

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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Beware Of False Economy In Health Care Reform Plans

■A full-time minimum-wage-earning restaurant worker is in a car accident. He is injured seriously enough to require several days in a hospital's neuro-trauma ward. He doesn't have health insurance because his employer doesn't offer it (or can't afford to). Chances are, he would never have needed to use his coverage—except in a situation just like the one he's in.

■A young family—mom, dad and 3-year-old—is forced to drop health insurance coverage when mom's regular job doesn't work out and she becomes a "temp." Dad's a student and a carpenter and has no access to employer-subsidized coverage. The cheapest basic major medical policy they have found would cost them more than \$200 a month. It might as well be \$2,000.

■A low-income family has Medicaid for their young son. Because they didn't know any better, the parents allowed the boy to fall asleep sucking on a bottle of formula every night when he was a baby. His teeth are badly decayed and need attention. The closest dentist who will accept Medicaid is 35 miles away.

Expect to hear a lot about health care reform in the coming months, on the state and national levels. It's high time.

But as we hear proposals and make up our minds about them, we should pay close attention to whether they are wellness-based, with their emphasis on the prevention of disease, rather than sickness-based, where people become seriously ill and require expensive high-tech care for problems which could have been prevented or made less painful and less expensive had they been detected earlier.

The tide already is beginning to turn in the public sector. Medicaid and Medicare programs in some areas are starting to pay for pap smears, mammograms, preventive dental care, smoking cessation treatment and other prevention and early detection measures. And that makes perfect sense. In many instances, a \$50 test can preclude the necessity of a \$15,000 or \$150,000 operation.

The public and private sectors in North Carolina have joined in an impressive effort to combat our state's deplorable infant mortality problem. Their work is already showing good results, with fewer babies dying before their first birthday.

The offshoot is better and earlier prenatal care—including health education, nutrition counseling and parenting assistance—for thousands of poor women statewide. Five hundred dollars worth of prenatal care can prevent a newborn from being a desperately ill "million-dollar baby" who'll require intensive medical attention and, more than likely, be developmentally disabled his entire life.

We'll do well to keep an eye on elected representatives who go after public health with the same kind of slash-and-burn zeal that might be appropriate in other sectors of government. They could be promoting a very false economy.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Educate Beach Realtors About Overcrowding

To the editor:
 Week after week I read about the problems of overcrowding on Holden Beach and how the homeowner needs to be educated. The homeowner has no idea how many people are crammed into their rental properties.

I found out the costly way when I put my house into Realtors' hands. Come July 4 I got a call from the Realtor and ended up having to have my septic tank pumped and a new sewer line put in. It cost me \$1,200.

I came down following that and found a fold-up cot in my kitchen that the Realtor had brought in. A neighbor told me there were at least 12 people in my house the week of the Fourth.

I had put into my contract that not more than six people could stay in my three-bedroom house. Needless to say, I changed Realtors.

I get a flat-rate per week or weekend for my house. Who benefits per person? I pay the water and power bills. The more people, the higher the bill.

The Realtors should be educated of their responsibility.

Mattie Burton
 Kernersville

No Lottery, Please

To the editor:
 Peggy Jaynes' letter in the Feb. 11 issue of *The Brunswick Beacon* appears to be the longest letter to the editor ever published. A zealous commitment promoting our base appetite to get something for nothing sometimes requires the reader to be overwhelmed with words.

North Carolina is fortunate that Mrs. Jaynes hasn't already been recruited by atheist Madeline Murray

O'Hare to save us from Christianity. Mrs. Jaynes may also save us from being the last state to collapse from internal decay, the result of unbridled immorality.

It is almost certain that Mrs. Jaynes conducted her research after she decided to promote a lottery and that the "facts" she quotes were received from pro-lottery sources. If I were a lottery director, I would certainly present its positive features.

Mrs. Jaynes discounts the possibility that organized crime would follow the lottery into the state. She can scarcely deny that favorable climate for a lottery would encourage other forms of gambling. If a lottery becomes our prime recreation, why should we not also enjoy pari-mutuel betting, casinos, state-sponsored prostitution and crack houses, all related, morally uplifting activities?

It would be possible for us to approach the enviable financial positions of New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and other lottery-sponsoring states. It makes one wonder why an individual would live in misery here when they could live in bliss in those states.

It would have been helpful if Mrs. Jaynes had specified the benefits Mr. Coy C. Privette would reap if his "self-serving innuendo, half-truths and out-of-context statements" were successful in defeating a lottery proposal.

It's very refreshing to read a truthful, objective, selfless letter of love such as the one Mrs. Jaynes wrote.

