cold.

It helped millionaires, the state’s richest lawyers and owners of medical practices. That’s who won, some of the wealthiest people in the state who will be receiving a tax cut that was allegedly designed only for small business owners.

Democrats in the Senate gave the Republicans a chance to make sure it went to only small businesses as intended by offering an amendment to cap the tax cut to prevent millionaires from receiving it.

The amendment was buried by a parliamentary maneuver, never even coming up for a vote. Cap-

ping the tax cut could have saved teachers’ jobs and paid for the compensation for the eugenics victims.

It could have avoided or at least reduced some of the other inexplicable choices in the Republican budget, like the decision to abolish the N.C. Teaching Fellows program or end all funding for drug treatment courts.

The list of absurd cuts is long, from tobacco prevention money to leaving thousands of at-risk four-year-olds locked out of pre-k programs.

Lawmakers could have freed up \$4 million in federal funding to make the November election run more smoothly by spending just \$600,000 in state money.

Instead they not only forfeited the federal money, they slashed funding for the State Board of Elections in the biggest election year in the state’s history.

There’s plenty more in the details that defy common sense, like increasing the number of people in state government who are political appointees instead of career public servants from 100 to 1000. On what planet is that a good idea?

But if you are looking for the real story in the 2012-2013 budget passed by this General Assembly, it is this—less for schools, less for kids, a slap in the face for eugenics survivors, and more for millionaires.

Those are the shameful choices this budget makes and how it will be remembered. And no fancy, well-funded spin machine can make that go away.

We Get Letters

Have you a story to share about Raz?

Editor’s note: Raz Autry’s brother Jerry wrote this appeal for stories and shared a few recollections of his brother, our long-time contributor.

Raz was always bigger than life to me. As a youngster, my first recollection of him was in a uniform. On Guadalcanal, he saw some of the worst fighting of WW II. How he became a Marine is quite the story: Raz was actually in the Navy and one day as this ship steamed toward the war in the Pacific, a Marine Captain came on board with a request, we need more Marines. The ship’s commander said, “No problem, everybody whose name begins with ‘A’ step forward.”

My brother’s ability to overcome was more the rule than the exception. An example: As a 185-pound pulling guard on the ECU football team, he was sitting on the bench as a second stringer when his 225-pound teammate came out for a breather and the coach sent Raz in. He was never on the bench again and went on to become captain of the team.

My brother loved East Carolina! In fact, the only disagreement we ever had came over my decision not to go to the college that Raz considered the only Carolina

in North Carolina. Raz became President of the student body and over the years was heavily involved in the growth of East Carolina into the school it is today.

Raz’s commitment to his family was always paramount. Mom became seriously ill when I was twelve and Raz and his young bride, Ireni, took me in. Going to East Carolina was no “day at the beach” for Raz because of many family responsibilities. Our Dad was a tenant farmer and worked the third shift at Erwin Mills and Raz spent every spare moment working on the farm and herding his brothers to school. When my Dad had a serious stroke, it was Raz who was there for all of us.

Raz was always a “take charge” type who was not afraid of change or risk. When he was a coach, winning was important but played second fiddle to character building. Former students have always been around to attest to how my brother rescued them from mediocrity to achieving some of their life’s successes. The stories are endless. Overseas once, I ran into an Army Captain who said, “When I was in school, your brother ran the school like the Marines. In fact, we had to keep our hair short and shirt tucked in. Then we thought he was way too strict but now we ‘get it.’ If it

wasn’t for your brother, I’d still be standing around on the streets instead of having a successful career.”

Raz courted controversy in a way. It was not that he went looking for it but from the moment education became his passion, his concern was with quality, and he never hesitated to confront any system or anybody to bring it about. Raz was always way too honest for his own good. I understand it. We were raised by a Dad who taught us a simple credo: in everything you do, always be honest and try to do the right thing. Over the years, the four brothers have fallen short but not Raz. He never wavered. I often thought that Raz, after retirement, maybe should have considered politics since he had this great love of public service. No way. Raz couldn’t stand to be around today’s national politics where self-interest abounds and what is good for the country can’t be found. He wouldn’t have made it ten minutes.

Raz loved Raeford, his church, Hoke County, among many. His family followed his wishes with a simple graveside service. The brothers would have ignored his wishes. We would have wanted the celebration of his life at the stadium named for him (I was there when it was dedicated) and his church choir; we would have wanted some paratroopers from the 82d Airborne to make a drop.

I have finally come to my point. We want to publish Raz’s last book, which is a memoir of when he was a High School Principal and we think it would be a “kick” to collect Raz stories and include them in the book. At Raz’s services, everybody I talked to had a Raz story. So, this is an appeal to your readers for some Raz stories. Thank you and God bless all of you richly.

Jerry Autry
San Francisco, California

Okay with me to pay some taxes

BY SCOTT MOONEYHAM
Capitol Press Association

Not long ago, I received an email from a reader who apparently wasn’t pleased about having to pay taxes.

He wrote, “Let the people who send their kids to school pay for their schooling and not the public at will.”

Perhaps I’m wrong, but I assume the reader doesn’t have children in the public school system. Maybe he is retired.

If so, he might want to consider that retirees, on average, gain far more in tax benefits than they pay in taxes.

When it comes to Social Security and Medicare, studies have shown that the average retired couple is likely to receive \$200,000 more in benefits than

they paid into the system.

And because some retiree income is exempt from taxation, and retirees generally see their income decline, the amount that they pay into tax coffers declines. Some also receive targeted tax breaks, like homestead property tax exemptions, that can reduce their tax bill.

As we become older, we all become heavier users of a health care system that, in so many ways, is dependent on tax dollars.

Does that mean those in the workforce should stop paying taxes that go to benefit retirees? No, of course not.

The reader ignores that we enjoy a system of government in which tax dollars, by and large, go for purposes that produce widespread, common benefits.

Public education is vital for

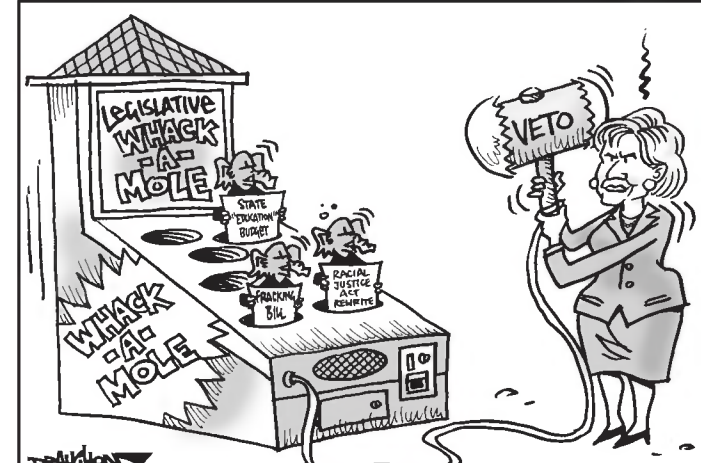
a productive workforce and economic innovation that generates wealth across society. Public roads don’t just get individuals from here to there; they get goods to market. Public parks mean that undeveloped land remains in the public domain, accessible to all.

As Oliver Wendell Holmes wrote, “I like to pay taxes. With them I buy civilization.”

The reader’s email, though, isn’t so different from a lot of political thought these days, that we are all rugged individuals responsible to no one or nothing but ourselves, that we, collectively, do not create government but only answer to it.

It’s a philosophy that, with wider acceptance, will ultimately mean less civilization, more fences, like what you see in Third

(See TAXES, next page)



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