

Opinions

Pictorial Editorial

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 IS AUTHORIZED TO ENFORCE INDEFINITE SUSPENSION IMMEDIATELY.



Kings Mountain citizens turned out in record numbers Tuesday to exercise one of their most basic rights - voting. Over 68 percent of the county's registered voters took part in the General Election and helped elect Democrat Bill Clinton President of the United States.

Photo by Jeff Grigg

BOB McRAE

Superintendent
 Kings Mountain Schools



It's time for work

Now that the election is over, it is time to plan for working with the candidates who were selected. This has implications at each of three levels - federal, state, and county. Most of the work for local school systems involves the state and the county. In today's column I want to share with you what I think will be some issues related to schools which elected state legislators will have to confront early in the next year. In my next column I will focus on the issues with a more local flavor.

At the state level one of the most important decisions will be whether or not to have a referendum on making the state superintendency an appointed position. Currently, this position is elected by the people. To change an appointed position would require a constitutional amendment, and that would take a popular vote. Both of the major gubernatorial candidates were on record as favoring an appointed position. Who would make the appointment is also up for debate. Most plans favor either the governor or the state Board of Education making the appointment.

The concept behind the need for a change is important. Consensus seems to be that there is a need to make the primary voice for education less of a political one. Hopefully, with the change, decisions for children would be made more for them and less on the winds of the current political climate regardless of who might be in power. Most of the recent educational improvement plans developed by various groups in our state and most of the major media members have endorsed such a change. To date the legislature has not tackled the issue. Keep attuned to this very important matter.

Another important issue of statewide interest is the future of the Basic Education Plan. This program was begun in the mid 1980's in an effort to insure that every student in North Carolina would have a common set of experiences in school, we have been able to expand our programs in the cultural arts, physical education, and support areas such as counseling. It has also provided additional funds for items such as instructional supplies and equipment. Opponents of the program say it focuses too much on matters outside of the basics and that decisions on how to spend the large amount of dollars required for the program should be reserved more for the local units. If a system decided that lowering class size is more important than expanding its cultural arts program, it could be free to do so.

Such a discussion leads to the mention of another matter which will receive much debate, that of how much flexibility should be given to local systems to make decisions for themselves. There has been a great deal of debate regarding this matter previously. However, efforts at giving systems true flexibility have been slow to move forward. The need to lobby for greater flexibility was clearly supported locally at our education summit last June.

The General Assembly will also have to face the issue of salaries for public school employees. The last two years have produced little improvement due to the lack of growth in revenues in the state. Teachers have had to wait patiently for increases, many of which have been quite small. This issue will be on the table early. The dilemma that still exists is in regards to how to provide better salaries for state employees in a time when revenue growth is very small. The debate will also focus on the question of which is more preferable, across the board raises or raises based on some measure of performance.

An issue to be addressed which doesn't affect many systems but does affect us in the issue of how to deal with out-of-state students who come to school in North Carolina. In the past school systems receive funding from the state for these out-of-state students. A study committee is to report back to the General Assembly regarding the future of this practice. If these students, and we have over 20 of them in our system, have to pay tuition equal to the state's per pupil allotment, most of them, and perhaps all of them, will not be able to afford to attend school here. The bill could be between two and four thousand dollars per year.

As usual, it will be an extremely important year for the schools when the General Assembly convenes. I encourage you to keep abreast of the proceedings. Nothing will assist public education in achieving what it needs more than citizen support. Our legislative delegation needs to hear from our school community. I plan to communicate with them frequently and hope you will consider doing the same.

Hicks should stay

The city of Gastonia is about to make what I consider a serious error.

The new city council, swept into office by voters who felt the old council was completely out of touch with reality, is about to "retire" long-time public servant Gary Hicks.

Hicks has devoted most of his adult working years to the city, starting in the planning department before taking over as city manager 19 years ago. He has 25 years service all told.

When he took the job, I told Gary that the attrition rate among city managers is 100 per cent. I was right, but it took 19 years to catch up to him.

The disputes that are driving the Hicks retirement don't really matter at this point. The damage is already done. The new council will have trouble agreeing on anybody to manage the city except themselves.

One of the newly-elected members hasn't been allowed to take his seat, while the guy he defeated has his claws sunk into the cushion and is hanging on for dear life. Ironically, the guy who is keeping the seat warm is the one the voters wanted most to be rid of in my opinion.