G. Nash Greene
 Holden Beach

(More Letters, Following Page)

The Revenge Of The Little People



Eric Carlson

It's been so quiet and peaceful this winter along our little Holden Beach canal. No amateur fireworks displays. No chorus of revving outboards. No weekly rental kids, high on ice cream and Pepsi, running in circles and screaming, "Mommy! Mommy! Look! A crab!"

We should have known it was too good to last.

Lately, instead of being nudged awake by a heron's squawk or a seagull's cry, we are catapulted out of bed by wailing Skii saws, pounding hammers and 100-decibel renditions of "Achy Breaky Heart" and "The Devil Went Down to Georgia."

They are building a new house next door and Lynn is taking it very personally. In fact, don't be too surprised if you see a headline reading, "Neighbor Goes Berserk, Carpenters Dismembered With Cuisinart."

I've been trying my best to dissuade her from complaining to their boss about the loud music, the litter blowing into the marsh and the general rowdiness typical of all young nail-bangers.

"Remember," I say to her each morning. "They will be here—right next door—all day while we are at work until late tonight."

The wisdom of my "this-too-will-pass" approach may not be immediately apparent to most folks. So let me tell you a little something about "The Revenge of the Little People."

Between what my dad calls "real jobs"—like newspaper reporter and book editor—I have spent much time toiling in what are known as the "service industries." I have been a store clerk, a delicatessen worker, a waiter, a bartender, a house painter, a sailing instructor, a tree trimmer and a carpenter's helper.

From these experiences I offer

this advice: Never underestimate the secret weaponry that an otherwise disinterested and unmotivated minimum-wage "worker bee" can bring to bear against a customer who has felt it necessary to "put them in their place."

I remember one of our early house-painting jobs, when my partner and I were new to the business and not too savvy about estimating our time and materials. We submitted an absurdly low bid and, naturally, we got the job.

The smart thing for the homeowner to do would have been to gracefully accept his negotiating victory and watch us spend two weeks painting his house for nothing. But instead, he would meet us every morning with an endless list of things he "assumed" we were going to do as part of the job.

"You mean you're not going to paint the flagpole or the barbecue grill?"

Consequently, we would spend each morning politely explaining the generally accepted parameters of a normal house painting job. And we would try not to remind him that he was paying us a quarter of what a union painting crew would have charged.

During our lunch break one day, after a particularly nasty session with our taskmaster, my partner quietly

got up and walked toward the side of the house with a paint bucket.

A few minutes later, I turned around to see an artfully rendered 10-foot high painting of Bullwinkle J. Moose making a very obscene gesture toward the passing traffic.

After rolling on the ground in laughter for several minutes, we got up and painted over the artwork. But now, every three or four years, as each new coat of paint fades, Bullwinkle J. Moose reappears to remind our former employer of those naive young painters he took such pleasure in tormenting.

Then there was the time my rented house in Manteo was purchased by a big shot from Virginia who informed me that I would have to move out immediately and would not be reimbursed for painting the entire place. Worse was the fact that I would never be able to find another rental in the middle of summer.

Some of my old worker-bee buddies were visiting on the morning the sheriff's department came to evict me and haul all my belongings out of the house and into the street.

Being a local, I was able to stall the deputies and got the clerk of court to postpone the order for three months. But when I returned to the house I found that my loyal pals, fearing the worst, had left a little gift for the new owner.

They had taken two dozen crabs out of the freezer, crawled into the attic and closed them up in the heating ductwork. I was touched by their gesture of friendship and solidarity.

The Mafia has a saying that "Revenge is a meal best eaten cold." It generally applies to the need for patience and anonymity when responding to an unacceptable insult. It is also a motto commonly embraced by food-service workers, among

whom the pun is not misplaced.

Waiters, waitresses and bartenders are often forced to grovel before some of the most obnoxious people in the world, like guys who have spent the day guzzling beer and working on a third-degree sunburn.

At a fancy restaurant where I worked one summer, a waitress was relentlessly hassled by a drunken tourist who repeatedly demanded that she take back his filet mignon because it was not sufficiently "well done."

Seeing her return in tears after the third complaint, the broiler cook "accidentally" dropped the steak on the floor, crushed it with his foot and then zapped it in the microwave for 15 minutes. The steak went out looking like a hockey puck. It did not come back. Neither did the tourist.

Or consider Molly, the waitress whose ex-husband—a certified dirtbag who was convicted of molesting her child—came to eat in her section of the restaurant several times a week after his parole.

