

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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Voters Are Getting Excited Again

Who, Me Vote? No Thanks!

So you don't plan to vote next week! You don't have time? You don't like any of the candidates and you're convinced the winners will turn out to be losers? You don't believe your vote matters?

What a lot of good excuses! Life is pretty frantic for most of us. Who has time to find their voting precinct or stand in line? What a bore!

And all those names facing you on the ballot...they're just politicians, and you know how crummy they all are. When did an elected official do anything good in office? And how in the world could one person's vote even be noticed, anyway?

If you can live with any of that rationale—and far more than half the country's registered voters do—just be prepared to keep your mouth shut next year as governments from City Hall to the White House make their decisions. Don't say a word about your taxes, the roads in front of your house or the miserable education your child or grandchild is getting.

You are no doubt content to let perfect strangers choose who will run a portion of your life. That small percentage of time-wasting, idealistic, foolish people who actually have nothing better to do than mark ballots are determining whether or not some dingbat slips his weird ideas into school planning or that ambitious politico gets control of county government and spends your taxes on a new airport.

Your life will be affected by all these people who win elections, but it's fine that somebody you don't even know put them in office.

Probably you won't even understand, much less care, about something else you give up when you stay home on Tuesday. There is a symbolism about the act of voting. It's one of the few actions open to everybody in this country who cares enough to register and go to the polls, and there's really something thrilling about it. As you stand in line with your neighbors, you can think of dozens of other nations where you might get shot for doing this, places where people are fighting and dying for the privilege. You can feel part of a long line of Americans who, for more than 200 years have valued the freedoms of this country, even with its flaws, and have been proud to have a voice in maintaining them.

If you want a real laugh on election day, get this: There are those rare citizens who go beyond registering and voting and actually study the candidates and research their issues. This is that rare breed, an informed voter, a real patriot. Can you believe it?

Who wants all that hassle, anyway? It's far more fun to grab a six-pack and settle down in front of the tube. Election day? Just another irritating excuse to pre-empt your favorite sitcom, broadcasting the names of people who will run your life.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Bypass Warning Device Could Work Here, Too

To the editor:
 I have followed with interest the debate and the controversy over the U.S. 17 Bypass around Shallotte. A similar situation existed on a West Virginia road—Route 19 north out of Beckley, W.Va. The problem was solved electronically.

The warning lights, set about one-fourth mile from the intersection, do not flash continuously, as they do on the U.S. 17 Bypass. The warning lights only flash when the traffic light is going to change from green to red. This allows the through traffic, traveling at 55 to 60 mph, time to slow down.

A sign placed at the warning

lights advises the driver "when the lights are flashing, the signal is about to change". The electronic device works in West Virginia and it will work here.

I also wonder about the opposition to the new Post Office at Seaside. Why did the opposition wait until the building was complete before voicing their opposition? Is there a political or personal motive?

I was under the impression that the Post Office in Shallotte will still exist, and that all the services will still be there. If this is true, why all the fuss?

George V. Rowe
 Sunset Beach

'Let The Chips Fall Where They May'

To the editor:
 The following is a response to the editorial, "Just Give Us The Facts, Ma'am," which was in the April 23rd Beacon.

I will not comment on the rumored 1.2 and the DA's .032 results of the blood test for alcohol content. I do take exception to "tinkering with the laws" and "evidence of careless driving".

Tinker is a word for cover up. To tinker with the law for the reasons you give is absurd. You already have "Freedom of the Press," which gives you the right to print or not to print.

Nowhere in the docket do I find a charge or conviction for careless dri-

ving. Reckless driving is common in the docket.

The victim is not even mentioned in this editorial. This person was turning into his own driveway. The impact of Ms. Baxter's car moved his three-quarter ton truck over 60 feet; the car continued through an open field until it was stopped by a utility pole.

Speaking as a victim, who spent three months in a hospital, I do not call this an accident caused by "careless driving".

We should be grateful that the victim did not end up a statistic and let the chips fall where they may.

