

VIEWPOINTS

We should treat teachers, students better

BY BETSEY RUSSELL

About a month ago, I shared the story of my child's teacher, who has now moved to Ohio to teach because he could not afford to support his family on the \$38,000 annual salary he made in North Carolina with 10 years' experience and a Master's degree. That sparked a response from an Asheville-area lawmaker who argued that the state of Ohio actually spends less on teacher salaries than North Carolina.

In a way, he's right. In Ohio, the state itself provides only about a third of education funding, and local taxes are responsible for the majority of education budgets, which include teacher pay. In North Carolina, about 70% of education funding has always come from the state and about 30% from local taxes.

But no matter how you slice it, teachers in Ohio earn more. National Education Association annual state rankings show that the average teacher salary in Ohio was \$56,715 in 2011-12, 23% higher than North Carolina's \$45,947 average. (And by the way, it takes 16 years of teaching in North Carolina to reach the \$40,000 mark.)

So, should North Carolina try to be more like Ohio and shift the burden of education spending to local governments to boost

teacher pay? No, for three good reasons:

First, fragmenting public school funding creates even larger gaps between "have" and "have not" school districts.

Ohio's salary data for 667 school districts shows a pay range for a starting teacher with minimal qualifications from just above \$25,000 to more than \$43,000. If you live in a wealthy suburban district, you may be able to generate the bulk of school funding through higher local taxes. But if you live in an urban area or rural county with no strong local tax base, you will struggle to attract highly qualified teachers and adequately maintain and supply decent schools. This proved problematic in Ohio, where the state supreme court declared in the 1997 DeRolph v. State case that the uneven funding of education through districts violated Ohio's constitution, which requires a "thorough and efficient system of common schools throughout the state." Now, twelve years later, they're still trying to clean up the funding mess.

Second, despite the variance between districts, one reason Ohio's average teacher pay is so much higher than North Carolina's is because Ohio has strong teacher unions. Whether you like unions or hate them, they help ensure that Ohio educators get paid

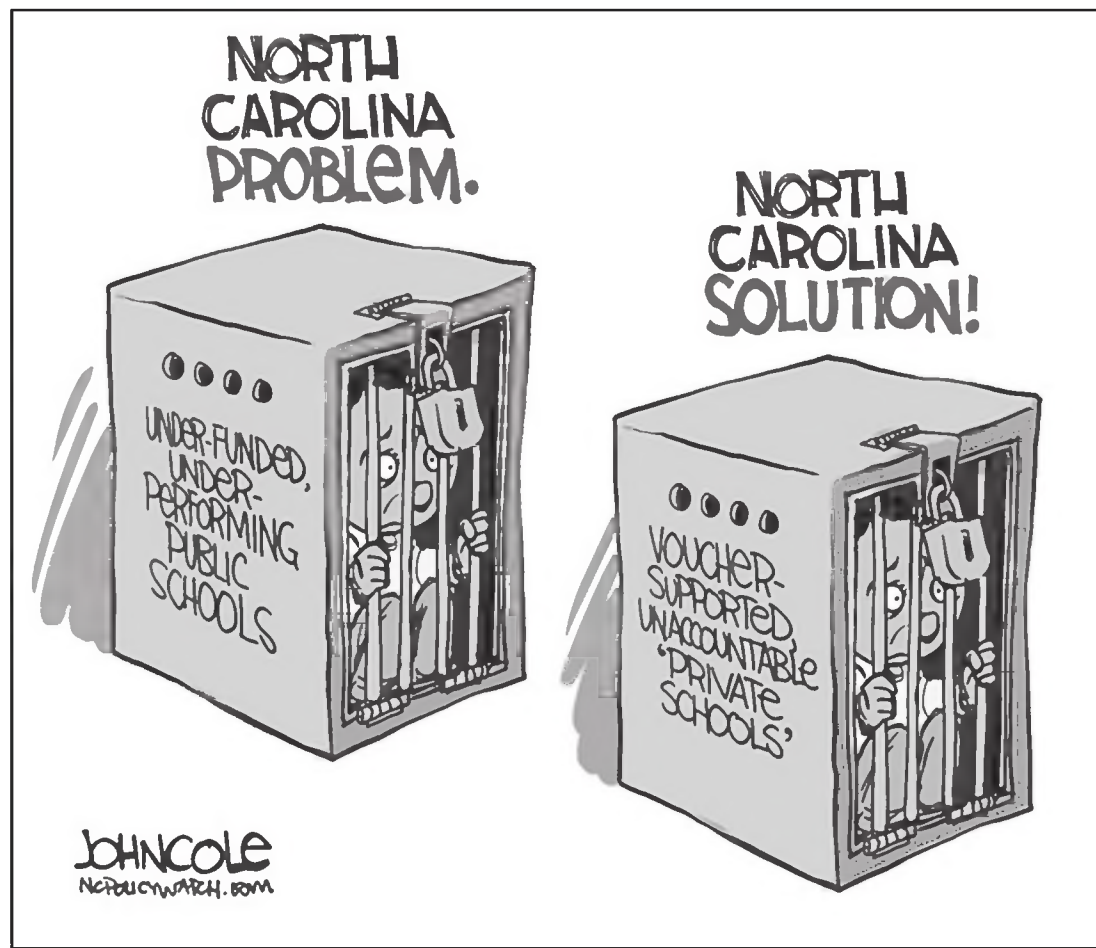
like professionals. In a "right to work" state like North Carolina, that union option doesn't exist.