Whenever he showed up, one of her fellow workers would immediately switch sections to spare Molly the indignity of serving him. And every time, she would call Molly back to the kitchen before delivering his sandwich so Molly could spit into it.

So the next time you feel—as we all do sometimes—like strangling that pimple-faced adolescent with the blank stare who just handed you another double-decker cheeseburger instead of the chicken sandwich you ordered, pause and ask yourself: "Who will be wrapping my sandwich and putting it into the bag?"

Remember: He who laughs last, laughs best.
 Bon appetit!



Worship In A Special Kind Of Sanctuary

"I don't want you to put houses on this island," it says in a child's scrawl in one of the three damp stenographers' pads in the Kindred Spirit mailbox.

The mailbox is on the South Carolina side of Bird Island. There's a bench beside it where people can sit and write in the notebooks, journals full of random musings by people visiting one of the most beautiful and tranquil places in Brunswick County and the last remaining undeveloped barrier island west of the Cape Fear River.

The mailbox and bench are on the beach, below the toe of the frontal dune, so folks visiting there aren't trespassers—they're on the public's property.

Some visitors prefer to think of it as God's property. Close to the mailbox, nearer the water, an altar has been fashioned from beach trash. Set in a metal pipe shoved in the sand is a cross cut from an orange Styrofoam pontoon. Its two pieces are lashed with a stray length of yellow nylon rope. A brown vinyl boat seat serves as a kneeling pad.

It seems appropriate. The beach on Bird Island is, after all, a special kind of church, a sanctuary with the power to make our workaday concerns—the ones that give us mere mortals stomach ulcers—suddenly seem distant and mundane.

From the Kindred Spirit mailbox:
 ■"We have Bird Island all to ourselves today..."



Lynn Carlson

- "Enjoy life. It's too short."
- "God has given us a wonderful thing."
- "We enjoyed surfing your beach."
- "We're not going to tell anyone about this."

More frequently these days, the journal entries are entreaties that the island remain as it is, that the plans of Janie Pace Price, owner of most of the North Carolina portion of Bird Island, be thwarted.

Mrs. Price, a Greensboro resident, is asking the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for permission to build a private system of bridges and causeway more than a mile long from Sunset Beach to Bird Island so she can develop a 15-homesite family compound in the center of the island.

"Please join us in saving Bird Island from development," one visitor pleads. Another, from Europe, says, "I would be happy to know that this island stays this way." A third—another child's entry, complete with smiley-face, says, "Don't

put buildings on this island, because it is beautiful."

They're not alone. The Corps' office in Wilmington has been flooded with letters opposing Price's proposal and expressing concerns for wetlands and wildlife since the agency began seeking public comment on the issue several weeks ago.

Nobody knows Bird Island better, or loves it more, than Frank Nesmith, a Sunset Beach resident who bought waterfront property on the mainland in '58 and left Tabor City to retire here in '78. Frank and his yellow dog Spartina have explored every inch of marsh around the island. He can pilot his small boat effortlessly through a labyrinth of grasses and water that will be bone dry at low tide, all the while pointing out tricolor and Louisiana herons obscured to less observant eyes by nature's camouflage.

It's not Mrs. Price's housing plans that cause Frank a problem; it's the idea of those bridges and causeway slashing the marsh that gives him a fit. He can't for the life of him find a way to justify disturbing that much wetland to serve just 15 houses.

Stopping his boat at just the right point in the marsh, Frank can help you shoot an imaginary chalkline from Bird Island to 40th Street, down the old low causeway, which is mostly gone now, to the burned remains of the bridge which connected Sunset and Bird Islands more

than two decades ago.

This exercise brings into focus the magnitude of Mrs. Price's proposal—not just to rebuild an old, low sand causeway and one-lane wooden bridge, but to put in a higher paved causeway and modern bridge big enough to dwarf the causeway and bridge which connect the mainland and Sunset Beach.

Frank makes a quietly impassioned case for the conservation of Bird Island, bristling at some peoples' suggestion that the Bird Island Preservation Society—of which he is a member—wants to take away Mrs. Price's land or her rights.

He is quick to point out that the society wants nothing more or less than an opportunity to purchase Bird Island if it can raise the money. And, at least for now, Mrs. Price is leaving the door open on that possibility.

Frank's kind of approach is the right one, I think. It is shared by the group's president, Bill Ducker, and by Todd Miller, executive director of the N.C. Coastal Federation, under whose umbrella the society is operating.

They are going at their task in a spirit of cooperation with Mrs. Price, looking forward to the day when they can negotiate with her and her agents toward a solution in which no one gets cheated—out of money, rights, or out of the opportunity to worship in one of God's most special sanctuaries.