

THE BRUNSWICK BEACON

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Repeat Of Prison Cap Is What People Want

Visiting in Brunswick County a few months back, North Carolina Education Superintendent Bruce Etheridge told a political gathering how he tried to make a gift to the state penal system of all the classroom trailers to be replaced by new buildings as the statewide education bond is implemented. It seemed like a sensible way to solve two problems for the price of one.

But the corrections department had no choice but to decline Etheridge's offer. It seems that classroom trailers, while apparently a fitting environment for millions of North Carolina public school students, don't meet the federal government's accommodations standards for people convicted of crimes against the people of North Carolina.

Remember "meals-ready-to-eat"? After Operation Desert Storm ended, vast storehouses of the rations on which American servicemen and servicewomen subsisted were left over. But that kind of food couldn't be used to replace or even augment the diet of penitentiary dwellers. MREs fell short of the federal government's culinary guidelines for prisoners.

Is it any wonder that average citizens are fed up with waste, inequity and downright silliness in government?

Maybe it took a Democratic bloodletting in Raleigh to do it, but N.C. Attorney General Mike Easley has finally filed motions in federal court to dismiss two lawsuits that provoked North Carolina legislators to impose the state's reviled prison cap. Whatever the stimulus, it's about time.

Easley contends the cases should be dismissed because the federal crime bill requires states to operate safe, secure, constitutional prison systems but not to worry about square footage per inmate. He also says he plans to ask the newly Republican-controlled General Assembly to repeal the cap and give more power to the Department of Correction.

It's anybody's guess what might happen in the courts. But there's a good chance a legislature riding the crest of a fresh conservative wave will eagerly take its chances against the feds and repeal the cap.

It's the kind of thing level-headed, law-abiding people asked for all across this country on Nov. 8. Crime bill or no crime bill, the people of North Carolina may lose to the federal government over the prison cap and continue to be forced to open the prison doors every time the inmate population reaches 24,500.

But it's time to stop assuming so and to fight for the rights of prisoners to endure a little hardship—at least as much as our sons and daughters in school and our men and women in uniform have.

GUEST COLUMN

You Decide: Can There Be Free Lunch With Tax Cuts?

BY MIKE WALDEN

The issue of cutting taxes is in the headlines again. Republicans say they will work to reduce federal income tax rates. President Clinton has also gently hinted that he may be looking at tax rate cuts down the road, particularly for the middle class.

There are a number of issues regarding cutting tax rates. One of the most interesting is a leftover issue from the 1980s: can cutting taxes actually be a free lunch in that lower tax rates will cause so much more economic growth that the government actually receives more tax revenues with the lower taxes?

Let's take this issue in steps. First, it's not controversial to think that reducing tax rates will generate more economic growth. If workers and businesses know they will keep more of what they earn, it's likely workers will want to work more hours and businesses will want to sell more products.

Both of these actions will make the economy bigger and increase the tax base for the government. But this generalization works only to a point.

If tax rates were cut so much that defense spending had to be cut below the point where people felt safe, or fewer tax revenues caused less road construction, which inhibited the movement of goods, then lower tax rates could slow down the economy.

For the sake of argument, let's assume that lowering tax rates causes the economy to grow faster. Does this automatically mean that with lower tax rates and a bigger economy, the government will actually collect more tax revenue? Not necessarily.

Up to a point, higher tax rates bring in more revenue to the government, even accounting for the shrinkage in the tax base with the higher rates. But beyond some point, higher tax rates can discourage so much economic activity that raising the rates causes tax revenues to decline.

This was the conclusion of the Laffer curve, but the idea has been in the economics discipline for over 100 years. What is this magical tax rate point above which increasing tax rates is counterproductive because fewer tax revenues flow back to the government?

Obviously this question has been the focus of much study by economists. They have reached the following conclusions:

Tax rates above 70 percent are certainly counterproductive. This means that if the tax rate is above 70 percent, and it is reduced, then the government will actually see tax revenues increase. Since this is a free lunch, it implies there is no reason for government to have tax rates above 70 percent.

Some research has found the magical tax rate point to be 50 percent. This is more controversial because it's not hard for a person's marginal tax rate (the rate paid on the next dollar earned) to reach 50 percent when taxes at all governmental levels are included.

Indeed, the federal income tax changes passed in 1993 pushed many households, including the elderly, into marginal rates higher than 50 percent.

So cutting taxes, if they're above 70 percent and perhaps 50 percent, can be a free lunch in that the economy will expand enough to provide more revenue to the government at the lower rate.