Third, and most importantly, North Carolina's own constitution fundamentally guarantees a state-level investment in public education. Article 9, Section 2 of our constitution states that "The General Assembly shall provide by taxation and otherwise for a general and uniform system of free public schools, which shall be maintained at least nine months in every year, and wherein equal opportunities shall be provided for all students."

The leaders who drafted the constitution understood the value of strong, well-funded public schools. They recognized that if we want to be competitive and sustainable as a state, then educating our children must be a priority at the state level — and that includes teacher pay. That's not to say that local districts shouldn't supplement salaries — in fact, almost all of them do. But public education is a cornerstone of our shared values in North Carolina, and funding it can't be an "every district for itself" issue.

In the spirit of our constitution, we shouldn't treat our teachers, and our students, like they do in Ohio. We should treat them better.

Betsy Russell is a nonprofit communications consultant who lives in Asheville.



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Here are a few suggestions: Some are saying that Lee Smith's new novel, "Guests on Earth," is her best ever. The setting is Asheville's Highland Hospital leading up to the great fire of 1948 that took the lives of nine patients, including F. Scott Fitzgerald's wife, Zelda. Through her central character, Evalina Toussaint, an orphan from New Orleans, Smith shows the complex mixture of joy and despair, accomplishment and failure, extraordinary talent

One on One

D. G. Martin



and disruption that make up the experience of those affected by mental illness. (Jan. 3, 5, 9)

Elizabeth Spencer, best known for her classic "The Light in the Piazza," published her first book, "Fire in the Morning," in 1948, more than 65 years ago. Her latest book of stories, "Starting Over," shows a spirit that is totally in touch with modern times and the challenges and ironies of those who live in them. (Jan. 10, 12, 16)

When best-selling mystery writer Jeffery Deaver's new book, "The October List," begins, a young woman's child has been kidnapped. For ransom, the kidnapper demands a half million dollars and a copy of a document called the October List. A fast-moving, entertaining, tricky tale follows. But Deaver's most unusual trick

is the timing. "The October List" begins at Chapter 35 and then goes backwards in time to an unexpected conclusion in Chapter One. (Jan. 17, 19, 23)

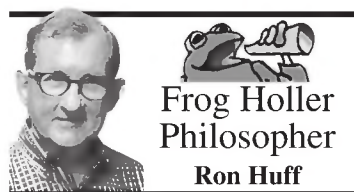
Jason Mott sets his debut novel, "The Returned," in the fictional town of Arcadia in Columbus County near Wilmington, where he grew up and still lives. One reason to read "The Returned" is because it is the basis of an ABC series called "Resurrection," which premieres Sunday, March 9, at 9 p.m. A better reason is Mott's compelling storytelling. In the new book, Harold and Lucille Hargrave's only child drowned on his eighth birthday about 50 years ago. The parents are now in their 70s, and their son, still eight years old, reappears. (Jan. 24, 26, 30)

Rocky Mount native Allan Gurganus's name will always be associated with his blockbuster, "Oldest Living Confederate Widow Tells All." His latest, "Local Souls," a collection of three novellas, takes us back to the fictional eastern (See MARTIN, page 3A)

They have what in Wagram?

A few weeks ago I got a call from some musician friends who were looking for a keyboard player to fill in on a job for them. These types of jobs are always an adventure because they usually require playing with unfamiliar musicians and performing unfamiliar songs. I knew all but one of the musicians, although I had never done a job with three of the four. Their list of songs looked somewhat daunting as it included many that I had never heard of. I may not be the world's greatest musician but I do have my professional standards and I do not like to make a fool of myself when the object is to have fun. At first glance, I was ready to decline, but I knew that time was short and they would have a hard time finding someone else at that late date. Being a person who has an innate desire to please people and also has a hard time saying no, I agreed to do the job. We did one rehearsal to convince ourselves that we could pull it off and trusted our ability to wing it under pressure.

The job was at the Cypress Bend Vineyards just outside of Wagram. Wagram seems an unlikely place to find a winery. No offense to Wagram, but it does not



Frog Holler Philosopher
Ron Huff

speak "winery" to me. Nevertheless, just a few miles outside of town is Cypress Bend. The vineyard is on a farm that is known as Riverton and is bordered by the Lumber River. This location would probably not be the best for many varieties of grapes, but they grow Muscadine, also known as Scuppernong, which are apparently well suited to the area. I did not sample the wine as my sophisticated palate prefers mine to be from a box!

