

# VIEWPOINTS

## Hope I haven't offended you

According to the number of articles I have written and my cloudy memories of past events, I have now been writing the Frog Holler Philosopher for a little over three years. Although Ken MacDonald has had to email more than once on a Monday looking for that week's entry, I have somehow managed to meet the deadlines each time. At some point, something is going to happen to end this streak, but I will try to keep pumping them out.

I often think that the column is not very well named, but it was named after an old News-Journal feature called "The Puppy Creek Philosopher." I always admired the savvy satire of the writer and wish I had his insights and humor. I do feel at liberty to get as philosophical as I am capable of. My other inspiration was the late Raz Autry's "A View From the Country."

Writing a column such as this has been a great experience. I had never written anything for publication before, other than song lyrics, so this has been a nice challenge. It has also been provocative. Meeting a deadline requires that I kick my mind into gear often for the purpose of finding a topic. Luckily, the only constraints I have on topics are my own. It has forced me to observe my environment in a different way, looking closer at details and taking you, the readers, into consideration.

The process of writing brings clarification of ideas. It is easy to think freely, and converse informally about things, but when I look at these



**Frog Holler Philosopher**  
**Ron Huff**

ideas staring back at me from the page, they beg for a higher order. The consideration of that higher order stimulates the brain to dig a little deeper and be a little more analytical and cautious with what is presented. I constantly walk the line between writing exactly what I think and cushioning my thoughts too much. As a moderate, this is usually not too hard for me, but there are certainly issues that are delicate that need to be discussed, even if it is a little uncomfortable. Examination of ideas through the lens of the public is a good exercise.

It has been fun to interact with the readers of the column. Most are very gracious and seem to enjoy them, or at least say they do. I am sure there are many who hate everything I write that has a political element. I only hope that these people continue to read and at least consider my viewpoint. I try hard to consider theirs.

I have certainly chronicled my life well over the last three years. While not as personal, the column is a diary of sorts. Often when I see old friends that ask what I've been up to, I first ask if they read the column. If they do, then they know everything already!

I have had people tell me that it took bravery to write about contro-

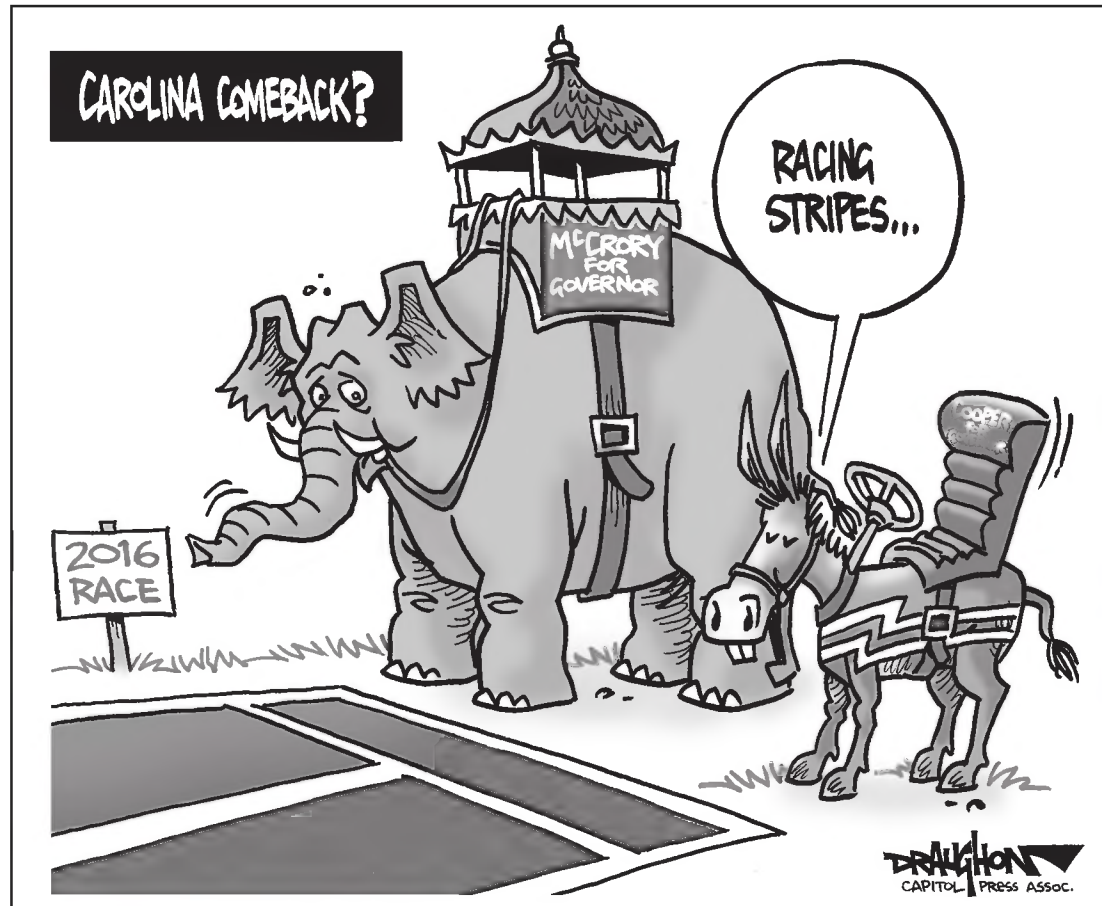
versial subjects such as the legalization of marijuana. I will admit that it is sometimes easier to just shut up, but our country allows us to state our opinions and good citizenship all but demands it.