But if tax rates are below 50 percent, cutting rates becomes more problematic because the government likely will lose revenue. At this point, citizens must balance the reduction in government revenues and services against the benefit of leaving more money in private hands and pockets. You decide.

Mike Walden, Ph.D., is a professor at N.C. State University who teaches and writes on economic issues, public policy and personal finance.

On The Road? Try The Golden Rule

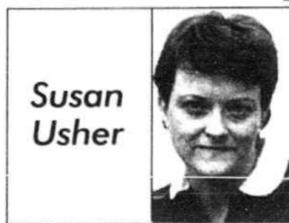
"Over the river and through the woods, to Grandmother's house we go. The horse knows the way to carry the sleigh..."

Horse and sleigh aren't the way we get around anymore, if it ever was in sunny Brunswick County, but we still travel in order to enjoy the holidays with friends and family. A study by journalism students at the University of North Carolina suggests Tar Heel residents who travel for the holidays do most of their going in-state and use the state highway system as opposed to air, train or other options.

Last year, reports the N.C. Division of Motor Vehicles, 28 people died on North Carolina roads over the Thanksgiving holiday and 13 died over the Christmas holidays.

Have I got your attention? I don't want to become a traffic accident statistic and I'm almost certain you don't either. The odds of it happening get higher every year because most of us just don't follow the defensive driving techniques we learned in driver's ed. Our roads are dangerous.

Instead of practicing a fractured



Susan Usher

"do unto others before they do unto you"—the motto of a young friend of mind, why not be more charitable and try the real Golden Rule: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."

Who among us wants to be responsible for the injury or death of another?

Maybe these 1993 statistics will convince you that we should pay more respect to the rules of the road and to fellow drivers:

- 1,384 persons were killed on North Carolina roads and highways in 1993, a 10 percent increase.
- One out of every 18 vehicles licensed in North Carolina was involved in an accident.

- One out of every 15 licensed drivers was involved in an accident.
- 184,489 accidents were reported, an increase of 7 percent from 1992.
- 129,535 persons were injured, up 5 percent from 1992.
- Speeding continues to be the leading violation in fatal accidents.
- In 82 percent of all accidents at least one driver was in violation of a traffic law.
- For every 94 persons injured, one person was killed.
- Thirty percent of all accidents involved only one vehicle.
- Alcohol was a factor in 34.4 percent of fatal accidents and 33.9 percent of persons killed.
- 72 percent of all accidents happen between 7 a.m. and 7 p.m., but only 53 percent of fatal accidents occur during that period.
- Sunday was the lowest accident day with 10 percent of all accidents.
- For motorcyclists, the chance of being killed or seriously injured when involved in a motorcycle accident was approximately 1 out of every 3.
- Thirty-one bicyclists were

killed, a 41 percent increase from 1992.

- An accident was reported every three minutes.
- One person was injured every four minutes.
- One person was killed every six hours.

Need any more convincing? Cigarettes come with warning labels that you can choose to ignore or not. Motor vehicles don't bear such warnings and for good reason. It's not the vehicle that is a menace, but the person driving it.

A motor vehicle, in the hands of a reckless and discourteous operator, can quickly become a lethal weapon. Behind each of those statistics are real people who suffered, and/or lost valuable property as the result of highway accidents. Most of those accidents could have been prevented by people like you and like me.

Got it? Hope you had a happy and accident-free Thanksgiving, and that you'll drive defensively throughout the '94 holiday season and all year round in 1995.



Thanks For Duct Tape, Vise-Grips And WD-40

The Thanksgiving holiday overwhelms me with the urge to give thanks for the many blessings of life.

As usual, I feel that kful for good health, for a well-adjusted (if somewhat warped) family, for a roof over our heads and a modest income (that may someday allow me to trade in my 135,000-mile car before it breaks down on deadline day—hint, hint).

This year, however, I would like to express my deepest appreciation for the great technological innovations that have improved our quality of life.

No, I'm not talking about inventions of obvious significance like the automobile, the telephone, plastics, motion pictures, the computer or cable television.

Nor am I referring to those equally important new products like the "Weed Eater," "Taxi Beads," the "Ginzu" knife, the "Salad Shooter," the "Club" anti-theft device and the "Topsy Tail" hair styler.

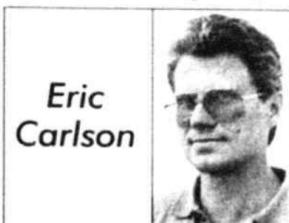
These represent important milestones in human development. But today, I would like to recognize the three greatest inventions in the history of mankind: Duct Tape, Vise-Grips and WD-40.

