

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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Redistricting's A Mess, But Make The Best Of It

Greater minority representation is a well-intended goal, but surely there's a better way of seeking it than ripping across counties and zig-zagging all over the state.

That's what has happened, you see, in the current effort to meet U.S. Justice Department redistricting requirements. As one local legislator pointed out, people don't live in nice, little squares. To come up with black-majority districts in areas where the ratio of whites to blacks is about 4 to 1 takes some creative drawing.

Brunswick County has come through the finagling well, remaining fairly intact compared to numerous other counties, which may be split four or five ways in terms of representation. It's only natural that Democrats and Republicans alike have used the redistricting as an opportunity to try to make gains for their parties while meeting Justice Department mandates.

But that's not really the point. The real question is do the ends justify the means? Is having black majority districts worth the price we're all to pay in terms of disruption and realignment?

One person, one vote is the principal behind our electoral system. The current redistricting doesn't appear to further that cause, and may indeed have unintended results.

There is a silver lining in this redistricting cloud, however, though it's one this county of strong and independent people may be reluctant to grasp.

For the new, zig-zagging district lines to work, southeastern North Carolina counties are going to have to start working with each other instead of competing so fiercely. They've been talking about cooperation and going to meetings, but it's a slow process.

Redistricting may be the extra incentive needed to speed the transition to a regional outlook.

Though we still have a lot to learn in Brunswick County about working together, we've got a leg up on some of our neighbors. With our leaders used to dealing with the different needs of "four counties in one," Brunswick County could quickly emerge as a leader in those discussions.

For the region to get what is due it, our legislators are going to have to work together now more than ever. That will require building coalitions not just among themselves, but among the people they represent—black and white; urban coastal and inland rural; natives and transplants.

We can't prevent zig-zagging lines across the redistricting map, but we can make the most of a less than desirable situation.

A New Image For Bats

BY BILL FAVER

One of my memorable experiences was sitting outside the natural entrance to Carlsbad Cavern waiting for the nightly "emergence" of millions of bats. We were not disappointed as bats poured out of the ground and flew off in all directions to begin feeding on the night-flying insects across the desert. Today there seems to be another kind of emergence—one trying to bring out the truth about bats who have suffered bad reputations for hundreds of years.

Bats are among the world's least appreciated and most endangered animals. They lose habitat and are victims of pollution, much of it caused by humans acting out of fear and ignorance. Bats have had a bad reputation for centuries. The truth is bats are not blind; they don't try to get into your hair; they are not rodents; they seldom transmit diseases to people or pets and very few contact rabies, so our concern should be no different than with other wild animals.

Bats are not birds, either. They are mammals, give birth to young and nurse them, raising only one pup each year. Their bodies are covered with skin, not feathers. Bats have good vision and use echolocation, like sonar, to travel. Bats consume vast numbers of insects and help control crop pests. One species, the Little Brown Bat, is said to capture as many as 600 mosquitoes an hour. Twenty million Free-tailed Bats in Texas can consume 1/2 million pounds of insects per night, according to one scientist.

There are almost 1000 species of bats worldwide and that accounts for almost 1/4 of all mammal species. Canada and the United States can claim 42 species. Fruit and nectar eating bats in the tropics are very important to the survival of the rain forests. In West Africa, the claim is that bats carry 90-98% of the seeds of pioneer plants for reforestation. In the Sonoran Desert bats play a key role in pollinating Organ Pipe Cactus, Agave, and other plants. According to Bat Conservation International, over 300 plant species need pollination or seed dispersal by bats. Some bat-dependent crops they list are dates, figs, bananas, plantain, peaches, avocados, breadfruit, mangoes, carob, cashews, balsa wood, and tequila.

Maybe we need to take another look at bats and learn to appreciate what they do for us. In the United States, we are told 40% of the bats species are on the endangered list. Bats have been neglected by conservationists and scientists and are the least studied of mammals. We need to learn that bats are among the most gentle, beneficial, and necessary animals sharing the earth with us. Baba Dioum, a conservationist from Senegal, writes:

*In the end, we will conserve only what we love,
 We will love only what we understand,
 And we will understand only what we are taught.*

INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE? WRITE:
 Bat Conservation International
 P O Box 162603
 Austin, TX 78716

Bat Conservation International is the international leader in bat conservation and education. They have pioneered research and other projects and have gained protective legislation saving bat caves and restricting pesticide use affecting bats.

