

State needs to stand up for its communities

Those who work in health care are in the business of taking care of people. It is an honor to provide that care, and I've been fortunate to serve alongside dedicated colleagues throughout my career.

If you need care, health systems and hospitals across North Carolina are available to you — as are the providers, nurses and team members who comprise them. These professionals dedicate themselves to their communities, assuring access to care, where and when you need it.

Our health systems and hospitals are also transforming to meet important challenges facing health care — challenges which are most significant in rural markets.

North Carolina has the second largest rural population in the United States with over 3 million people living in rural communities. Communities that also have lower incomes, lower job

growth, higher poverty rates and higher health disparities with higher mortality than urban communities.

Vidant Health understands this all too well. We serve 1.4 million people in largely rural eastern North Carolina, one of the most difficult health care markets in the country.

We stand to lose \$40 million as a result of the State Treasurer's proposal to decrease State Health Plan reimbursements to hospitals and providers. Given we are a not-for-profit organization that reinvests our profits back into the communities we serve, this will have a detrimental impact.

Health systems have a duty to care for every patient. As an elected official, the Treasurer has a duty to serve every citizen

COLUMNIST



MICHAEL WALDRUM

of North Carolina. If his proposal is enacted, it will compromise our ability to provide essential services — and people who live in rural markets will be impacted most.

These are difficult issues requiring thoughtful solutions, which should be informed by the facts:

We don't know if the Treasurer's plan will solve the state's liabilities; we do know it will hurt rural communities.

The State Health Plan and Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina (BCBSNC) have a long-standing relationship of more than 25 years.

Past performance audits show the State Health Plan issues are not new.

There has been no public disclosure of what has driven

the liabilities for the State Health Plan, nor the fees paid over those 25 years to BCBSNC to administer it.

BCBSNC has a history of using market position to its own advantage and to the detriment of providers.

A recent American Medical Association study found North Carolinians are in one of the least competitive health insurance markets in the country.

Whether you serve — or are served — by North Carolina health systems and hospitals, I urge you to tell your elected officials these arbitrary cuts are not the right solution. Our representatives need to know you will not stand for changes that are in the best interest of a select few and hurt a majority of our state's residents — especially those living in rural North Carolina.

Mike Waldrum, MD, MSc, MBA, is the Chief Executive Officer of Vidant Health.



Peter Williams

Toyota is a blast from the past

I bought a magical time machine for \$1,000.

That sounds a heck of a lot better than "I bought a 1985 Toyota Camry."

But that is what I did. The situation was I took my Ford Taurus to two mechanics and they couldn't fix the problem. So I borrowed a car, but even family ties only go so far and when I had her car for more than two weeks.

So as I seek out a third car doctor to heal the Ford, I needed something, anything.

Hence the relationship with the car that we now call "Joyce."

I did not come up with the name Joyce. My real human friend Cindy did. She has a car she calls Mildred. If I were to name the Toyota by myself, it would be a word you can't use in polite society, and clearly not in church.

Since cars can't read (at least the 1985 versions), I can say that when it comes to beauty, Joyce — well — Joyce has a nice personality. She has the aerodynamic properties of a brick.

I can say with pride she has four almost new tires and a brand new timing belt.

So for \$1,000 I bought four almost new tires and a timing belt that is also a time machine. It sounds better, don't you think?

When this car was created Ronald Reagan took the oath of office for a second term. Mikhail Gorbachev became the leader of the Soviet Union. Desktop publishing started to be used on a larger scale. British scientists reported the opening of an enormous hole in the earth's ozone layer over Antarctica.

And, drum roll please, Coca-Cola introduced "New Coke."

Joyce has seen it all. In fact one of those stains on the passenger seat may in fact be from New Coke.

All of this will be lost on a younger generation. That's OK.

I have never owned a Toyota before. I always had the imagine of quality associated with the brand. There is an expression called "fit and finish" where if you close the door it has a solid feel to it.

Joyce has none of that. She might have had it once upon a time in her youth, but closing the door with Joyce it's like the rattle of closing a metal garbage can.

Did I mention the four almost new tires? I also think Joyce has a nice personality.

I won't say the radio doesn't work. The radio will work if you like to hear just static.

Did I mention that the heat works? Applause please. The A/C doesn't but that is a non-issue now.

And the engine? The 1985 Toyota Camry is powered by a 95-horsepower engine. That is to say that I don't think you will see me passing you on U.S. 17 unless you are walking or driving a tractor.

On the shift knob there is a thing for "overdrive" which I haven't touched for fear something really bad might happen. I might go "Back To The Future."

Who knows? Maybe something good will happen.

After all, it is a time machine, not a 1985 Toyota Camry.

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Letters to the Editor

Inner Banks Santa was busy this holiday season

Dear Editor,

It is always gratifying to see how the holiday season brings out the best in people, especially those who donate their time and talents to bring a little joy to the less fortunate. I'm thinking of Salvation Army bell ringers who stand outside in the cold to collect spare change from shoppers; I'm thinking of the many church workers who fill food baskets for those who would otherwise go hungry; and I'm also thinking of the many volunteers who don Santa suits and give wide-eyed

little children a knee to sit on. I met one of these Santas this year, a short man with a little belly and a snow-white beard who is perfect for the role. And he lives right here in Hertford's Albemarle Plantation.

Gary Lico is a semi-retired TV executive who decided a couple of years ago that playing Santa Claus was something he would like to do. He took an on-line course through Santa Claus Conservatory to learn the tricks of the trade, like how to do parties for adults or special-needs kids. He then went out and

bought a Santa suit and began marketing himself as the Inner Banks Santa. Before long he found himself in great demand, even in mid-summer when he was asked to play Santa for the Edenton Steamers' Christmas in July event at Hicks Field. In 2017 he posed with little kids and led the crowd in singing Christmas songs, and in 2018 he even threw out the first pitch.

Our Inner Banks Santa was very busy this holiday season. He played Santa at Edenton's tree lighting ceremony and entertained 65 kids at the Ameri-

can Legion's Breakfast with Santa, mentally handicapped adults for Life Incorporated, under-privileged kids at Operation Santa, and blind adults for the Lions Club. He was even seen wandering the streets of Edenton during its Christmas Candlelight Tour. We remain skeptical of rumors that he was seen guiding a sleigh over Hertford rooftops. But then, you never know about the Magic of Christmas.

Claude Milot
Hertford

Truth will never die completely

Dear Editor,

Yes! The economy seems to be "booming," unemployment is down, and apparently jobs are plentiful. Trump, of course, takes personal credit for all of this.

I give him full credit, also, for the slow death of truth in

America. It's well known that Trump lies from morning to night and from night to morning. His "base" (including Fox News) admires his perpetual untruthfulness. They can no longer tell the truth from a lie. This is what got him elected in 2016.

But all of Trump's lies, exaggerations, and virulent insults are ruining America. The moral conscience of America is weakening day by day, bit by bit. If "the truth shall make (us) free," untruth imprisons us in our own illusions and falsehoods, and this is precisely what

Trump and his lackeys want. But truth can never die completely, for all of Trump's attempts to kill it. Truth comes from God, and IS God. Even Trump isn't greater than God.

Jerry Gill
Hertford

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