No home can be considered properly equipped without this holy trinity of household maintenance. There are few repairs that can't be made easier (or at least jury-rigged) by using one of these wonderful tools.

Can you imagine a world without WD-40, the miracle penetrating lubricant and moisture displacer? Everybody uses it for stopping squeaks, freeing sticky door locks and loosening rusty bolts. But there are countless other applications.

I once "repaired" an expensive stereo amplifier with WD-40. This is quite a feat for someone whose knowledge of electronics ranges from "plug it in" to "switch it on."

A friend gave me the classic old amplifier after he bought a nice new one. The only trouble was, it didn't work. Not even after I plugged it in and switched it on.



Eric Carlson

"You probably just need to clean the contacts," he said. I nodded knowingly, without the slightest idea of what that means.

Ignoring the warning about "NO USER SERVICEABLE PARTS," I removed the amplifier's metal housing and set the mass of complicated circuitry on the front porch. I adjusted the garden hose to its most potent spray and gave it all a good cleaning, contacts and all.

After shaking out the excess water, I hosed down innards with an entire can of WD-40 and set the amp in the sun to dry. A few hours later, I plugged it in. I switched it on. And it has worked like a charm ever since.

Vise-Grips are the tool of last resort (short of a hacksaw) for removing stubborn nuts. Particularly after the six flat sides of the nut have been rounded into a swirl of scarred metal by using the wrong sized wrench.

No problem. Just clamp on a set of Vise-Grips. Bash the rugged metal handle with a big hammer and off comes the nut! It ain't pretty, but it works. (Especially with a little WD-40 to loosen things up.)

Vise-Grips once spared me a 20-mile push through the New Mexico wilderness during a cross-country motorcycle trip. I somehow managed to break the gearshift lever and was stranded in the desert with a useless stub of metal protruding from the transmission.

No problem. I just clamped a set of grips on the spindle, creating a handy shift pedal. It worked so well, I rode for another week before replacing it.

Another little-known use for Vise-Grips is to roast peppers. Just

clamp a big set of grips on the stem. This gives you enough distance to hold the pepper safely while scorching the outside skin with a blow torch. (I am not making this up. Ask Lynn.)

And what would we do without Duct Tape, that wonderful silver binding material developed for the heating, ventilation and air-conditioning industry? There is no limit to the possible applications for this king of all adhesive tapes.

Who hasn't seen an entire car window replaced with Duct Tape? Campers should take along Duct Tape to patch a tent, splint a sprained ankle or make a waterproof bandage. I once saw a serviceable canoe made of a wooden frame covered with Duct Tape. Even armed robbers love it for binding and gagging hostages.

One winter I was on a surfing trip to Puerto Rico, where we stayed next door to a cottage full of young Brazilians. They spoke almost no English except a few words they picked up from Frank Zappa records, of which they were great fans.

Paddling out in the morning, you could hear them chatting away in Portuguese. Then, for no apparent reason, some bizarre song lyric would ring out in perfect English:

"Moving to Montana soon..."

Gonna be a dental floss tycoon..."

One of the Brazilians bounced off the reef one day and got a big slice in his board. I arrived just as he was climbing out of the water, expecting to spend the day fixing the ding instead of surfing.

I opened the trunk of our rental car, grabbed a roll of Duct Tape and slapped on a patch that would hold water out until he could make permanent repairs. The Brazilian was awestruck. He examined the results with utter amazement.

That night, after several rounds of pina coloda, he offered to trade me a handful of strange bills for the Duct Tape. In the interest of international relations (and knowing I could get another roll for a couple bucks) I accepted.

Later, I showed one his buddies the money and asked what it was worth. He told me they did not have Duct Tape in Brazil and assured me I had been well paid for it.

"You...have make...a good...business," he said.

So perhaps I will go down in history as the person who introduced this important product to the South American continent. You may even hear people singing songs about me:

"Moving to Sao Paulo soon...
Gonna be the great Duct Tape tycoon..."

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Board Asked To Rethink Position On VFD Support

To the editor:

This letter is to the Brunswick County Commissioners. Last week I read where you appropriated money for different needs in the county. Please rethink the decision to cut out the continuous fund for fire and rescue. We really need the help.

We were completely left out this year. We are having even more fundraisers than usual just to keep operating our departments.

We as firemen give our time all of the time without even getting a thank-you. I ask that when you meet again, please reconsider helping us out this year instead of saying "maybe next year."

Richard Evans
Civietown
EDITOR'S NOTE: Richard Evans is chief of the Civietown Volunteer Fire Department.
(More Letters, Following Page)