I recently wrote a column on political correctness. I am truly sorry if anyone was offended by that article, but the risk of offense is what the debate is all about. I have spent much time considering this correctness, but I am sure there have been some unintended insults along the way. Some of us need to thicken our skins a little.

Writing these columns places a time stamp on events that might not otherwise have been put in a timeframe of reference. I can assure you without doubt that Raeford Road in Hoke County has transformed in the last three years. I discussed the potentially new hospitals in the column and now, behold, they have come. With them, the corridor has exploded with growth.

My favorite benefit of the writing has been the elevation of my own awareness of things. I have studied things more closely for the purpose of passing my experiences along to you. I have been forced to organize my thoughts and struggle to express them. Although I can't prove it, I have a feeling that delving deeper into my capabilities has stretched and opened my mind a little bit. This is a good thing! Hopefully, I can continue this quest. Thanks for reading!

More later.



## By the numbers: year in review

BY CHRIS FITZSIMON  
N.C. Policy Watch

(This edition of Monday numbers is a final look at 2015 and includes at least one number from each month of Monday numbers in the past year that policymakers should address in 2016)

43—rank of North Carolina among the 50 states in average teacher pay ("TABOR would guarantee a permanent place at the bottom for North Carolina," Progressive Pulse, August 26, 2015)

1—rank of North Carolina among the states for the largest decline in average teacher salaries from 2003-2004 to 2013-2014 (Ibid)

5.8—percentage increase in productivity in North Carolina during the ongoing recovery from the Great Recession ("The State of Working North Carolina 2015," N.C. Justice Center)

3—percentage decrease in wages in North Carolina during the ongoing recovery from the Great Recession (Ibid)

88—number of Americans killed every day with a gun ("Gun Violence by the Numbers," Everytown for Gun Safety, September 28, 2015)

7—number of people under the age of 19 who are killed by a gun every day in the United States (Ibid)

1,815—amount in dollars of the annual tax cut in the budget passed by the General Assembly in 2015 for the wealthiest one percent of taxpayers ("Chartbook: Four Charts on the Final Budget," N.C. Budget & Tax Center, September 16, 2015)

7—amount in dollars of the annual INCREASE in taxes in the budget for the lowest 20 percent of taxpayers, with annual incomes below \$20,000 (Ibid)