I wonder if anybody has thought about challenging anything he votes on in court?

The guy who has been denied his seat is probably the one responsible for Hicks' retirement. He has criticized the city manager and linked him to a political machine that exists in his mind only.

Gary Hicks has been city manager for 19 years. He has been able to work, harmoniously, with nine different city councils. Obviously his work record is solid, else he wouldn't have lasted so long in such a high profile job.

I doubt there is a city manager anywhere in the country who has more than 19 years on the job in a city the size of Gastonia.

Gary Hicks is an able administrator, and excellent manager of people, an expert in the running of city business and an all around personable guy. He is a good family man and a faithful friend. Gary is a credit to his community, and I have yet to find anyone, save one person, who has a harsh word to say about him.

IN THE NEWS - With all the election coverage, sometimes it's hard to find anything interesting in the news these days, but I have uncovered a few choice tidbits.

I am amazed that some people can find so many useless ways to spend their time.

There's a whacko organization out there somewhere called Worldwatch Institute, and they have issued a report that tells us, "with the demise of the nuclear threat, population growth is now the leading threat to our future."

I guess what that means is, if we want to control the population growth, we ought to go back to stockpiling nuclear weapons and encourage Russia to do the same.

The Institute lists among "negative world indicators," rain forest depletion and disappearing bird species.

I love birds. I feed them year round; song birds, finches, humming birds when they're here, etc., but I fail to see how a disappearing species would affect me negatively. Frankly, I'd like to be rid of starlings, grackles and cow birds.

Don't you get a little tired of those environmental bird brains talking about rain forests? I'd be willing to bet 90 per cent of them have never seen a rain forest and 50 per cent can't even point you in the right direction should you choose to find one.

TURNABOUT - A few months ago, the Levi Strauss & Co. decided to cease donating money to the Boy Scouts of America, because that organization refuses to admit homosexual scoutmasters and scouts into their ranks.

It appears the jeans maker has heard from an outraged public, as they have, oh so quietly, withdrawn their dictum and have resumed financial support of the scouts.

SENSITIVITY INDEX - Dave Dravecky, the young southpaw pitcher who lost his arm to cancer, recently wrote an article for a national magazine. He stated, in the piece, that he took pleasure from watching his daughter down the aisle at her wedding and from watching his son play sports. Now that's a pretty innocent statement isn't it?

Sure enough, a letter poured in from all over. A Miss Yvonne Marie Hicks wrote: "I hope he'll be able to attend his son's wedding and watch his daughter play sports. Here's hoping he becomes enlightened about the pain sexism causes."

I think I'm going to throw up.

Our View

Slow down prison system's revolving door

Much has been said and written about prison reform in recent years and that's good, but it is time the North Carolina State Legislature took a look at sentencing and parole guidelines.

A man in Wilmington, N.C. was recently convicted of raping a twenty-nine-year-old mother of two, then beating her to death with a stick.

As the rapist/murderer begins serving his time in prison it is important to note that the murder conviction will not be the crime that keeps him in prison the longest.

A fallacy of the North Carolina justice system is that rapists can be imprisoned much longer than those convicted of second degree murder.

In the Wilmington case the perpetrator was originally charged with first degree murder and first degree rape, but plea-bargained to second degree murder and no contest to the rape charge. He received life for the murder and 40 years for the rape. That

means he will be eligible for parole after 10 years for the murder and 16-20 years for the rape.

It is indeed difficult to find the rationale behind that development, and prison officials cannot explain why such a discrepancy exists.

We find it hard to understand why a criminal is eligible for parole in 10 years for murder, but 16 to 20 for rape. Both are horrible acts, of course, but somehow the sentences for these crimes seem skewed.

We have learned that a state committee is looking into ways and means to revamp the state's sentencing laws. The N.C. Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission will present a new package of sentencing guidelines to the General Assembly early next year.

The legislature would do well to act on these regulations as soon as possible so that the revolving door in the state prison system can be slowed a little.

KM United Fund needs your support

Kings Mountain residents are known for their friendliness and their willingness to share with those who are less fortunate.

It is that time of year again to display that generosity.

The local United Way campaign kicked off last month with an ambitious goal of \$121,500. They are well under way and have achieved about 20 percent of the goal already.