For a contribution, BCI will send you information on protecting and attracting bats and plans for making bat houses for your backyard.

The 'Hanging Judge' Leaves An Impression

You could tell that Brunswick County Superior Court Judge Joe Freeman Britt had grown impatient. He stood, and his voice rattled the courtroom.

He leaned forward, placed his knuckles about shoulder's length apart on the judge's bench before him, and gave a terse, quick lecture.

He immediately drew the attention of everyone there, as though a classroom full of elementary kids had been caught disobeying a principal's order. Lawyers, defendants, court reporters, probation officers, family members and prosecuting witnesses were shaking in their boots.

"Let me explain how this courtroom works," Britt began. His black robe glistened. That towering figure demanded respect. A hundred pairs of eyes were bulging out of their sockets.

He explained that people in his courtroom were expected to behave like jurors. Jurors are not allowed to come and go as they wish, to prance down the aisles and to cause distractions in the middle of a trial. Persons in the audience must keep their seats until a recess is called or until court

Terry Pope



is adjourned. His orders were firm and to the point.

"If you do not want to be here, if you do not want to be here, then leave. Now is the time," he stated. No one left. The shuffling of papers and the creaking of doors had all stopped. Seat cushions that had made an orchestra of anxious noises before the lecture began had suddenly grown silent.

He has a nickname. Anyone around the courtroom can tell you that it's "The Hanging Judge" because he has quite a reputation for giving out maximum sentences and for being tough on criminals.

No doubt, there were a lot of continuances of criminal cases in Superior Court last week, but as the

saying goes, "You can run, but you can't hide." Judge Britt of Robeson County has been assigned to Brunswick County, along with Superior Court Judge Giles R. Clark, for the next six months.

The first case before him last week involved an 18-year-old who had violated his probation by failing to meet with his probation officer and by failing to perform community service work.

"Do you admit or deny the allegations?" Britt asked. Yes, he had done the things he was accused of, he started to tell the judge, but... Boom! Probation revoked, two years in prison. Next case.

Mouths flew open. The defendant turned to question what had happened with his probation officer, who never moved an inch. Assistant District Attorney Lee Bollinger approached the judge's bench with a sheet of paper, and the two talked briefly. Judge Britt's head shook off whatever it was that Bollinger had asked.

"May I say something? I'm his mother!" a voice came from the courtroom.

"No you may not! You can talk to the District Attorney and he can relay any information he may wish, but I will not talk with anyone in the audience," the judge replied.