Eileen Kellagher
 Long Beach

I stand amazed. Just when it looked like another blah election year, voters all across America are getting excited. They think they've found a REAL choice, something or somebody different from the politics-as-usual breed.

They like Texas billionaire H. Ross Perot. Excuse me, the national press says Americans love Perot. Not because of his positions on the issues, but because he's perceived as a leader, a man of action, a man who makes things happen and gets things done.

I've even been tempted to sign the petition to get Perot on the ballot in North Carolina, and I'm not a petition signer. However, I am a dissatisfied voter, though not for entirely the same reasons as some other people I know.

If Perot does make the ballot, who knows what will happen when I step into the voting booth this fall. In some past years, I've been so undecided a quarter has come in handy.

Generally, American voters aren't happy with the way the country's going. And while we all have to

Susan Usher



share the blame for the trends we see and the failure to correct them, most of us are happy to shove the bulk of that blame on somebody else. Congress and the Presidency are good places to start; after all, the folks up there are supposed to set an example, aren't they?

He's not the stereotypical candidate; he's different. And believe me, they've had enough of the rest.

Perot is different and he's drawing dissatisfied voters the way honey draws flies.

At the national level, I don't think the reporters know yet whether to take the draft Perot campaign seriously; otherwise they probably would have been "digging" deeply

into his background even more quickly than they have. What would they find if they did? Possibly just what the man appears to be; I don't know.

That same group of reporters appears to be a little nervous because Perot hasn't been easy to pigeon-hole. No one has handed him a platform based on public opinion research correlated to a national party platform. What we're hearing from Perot, I think, is what he thinks. Apparently, like most of us, he's a hybrid when it comes to the issues, part-liberal, part-conservative, evolving.

As a journalist, I was taught to focus on the issues in a campaign, to pin the candidates down, force them to take positions and to fuss at them if their positions change.

But is that realistic? My own views vary issue to issue, shaped in part by my own personal experiences and are in a continuous state of change. I figure if my position on an issue is subject to change as I learn about an issue, have experiences relating to it or hear about others' experiences, then maybe it's

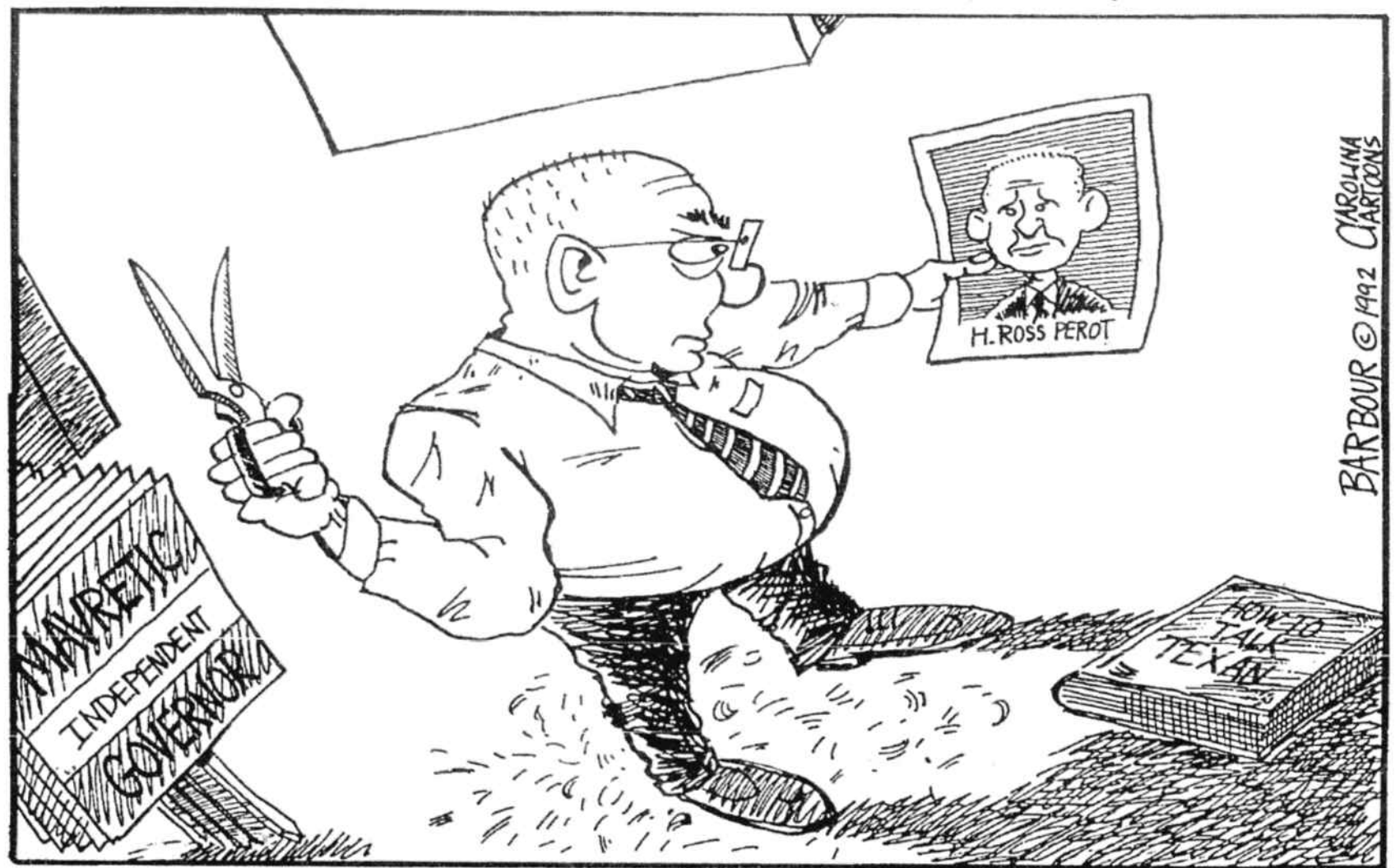
okay for a candidate to be the same way. In fact I would probably wonder about a person whose view never, ever changed.