135—number of days since spokesman for the N.C. Education Lottery told the Raleigh News & Observer that lottery officials "don't want people playing with the rent, food, or gas money" ("North Caro-

lina could widen lottery's reach," Raleigh News & Observer, August 22, 2015)

468—amount in dollars of the lottery sales per capita on Halifax County in 2014 (Ibid)

2—rank of Halifax County among 100 counties in highest lottery sales per capita (Ibid)

27.4—percentage of people in Halifax living below the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau)

61—percentage of North Carolina workers who earn less than \$20,000 a year who have no access to paid sick leave ("Caregivers at Risk: The urgent need for fair pay and paid leave for all of NC's caregivers," N.C. Justice Center, June 2014)

38—percentage of North Carolina workers who earn between \$20,000 and \$35,000 a year who have no access to paid sick leave (Ibid)

30,000—minimum reduction in voter turnout in the 2014 election caused by new voting limitations and polling-place problems ("Alarm Bells from Silenced Voters," Democracy North Carolina, May 2015)

39—rank of North Carolina among the 50 states with the highest average student loan debt of graduates of 4-year colleges and universities in 2013 (Institute for College Access & Success, Project on Student Debt)

28,312—amount in dollars of the average student loan debt of graduates of East Carolina University in 2013, the highest in the University of North Carolina system (Ibid)

90—percentage of graduates of Fayetteville State University in 2013 with student loan debt, the highest percentage in the University of North Carolina system (Ibid)

28 billion—amount in dollars the University of North Carolina system contributes to the state's economy (Economic Modeling Specialists International, "Demonstrating the Collective Economic Value of the

University of North Carolina System," Executive Summary, February 2015)

425,000—number of jobs in North Carolina that can be traced back to the impact of the university system (Ibid)

24.9—percentage of reduction in per student funding for the university system since 2008 ("State-by-State Fact Sheets: Higher Education Cuts Jeopardize Students' and States' Economic Future," Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, March 5, 2015)

2,424—number of public schools in North Carolina that received a letter grade with the release last February of the A-F report card grading system (N.C. Department of Public Instruction)

100—percentage of schools that received a grade of F that have MORE than 50 percent of their students eligible to receive free or reduced lunch (Ibid)

97.9—percentage of schools that received a grade of D that have MORE than 50 percent of their students eligible to receive free or reduced lunch (Ibid)

520 million—amount in dollars of the loss in state revenue from proposed elimination of the state capital gains tax ("A Capital Loss: Eliminating taxes on capital gains would make North Carolina's tax system more unfair and make the state's revenue challenge worse," N.C. Budget & Tax Center, January 2015)

67—percentage of benefit of eliminating capital gains tax that would flow to the top one percent of North Carolina taxpayers (Ibid)

957,000—amount in dollars of the average income of top one percent of taxpayers in North Carolina (Ibid)

112—number of days until the 2016 session of the General Assembly convenes (N.C. General Assembly)

### TODAY'S HOMEWORK (Notes on Education)

"I'm not sure public schools understand that we're their customer—that we, the business community, are your customer. What they don't understand is they are producing a product at the end of that high school graduation. Now is that product in a form that we, the customer, can use it? Or is it defective, and we're not interested?"

— Rex Tillerson, chairman and chief executive officer of ExxonMobil

"As a public school teacher, let me be clear: my students are not products. Education is not about turning children into widgets for big business. It is about readying children for life, and that includes so much more than the tiny and inhuman vision of people like Rex Tillerson. Hands off my students, my daughter, and my country!"

— Steven Singer, parent, teacher, and public education activist, in press release by The Badass Teachers Association

## We Get Letters

### Four oblivious apocalyptic horsemen

To the Editor: President Obama, Secretary of State Kerry, former Secretary of State Clinton, and Senator Bernie Sanders are oblivious to the danger posed by ISIS.

