

Opinions

Guest Column

Education the key

By AARON J. JOHNSON

The men and women sent to the state's prisons share a common trait - their lack of education. In 1990, the courts sent 24,573 offenders to prison. Of that number, 58 percent did not test at an eighth grade level and 95 percent did not test at a twelfth grade level.

Providing these people an education may be a key in their change from a life of crime to a successful life. Education is a tool that can help every man and woman, even a prison inmate, improve themselves.

I recently attended ceremonies honoring inmates who received college degrees. In the first graduation ceremony at the Harnett Correctional Institution in Lillington, 11 men received Bachelor of Science degrees in Business Management. At the North Carolina Correctional Institution for Women in Raleigh, three women received Bachelor of Arts degrees in Behavioral Science and 10 received Associate degrees.

These 24 inmates are all graduates of Shaw University of Raleigh. Shaw began offering college courses to inmates in 1985. Shaw now offers courses to inmates at Central Prison, North Carolina Correctional Institution for Women, and Eastern and Harnett Correctional Institutions.

In addition to the programs at Shaw, inmates have also been able to take college courses through the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill. The College Education program provides inmates with classroom and television courses. Inmates at the Orange Correctional Center may participate in the Econo-College program which provides classes at the prison or allows qualified inmates into study programs at UNC-CH, North Carolina Central University, East Carolina University, or Durham Technical Community College.

College coursework for inmates may be funded through federal PELL grants, need-based assistance sought by the student.

The state community college system provides inmates education opportunities in academics and job training. Last year 2,336 inmates participated in academic courses and 2,178 took part in vocational programs monthly. Fifty of the state's community colleges provide education programs in 89 of the state's 91 prisons.

Education programs do seem to be having an impact. The rate of reincarceration of inmates who have gone through prison education programs is lower than the rate for the overall prison population.

Certainly, society intends to punish those who break our laws by sending them to prison. However, rehabilitation must also be a part of that equation. When and offender emerges from prison after completing his sentence, what chance does he have to succeed without having developed new skills? With increasing admissions and limited prison space reducing the amount of time offenders are serving and the cost of incarceration reaching \$50 per inmate per day, education is a worthwhile investment.

Aaron J. Johnson is secretary of the North Carolina Department of Corrections.

Editorial

US Senate

Major disappointment

The U.S. public is being sold the bill of goods that members of the U.S. Senate are under-paid. By voting themselves a \$22,500 raise, members of this hallowed house have agreed to take no more outside stipends (kick-backs) for appearing before special interest groups.

The pay raise is a kick in the pants for many American families. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, 65% of workers earn less than \$22,500 a year; 33% earn between \$22,500 and \$74,999; and only 2% above \$75,000.

With the \$22,500 raise, members of the Senate now get \$125,100 a year in salary. Presumably, the idea of the pay raise was to keep the senators at work-instead of making meetings for money- and insure a better grade of government.

The prime problem of the pay raise, other than being a slap in the face of hard-working families, is that a good portion of the upper house is overpaid at \$22,500-much less \$125,100!

Far more sensible is some sort of sliding scale that would award pay on the basis of performance. The Senate, or course, would never agree to this. For many it would mean a paycheck below the poverty level.

-The Hickory News

Cartoonitorial



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Let's vote the rascals out

Probably 75 percent of the mail that comes across my desk goes immediately into the trash can. Usually, if it doesn't apply to Kings Mountain or the area, we don't use it.

Once in a while, though, a piece of mail that has absolutely nothing to do with KM just catches the eye. Sometimes I read it and then throw it away. And sometimes I just can't seem to part with it without passing at least part of it on to the readers.

Last week, a piece of mail caught my eye. A man named Jack Gargan wrote requesting the paper give him the space for a small advertisement recruiting men and women who love the good ole USA, and who have "integrity, common sense and backbone" to run for Congress. The only requirements he asked is that they vote to limit congressional terms, roll back the pay raise, sharply reduce congressional staff and perks, eliminate deficit spending and initiate meaningful election reform.

Frankly, we can't give him the advertising space, but I like some of his ideas. I especially like the name of his organization, T.H.R.O., which is an acronym for Throw the Hypocritical Rascals OUT!