The attractive main building, which holds the retail shop, can be seen from the highway, as can the vineyard. Nearby is a large white tent similar to but bigger than the ones sometimes used for weddings and parties. This large tent is erected on a concrete slab and is the venue for musical entertainment and events. While loading in my gear, I was approached by a lady who asked me if my name was Ron. Although I sometimes deny this for my own

protection, I admitted it and found that she was Jessica Hubbard, an old friend from Raeford who I hadn't seen for many years. You just never know where old friends will show up.

The tent is set up on one end with a bar for wine and beverage sales and tables for finger food. There is a stage in the center on one wall, which is surrounded by tables made from wine casks. The tent is heated and we needed it on that cold, wet and windy day. Our performance, though not well rehearsed, was appreciated by the crowd, including the Christmas songs that find their way into the repertoire this time of year.

The vineyard has been presenting musical entertainment for several years. They regularly have jazz, classic rock and beach music on the weekends. If you are looking for something a little different and like live music, I suggest you check their schedule and give it a try. If you just like wine, they have a tasting area in the main building that is very nice. After your visit, you can brag to your snooty friends that you have been listening to jazz and tasting wine—in Wagram! More later.

Everyone needs to band together

Racial issues have always seemed to grow intense during bad economic times. It seems that every problem in this country, in some way, can be traced to a racial problem. As I have reported over the years, this is the only country in the civilized world where race is a deciding factor in almost every sector of American life. In reality, it is not a factor—it is used as an excuse for many people not to change their attitudes and ideas.

There are those among us who are not old enough to remember the '60s and school integration. Many said, "This will never work, children of all races going to school together." But today, the same cities that fought desegregation are now the greatest benefactors of it. Southern cities such as Atlanta, Birmingham, New Orleans, and others that once were the heart of racial discrimination are now growing and surpassing many of the major northern cities because ALL races and groups are working together.

The reason programs in these cities worked so successfully, once the people forgot race and discovered their ideas, goals and ambitions were the same, was they were able to move forward and progress. Once we begin to understand that we ALL wish the best for our families and ourselves, we should be able to



Paul Burnley

work together and ALL progress. Citizens working together in our state have been the reason for growth and progress in Raleigh, Durham and Charlotte. These communities have progressed because ALL people, regardless of race or culture, were able to work together for the betterment of ALL.

This area should not be bogged down because of racial problems. With the military, in which racial discrimination is not acceptable, being one of the largest segments of the population, different races and cultures working together should be the norm. Also, this area has a vast mixture of different races and cultures, so you would assume there would be less racial tension here.

The thing that has always amazed me about racial misunderstandings is that generally they occur between the poorest of people of each race and culture. Fifty years after the passage of civil rights legislation, the poor white and the poor minority are still constantly fighting among themselves over issues that are not important, things such as sitting beside each other on public

transportation, or eating in the same restaurants, or using the same restrooms. Were these issues important enough to grow into violence? If the energy put forth complaining and fighting about these trivial things were directed toward events that would improve the living condition of everyone, we ALL would be in a better position in life.

As long as the few powerful and influential people that control this country are able to keep the different races, cultures and groups fighting each other, they are able to control them. None of these groups are strong enough to cause them any problems as a single unit. But if these different groups united, and fought together, many problems they face would be eliminated.

This is what happened in the Middle East, with the Arab Spring, when groups that were fighting each other banded together in a single cause and gained control of their country. Only time will tell if this was the right move or not.

I am not suggesting overthrowing the government; however, the actions by our representatives clearly show that changes should be made. If ALL citizens would band together in a single cause, many changes would be possible.

Paul Burnley can be reached by email at plburnley@aol.com.

TODAY'S HOMEWORK (Notes on Education)

"I am done with great things and big plans, great institutions and big success. I am for those tiny invisible loving human forces that work from individual to individual, creeping through the crannies like so many rootlets, or like the capillary oozing of water, which, if given time, will rend the hardest monuments of human pride."
—John Taylor Gatto "The Moral Logic of Perpetual Evolution"

"Poverty is water in the gas tank of education, but its apologists facetiously condemn a pit crew of teachers who—not allowed to say the water won't combust—are pushing sputtering lives, but not fast enough, around a track where youthful suburban rockets whiz by in their mall rat garb."
—John Kuhn in "Contextual Accountability"

"When parents and the public at large respond to teachers with high levels of respect and trust, it filters into the fabric of the family and permeates the attitudes of the children. In the Pacific Rim countries particularly, it is the parent's responsibility that his/her child does well in school and if the child does not perform or behave well it brings dishonor to the family. Education in most countries visited by the Forum's International Studies Program is viewed by all of society as the key to a successful life as an adult. And it becomes a part of the fabric of policy decisions at all levels of government."
—Jo Ann Norris, executive director of The Public School Forum

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