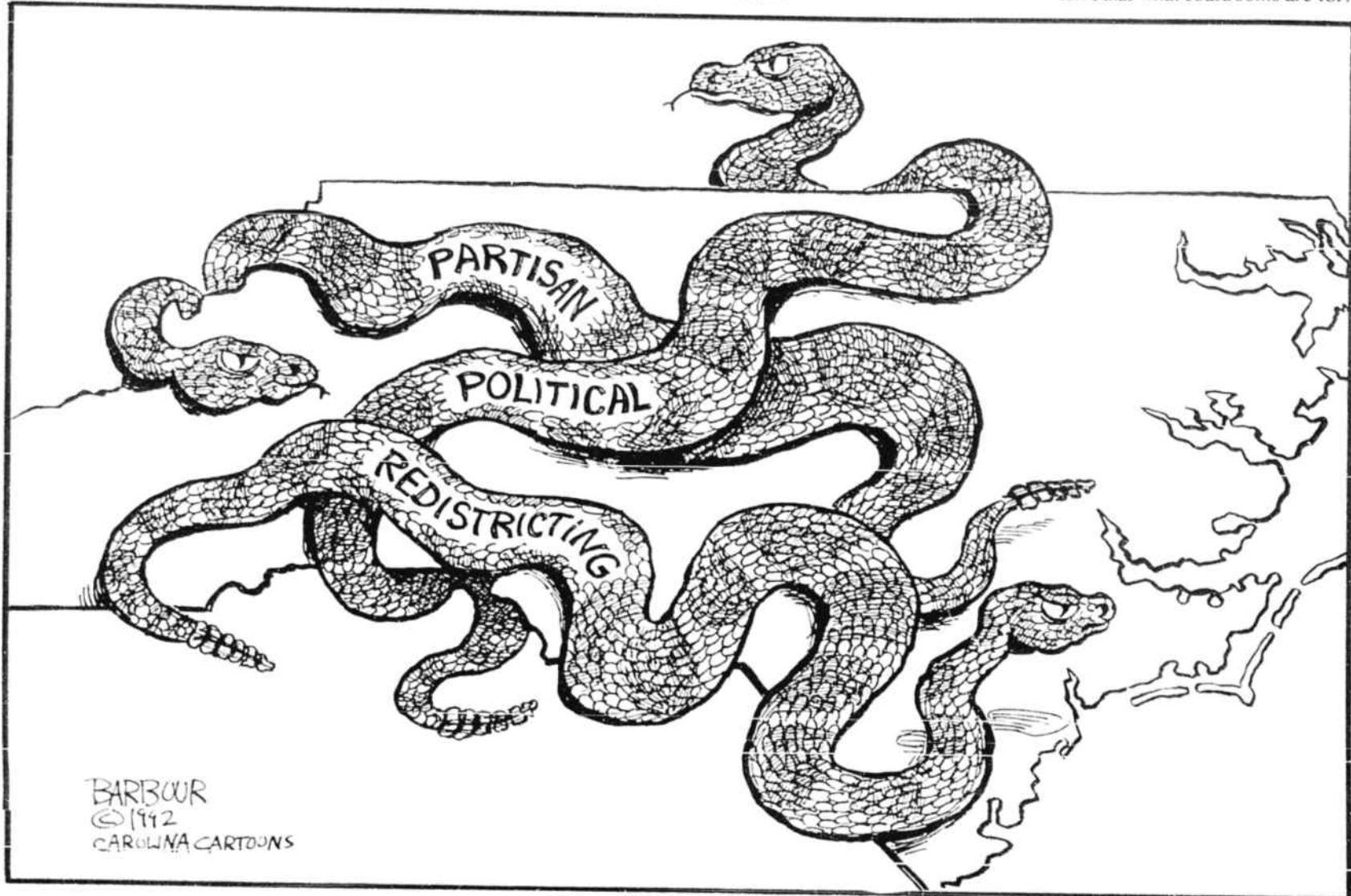
Next probation case. Boom! Two years in prison. Next probation case. Boom! Ten years in prison. All maximum sentences. The deputy was kept busy escorting persons to the jail.

But who could argue? Why shouldn't all judges be as strict, especially with those criminals who have wasted one chance already?

What has happened in the past to make the kind of respect that Judge Britt demands in his courtroom seem eccentric today? Shouldn't criminals be corralled into the courtroom shaking in their boots? Shouldn't a light sentence for the defendant seem a rarity, that some unusual condition exists to merit lesser time in jail?

It doesn't seem that way in today's courtrooms. Judge Britt left quite an impression during his four-day stay in Brunswick County, and he will be back. Criminals were sweating; victims were smiling.

Isn't that what courtrooms are for?



There's A Dance In The Old Dame Yet

Looking at Sweetpea's photograph on my desk it is hard to believe my mostly-dachshund is 15 years old.

Sorry adding (the basics of math truly did never sink in) had us believing, until Don did the calculation, that she was 16 this year.

Sweetpea came to me as a gift from Fred Hardee, who still lives at Hickman's Crossroads; the rest of the litter has since died.

My big black labrador had been shot by hunters in the woods behind my house in Burke County. The next dog would be a "house" pet.

That Christmas of 1976 Sweetpea was six weeks old and the size of an elongated mouse. She wrapped herself around my neck, digging claw-like toenails into my sweater, and off we went to Glen Alpine. She made the trip with me from Burke County to Raleigh, adapting better to city life than I did. She enjoyed our year-and-a-half or so at Ocean Isle Beach and took to downtown Charlotte with its bustle and noise. But she was ready for the country quiet of our subdivision when that move came.

For those of you who've been ask-

Susan Usher



ing, she's doing pretty well to be such an elderly little lady. The picture on my desk was taken just six years ago, when Sweetpea's fur was the color of honey and her eyes like warm amber.

Sweetpea's as loving and affectionate as ever. While still a little on the plump side, she hasn't gained weight in several years.

There are some parts breaking down—she has trouble digesting fat, so she's on low-fat diet, and she has a heart murmur.

Her bladder control isn't what it used to be; she has to go out a lot during the middle of the night. Don and I once thought the only thing we'd ever have to get up for at 2 a.m. were baby feedings. Instead we have

Sweetpea, needing to go out one more time.