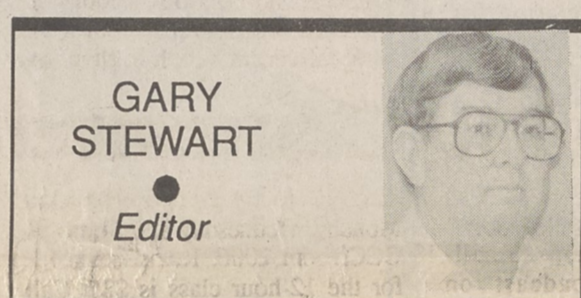
Gargan, a 60-year-old retired financial planner, explained that he had borrowed \$45,000 from his retirement savings to place full-page ads in major newspapers across the nation last summer calling for the ouster of all incumbent politicians. "I'm mad as hell, and I'm not going to take it anymore," he screamed in bold print. He enumerated a long list of congressional misdeeds and abuses of power and asked for contributions from those who felt the same way. Time magazine was so impressed with his efforts that it named him its "Hero of the Week."

Gargan's effort succeeded in ousting only 16 incumbents, but he said more than 80 congressmen were unopposed and most of the rest had only token opposition. "You can't throw 'em out if they don't have anyone running against 'em," he said.

Gargan said his effort is truly non-partisan. "We don't care if the applicant is a Democrat, Republican or Independent. Our committee will endorse the best qualified challenger in each primary and/or runoff election."

MORE POLITICIANS FULL OF PORK - While I sometimes feel like Gargan and take the attitude "just vote 'em all out," I can say that one incumbent who deserves our support is Cass Ballenger of Hickory, our 10th District Congressman.

Ballenger was one of just seven who had the guts to vote against the most recent 5-cents gas tax increase



GARY STEWART
Editor

bill which was approved by the House Committee on Public Works and Transportation. The legislation, which outlines national transportation spending through 1996, would raise more than \$30 billion. Next year alone, the bill would raise more than \$6 billion.

"I strongly oppose the new gas tax," Ballenger said. "It is unfair to expect working Americans to pay yet another tax simply because we don't have the courage in Washington to control federal spending."

"You have to remember that Congress just raised the gas tax by a nickel last year," he added. "I opposed that tax for the same reason I oppose this tax. The people who can least afford the tax will be hit the hardest."

"Sadly the word is that the nickel tax in this bill may just be the beginning," he added. "The folks over in the House Ways and Means Committee would like to see that nickel tax bumped up to 10, maybe 15 cents per gallon."

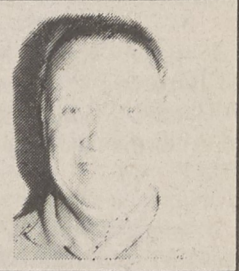
"In addition, this bill is stuffed full of special pork projects that do not necessarily have the blessings of state and local transportation officials. This is because many times projects are not pushed through Congress on merit but instead on how much political mileage they give politicians back home."

Ballenger said the Democratic leadership in the House is calling the tax increase "A Nickel for America." However, he said, "it's a nickel for the politicians."

"This bill is the perfect example of what is wrong with the United States Congress," Ballenger said. "The President asked Congress to spend \$103 billion on transportation over the next five years. Congress turns around with a \$153 billion spending bill and expects the taxpayer to pay the tab through a new tax. At some point, Congress is going to have to change the way it does business."

The transportation bill will come before the full House next week for a vote. If passed, the measure must be reconciled with the Senate bill through a conference committee.

JIM HEFFNER
Columnist



Don't look Ethel!

There is a phenomenon occurring right now that might get pretty interesting. People are starting to shed their clothes and run around in public. I guess it's the heat.

I've read or heard about three incidents in the past week.

Over in Charlotte, word has it that a voluptuous woman has been jogging around different neighborhoods wearing a G-string and a big smile. The cops are having a tough time finding her because she switches jogging trails from time to time. I'm not too sure they are really interested in finding her, except maybe to get a good look.

A Raleigh man, R.A. Brown, pleaded guilty last week to running into a police officer after a Duke-State basketball game last winter. The policeman suffered a broken leg. Seems a group of students, after N.C. State defeated Duke, ran into one of the main streets in Raleigh in various states of undress.

The policeman commented, in an interview, "I was struck by a large-statured man with no clothes on." I'll leave that comment to the readers for interpretation.

A couple of weeks back a man and a well-endowed young lady walked into a convenience store in South Carolina. Before they left, the man had rifled the cash register and the beer cooler. All this happened while the woman browsed around the store in her birthday suit. The manager didn't even know he'd lost anything, not having seen the man at all.

I wonder if this is a trend. Merchants at the beaches are reporting an increase in the sale of those thong and G-string bathing suits. I really don't mind seeing women wear those things, but men ought to leave them alone.