These days I don't think it's as important how a candidate views a specific issue as how he or she approaches the decision-making process, and the factors that have shaped them as individuals. Attitude is especially important.

Most of us haven't been really excited about any candidate for public office in a long time. We needed a jump start and Perot's just that, a jolt of electricity across an otherwise faded landscape.

Win or lose, his involvement in this presidential campaign will have been good for us, bringing some people back into the political process who had given up interest and hope.

Win or lose, his success in the petitioning process should send Democratic and especially Republican leaders scurrying back to the drawing board, trying to figure out what Perot offers that their candidates and their platforms don't.



Don't Just Vote For A Pretty Name

I've been listening to and reading media rhetoric from all the politicians, but it was my visit the other night to a candidates' forum that brought back vividly my own fling with elective office.

Fourteen years ago I was seized with the idealistic fever of public service and ran for the New Hanover County school board. Having taught, reported on education, shepherded four children through the education mills, and presented dramatic programs in the schools for many years, I considered myself a unique expert on the subject.

Oh, the grandiose plans I had for improving everything from teachers' working conditions to central office efficiency! However, I had not counted on the disgusting farce of campaigning to get elected. After several months of eating fried fish and shaking strange hands, I wasn't sure I had any idealism left, not to mention energy.

The kind of forums where candidates actually talked about their goals and their educational concerns were stimulating and enjoyable. I liked answering questions, hearing what my opponents had to say, and gauging the needs and complaints of

Marjorie Megivern



the public.

However, these events were the ones where candidates outnumbered the audience. There was no great rush to attend substantive, informative gatherings, especially if no refreshments were served. No, the crowds came out for the big blowouts in a park or stadium, where hot dogs and fish and gallons of soft drinks provided motivation. Here, speaking time was severely limited, if allowed at all, and the noise of the masses drowned out any serious dialogue.

I took me only a few weeks to realize I was not cut out for political jousting, that I was happier on this side of the reporter's pad and could withstand just so much phoniness and party whoopla without running for fresh air. Soon, I just wanted the whole thing to be over.