Sixteen area agencies will benefit from the drive that ends on December 4.

This is your government at work

C.D. Barrett, Jr., of Wilson, N.C. is a tree farmer. He also has the reputation of being a conservationist and a good steward of the land he owns. He is a member of the N.C. Forestry Association and has served on its board of directors. In 1989, Barrett was honored as North Carolina's tree farmer of the year.

Mr. Barrett has gone to extensive lengths to make his 250 acres a symbol of good stewardship. To promote wildlife, he has planted sawtooth oaks, special grasses and other annual and perennial wildlife foods. He built a large fish pond, and planted chestnut, persimmon and apple trees, all for the feeding and protection of wildlife.

Mr. Barrett, though, has become a frustrated man.

A few months ago, the state hosted a group of extension agents from all over the U.S. and the group toured Barrett's farm, because it was a good example of a timber operation that has been peacefully merged with the environment.

During the tour, one of the agents noticed a longleaf pine with a red-cockaded woodpecker entrance hole. The N.C. Forest Service was notified and the tree duly noted.

The red-cockaded woodpecker is an endangered species, and, though the N.C. Forest Service, the N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, all agree the bird or birds

are long gone, Barrett cannot sell mature timber on the 40 acres of his property surrounding the single longleaf pine. Timber buyers will not cut trees in the area because they are afraid of how the Fish and Wildlife Service will interpret the law.

The Wildlife Commission has notified the Fish and Wildlife Service that the birds are nowhere to be found and the FWS says that's good enough for them. They say the Wildlife Commission should put a letter in the Barrett file to clear the matter up. However, to officially remove the tree's designation, Fish and Wildlife will have to conduct an onsite inspection. The trouble is they don't have the manpower to, "Come down there and correct such a simple matter."

Meanwhile Mr. Barrett is slowly but surely going broke, because he cannot sell his timber.

This is an excellent example of government in action. Let's all do our best to push this drive over the top at the earliest possible date.

Herald Letter Policy

All letters should be typed and double spaced, if possible, and signed in ink. If not, write them clearly and sign them in ink. Unsigned letters will not be published.

Mail all letters to The Editor, P.O. Box 769, Kings Mountain, N.C. 28086. Hand-delivered letters will not be accepted.

Now, before the letters and calls begin, that was a joke!

Seriously, Ross Perot did this nation a tremendous favor by running for President. He opened some eyes to some very serious issues.

Here's hoping he keeps his United We Stand organization intact. He could be a government watchdog like we've never seen before.

A 'Beary' good deed by Telephone Pioneers

Telephone Pioneers of America will celebrate Hug-a-Bear Sunday Nov. 8, coordinating public presentations of the handmade bears to local agencies dealing with traumatized children.

In Cleveland County, the Foothills Council has scheduled a Hug-a-Bear presentation at the Children's Shelter in Lattimore Monday at 4 p.m. The Foothills Council also provides volunteer support to other community causes, such as literacy and environmental programs and assistance to the mentally and physically handicapped.

Pioneers have distributed more than 700,000 bears since the program began in 1979 in a pediatrics ward in South Dakota.

DON'T FORGET TO ENTER PHOTO CONTEST - Don't forget to enter your photos of President Bush's visit in the President's Photo Contest. Deadline is November 20.

Entries are trickling in; so, if you've got a good picture get it on down here. It could be the winner. First prize is \$50, second prize \$30, and third prize \$20, compliments of His Honor the Mayor, Scott Neisler.

GARY STEWART
 Editor

And, who knows, if Clinton doesn't live up to his promises, in four years we could be the boss and call him Ross.

A DESERVING WINNER - John Bunch is an avid sports fan.

The Kings Mountain High School senior plays on the Mountaineer baseball team, and he loves to watch football. He keeps up with all the area high school and college teams.

He has been entering the Herald's football contest for four years and has come close to winning many times.

Two weeks ago he finally won the \$100 prize. Last week, he did it again.

In over 20 years of checking football contests, I believe this was the first time I had checked a back-to-back winner. John hit 17 of 20 winners last week after hitting 18 of 20 the week before. Maybe I should get him to pick for me in my contest with Bullet Bob Hayes and Big D Austin.

Congratulations, John! Keep picking. You could score a hat trick this year.

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