All of this nudity reminds me of when Lady Godiva took her ride through Coventry, sans clothing (yaked). The men of the village were told not to look at her. The court decreed that any male caught looking would have his eyes gouged out. As it happened there were two stablehands on the route, and one of them eased over to the window to have a peek. "You know the rules, George," his co-worker reminded him. "Do you want to be blinded?"

"Say what you will, Alvin," said George, "but I'm gonna risk one eye."

I always felt like the airlines could stop hi-jackers by making everyone fly in the nude. I even went so far as to suggest it to a large airline, but they declined. I still say it will work.

Remember streaking? For a while there, people were running around all over the place without clothes. No gathering was sacred. A streaker even ran across the stage while the Academy Awards television show was in progress.

As the New York Yankees were going through spring training drills in Ft. Lauderdale one year, a streaker ran past several of the players, including Yogi Berra, as they made their way from the practice field to the club house. Later, Mickey Mantle asked Berra, "was it a man or a woman, Yogi?"

"I couldn't tell," said Berra, "they didn't have any clothes on."

I guess some folks just can't help themselves, they've just got to strip. It'll be interesting to see who will be the next to grin and bare it.

GREASE - I know most of you are familiar with that grouping of fish camps south of Gastonia. I've tried them all and the food is tasty at most of them.

I'm a little more interested in health than taste these days and I've done a little research. I will not publish the names of the restaurants here...yet, but I will tell you that, near as I can figure, there's only one fish camp down there that uses anything but lard in which to fry their fish. Lard is loaded with cholesterol.

The fish camp I have in mind uses the best oil, healthwise, and their prices are competitive.

My advice is, before you eat in any restaurant, find out what they use for cooking, especially fried dishes.

Senate pay

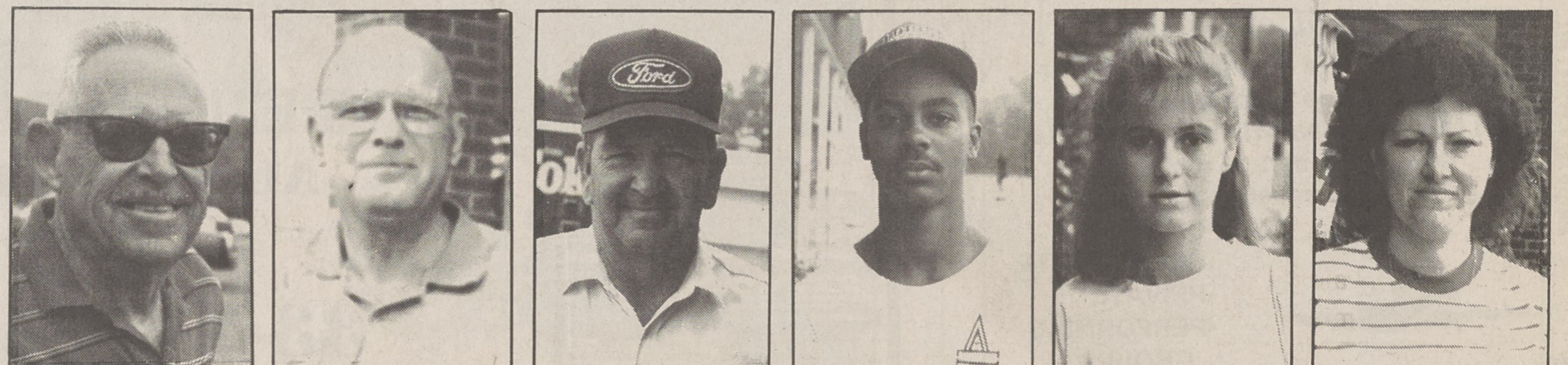
Senate pay increase beginning in 1975 when pay was \$42,500:

1975: to \$44,600	1985: to \$75,100
1977: to \$57,500	1987: to \$89,500
1979: to \$60,663	1990: to \$98,400
1983: to \$69,800	(plus inflation)
1984: to \$72,600	1991: \$101,900 to \$125,100

Source: Senate Library

Sidewalk Survey

Do you think school bus drivers should take drug tests?



- M.L. Williams**
Yes. I think all school drivers should. We don't want kids riding with someone who is taking drugs at all.
- Harold Whitener**
Yes, because of the recent serious accident resulting in the death of children.
- Clarence Earle**
Yes. I think they ought to because there are too many people on them. There's a lot of children.
- Ron Adams**
Yes, it would be safer for the kids. If they refuse to take a test, they shouldn't be able to drive.
- Monika McBee**
Yes, because parents are trusting bus drivers with their children's lives.
- Debbie Melton**
Yes. I think they all should because children's lives are at risk on the school bus.

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