Then the darnedest thing happened. I was elected! I was one of the top vote-getters, in fact, in my first (and last!) time out as a politician. How did this happen?

How it happened is the point of these remarks, a sad and cynical commentary on the voting public.

I had been on stage frequently in Wilmington's community theater, had become known as a reporter and married a professor whose somewhat controversial name was becoming a household word. I'm convinced that simply on the basis of name recognition people pulled my lever and hoped for the best.

That election could not have been based on much real understanding of my views or qualifications; there just weren't enough occasions when we candidates talked seriously and people listened. If voters facing zillions of names on a ballot have heard little but "sound bites" for months, they are inclined to go for any name that's familiar. Unless that well-known moniker belongs to a convicted child molester, it gets more attention than the most supremely qualified stranger.

This practice continues, I'm afraid, through the present campaign.

The forum I recently attended reminded me of it because all but two of the candidates were unknown. Several appeared to be superb prospects for the school board and, in my opinion, the two "names" are in that category. Just suppose they had been, like some of the others, extremists, egotists or uninformed about issues. My hunch is they would still get the lion's share of the votes.

There's no excuse but laziness for this method of choosing officials. Not only does the media, especially newspapers, present information on which to base a choice, but public forums are held ad infinitum, to give us the chance to see candidates close up and ask them questions.

Remembering how I was unleashed on an unsuspecting public, I would plead with voters to take the time and effort to make use of these educational opportunities and to vote with some understanding of the people behind those names. It so happens I turned out to be a pretty good school board member, but that was pure luck.

Don't be fooled by a name you know and as a result get an official you would like to forget.

Speak As Though Every Syllable's Golden

When they gave out voices, I must have been at the back of the line.

For whatever reason, the voice I ended up with isn't a rich baritone, tenor, bass or anything in between. It simply wears out at the end of a long day. Rest helps it to recover.

The more I talk the weaker it gets. Over the years I've grown to judge how far I can push the throat box, and I try to stay within the limits everyday. I don't sing either—but I never could.

People ask me to speak up over the telephone. They say it politely, at first, like there must be a bad connection somewhere. Then I realize that I've forgotten that my voice doesn't carry well over the receiver, so I speak a little louder.

Some thought it would be a problem when I wanted to teach high school. My college supervisor, during my student teaching, waited until the semester was over before he

Terry Pope



told me, "I didn't think you were going to make it."

They fed me to the lions at my alma mater, North Brunswick High in Leland. I got an A, good evaluations from my supervisor and had fun teaching in the process.

There is this myth about persons born with soft voices, that they don't always get what they want, that they can't demand control over a classroom or meeting and that the voice-box matches their aggressiveness in life.

It's just a myth. I'm finally speak-

ing up for all of the quiet people in the world. It's time we've had our say.

In the classroom, students at first didn't know how to take me as a teacher. They were used to being yelled at. They told me so. Being yelled at doesn't make some people listen. Kids can easily tune out an authority figure with a big mouth.

So what we quiet people do is use that silence to our advantage at times. We talk as if every syllable is golden. In the classroom, if you really have something important to say in a learning environment people will strain their ears to listen.

And when normally quiet people do raise their voices, people listen. Like those old E.F. Hutton commercials. When E.F. Hutton talks, people listen.

But after five classes each day, my voice needed rest every night. Sometimes in the news business, it escapes me as well. It'll run and

hide at times. But in the morning it's another day. Recharged for another 12 hours.

The same myths relate to the job I perform as a basketball referee. Some assume that only big mouths can qualify for officiating or even play the game. I'm out to prove them wrong. In fact, fans do not go to games to watch officials.

If officials are doing their jobs well, they are invisible on the court. They do not need to yell and make theatrical performances after every play.

But we battle the stigma anyway. Some of us turn to writing our thoughts down instead of speaking them. Now that's a thought!

People with plenty of adrenaline in the throat have no idea what this column is all about. They take their voices, all too often, for granted.

When that line formed to give out voices, those people somehow talked their way to the front.

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