Bernie Sanders keeps harping on our economy, and hardly talks about ISIS. He is way out in left field.

President Obama referred to ISIS as the JV team and dithered when moderate Syrians asked for air strikes. Over the past year, Obama's air campaign against ISIS averaged 20 sorties per day

compared to 1100 sorties per day in Operation Desert Storm and 800 per day during the second Gulf War.

Obama continues to refuse to call them radical Islamic terrorists.

When referring to the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris, Secretary Kerry said there was "a rationale that you could attach yourself to somehow and say, okay, they're really angry because of this and that." And then he described the killing of 130 people in Paris as indiscriminate. There is no rationale for any terrorist attacks, and

showing sympathy for the Charlie Hebdo attack is ridiculous.

In a Democratic debate, former Secretary Clinton said she couldn't refer to the Paris killers as radical Islamic terrorists, which is parroting Obama's view of the terrorists. Clinton and Obama think we should lead from behind and let others be out front, and ISIS and others are taking advantage of this policy of non-leadership, and they threaten the security of this country and the Western world.

Donald Moskowitz  
Londonderry, NH

## Bond issue may be decided late in the game

A concerted push has begun in support of the \$2 billion bond referendum that voters will consider during the March 15 primary election.

During the first week in January, a pro-bond committee will officially launch its campaign to encourage "yes" votes on the bond package during an event at N.C. State University's Centennial Campus. It includes more than \$1.3 billion for the University of North Carolina and community college systems and \$309.5 million for water and sewer loans and grants, along with money for parks, the North Carolina Zoo, the National Guard and the state Department of Agriculture. See the list of projects at [VoteYesToInvest.com](http://VoteYesToInvest.com).

It will be the first time since November 2000 that voters statewide will consider a bond package put on the ballot by the General Assembly. Back then, voters easily voted to borrow \$3.1 billion for higher education-related projects.

"Let's face it, the bonds will provide a critical face-lift for our state, providing long-term infrastructure and facilities that will benefit North Carolinians for generations," wrote former N.C. Supreme Court Justice Bob Orr, who also is co-chairman of the NC Connect Bond Committee, in a recent opinion editorial.

At first glance, it would appear

### One on One

**Patrick Gannon,**  
Capitol Press  
Association



that this referendum will be a slam dunk. So far, there's no organized opposition.

But timing is everything. Rob Christensen, a longtime political writer for the News & Observer of Raleigh, predicts that the referendum will be defeated because of the turnout of conservative voters for the hotly contested Republican presidential primary.

"Do you really think all of those Trump, Cruz and Ben Carson voters are going to be anxious to borrow a lot of money for new government projects?" Christensen wrote.

He might be correct. During the 2015 legislative session, nearly 20 of the more conservative House Republicans voted against putting the bond package on the ballot. And if Hillary Clinton has sewn up the Democratic nomination by March 15, Democrats—who are more likely to support borrowing—might not be as excited to go to the polls.

Another strike against the proposal is that it doesn't include money for transportation projects. An early

version of the bond legislation included \$400 million to supplement highway funding, but lawmakers decided there were better ways to find extra transportation dollars.

It's safe to say that most North Carolinians believe more money is needed for roads.

It's also safe to say that you'll be hearing much more about the bond referendum in the coming weeks. The pro-bond campaign already has raised more than \$1 million—with hopes of raising much more—to run ads and otherwise get the word out.

You'll hear that no new taxes will be needed to pay for the bonds, although the money to pay off the debt has to come from somewhere, which means other state priorities might get less money. You'll hear that borrowing won't negatively affect the state's AAA bond rating.

And you'll hear that the state's population just topped 10 million people, and better infrastructure is needed to support that influx of new residents.

But just keep in mind that the vast majority—if not all—of the information you will hear about the referendum before March 15 will come from those who want you to vote for it.

We'll hear from the voices that matter on March 15.

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