I'm not sure how well she can see, and her hearing's not what it used to be. These days she's hoary with frost, more white than honey in most places. Her eyes are clouded with "senile" cataracts, which supposedly don't affect her vision. But sometimes it takes her a moment to figure out it's me.

She sleeps a great deal; in fact, I think she sleeps most of the day, with our aging cat, Nosey, curled up nearby. You'll find them in the sunniest part of the yard. Evenings, she curls up in front of the gas heater, whether it's on or not, or retires early to her blanket by the bed.

But Sweetpea's a spunky old gal. Sometimes she has the get-up-and-go of puppyhood, chasing one of the cats around the corner of the house, or spooking a strange dog that comes in the yard.

When we're home, Sweetpea makes a show of giving the UPS truck a fit. She's still convinced—or maybe she's trying to convince us—it is her barking and nipping at the tires that makes the truck leave.

After all, it works every time. Same thing with the school bus that used to stop next door and the garbage truck.

Sweetpea used to walk with us. In fact she would go to the door and beg to go walking she liked it so much, good encouragement for us. We'd walk at what we thought was a pretty brisk, aerobic pace, with her short, fat legs racing to keep up and her tail wagging all the while.

These days, she can't make it around one side of the block, unless we slow our pace to a slow ramble. As we circle by the house, she trots out to greet us then retires to the yard.

This past summer it sunk in that Sweetpea probably wouldn't be with us much longer. Either she would die one day soon, or we would have her put to sleep because life had become too painful or difficult for her.

Then, on a "Roots" outing to the Taber community near the Bladen-Cumberland County line, my sister Carol and I met a 23-year-old dachshund that looks a lot like Sweetpea.

There may be a dance or two left in the old girl yet.

They Say We Make Too Much Money

Current economic situations statewide and nationwide must be in truly sorry shape.

At our house, we're getting some quick economic lessons of late.

I read in a Wilmington newspaper yesterday that my husband and I, with our combined income, are classified as Upper Middle Class by North Carolina standards.

That's a little hard to believe. It's true we both have jobs that ensure that we can afford the necessities to lead healthy, stable lives (insurance, food, clothes, utility bills, apartment rent and car loans).

We also can afford to save a little money for that rainy day.

I wouldn't say we're hurting, but we're certainly not running out to buy the camcorder or 500-millimeter zoom lens for the camera or that nice pair of shoes we saw in a mail order catalog.

There is very little that we need, and for that I'm grateful, but the things we want often seem to be out of reach.

Dori Cosgrove Gurganus



That's why it's hard to read the words Upper Middle Class and not break into pathetic laughter.

Us?

We can't even afford to buy a house or even make loan payments on such an expenditure!

I always imagined Upper Middle Class to be where my parents are situated. They can afford to take days off from work to go on vacations, dine at restaurants on more than just special occasions and can build a greenhouse on the back of the house when they please.

My husband doesn't get paid if he takes a day off from the U.S. Postal

Service. So, to guarantee a decent-sized paycheck, he works six days a week, every week.

We can afford the payments on our own cars, but there's no way we could go out and buy a new one at our income level.

What's even sillier is that when we applied to the Farmer's Home Administration (FHA) for a house loan, they said we make too much money to qualify for assistance.

So we've got the government telling us we're more than just comfortable, we're downright cozy.

Doesn't it seem, then, that we'd be a good risk in paying them back?

OK, OK, I know we're not truly needy.

But all we can afford to pay is apartment rent.

And that house, new car and vacation to Ireland are seeming more and more out of reach with most prices soaring higher and higher.

And then we hear one economist on television deny that the nation is

in a recession, and another report that people are going bankrupt left and right.

President Bush refutes news of a recession, but reportedly people are being laid off and businesses are going under every day. And his opponents say that things will just get worse!

Who should I believe? I'd like to get a straight answer on what's going on.

Watching television news and reading newspapers isn't doing it.

If I'm rich, I think I'll use some of my wealth to buy one of those new-fangled dictionaries of economic definitions and ideals.

If my husband and I are Upper Middle Class, then how would the government classify a family that really can't afford health insurance or doctor's visits for the kids, new clothes, healthy meals and repairs and insurance for the family car? Lower Middle Class?

Just one more thing to make you go, "Hmmm."