

Opinions

Your Right To Say It

A busy session

The 1993 session of the General Assembly will be one of activism, new faces, and old battles waged anew. With Jim Hunt back in the Governor's Mansion, the legislature will have a strong leader of the majority party to contend with, as well as a significant number of new members. Re-elected Speaker of the House Dan Blue of Raleigh says that 1993 will be a year in which legislators can afford to pursue new initiatives in education and environmental protection. Other leaders say the General Assembly will likely pass some form of health care reform.

I doubt it. Legislators will be (and should be) gun shy about new spending programs. The fiscal turmoil of the past couple of years has been instructive. The state is still over-extended, dangerously so if the economy slows down again.

So where will the action be next year? I suspect that governmental reform ideas such as those proposed by Democratic Sen. Howard Lee of Chapel Hill will be an important topic during the session. Lee would re-organize the state government to operate in a more logical and effective manner, including in a "balance of powers" package such as veto for the governor, making more state offices appointed rather than elected, and changing the length and maximum number of legislative terms.

You'll hear a lot about term limits in the coming months. An unfamiliar assortment of conservatives, populists, Republicans, Democrats, and independents favor limiting both Congressional and legislative terms. Polls show huge majorities of voters in favor of the idea. And the results or recent elections around the country will convince many term-limit holdouts (like me) that even in a year of scandal, mismanagement, and incompetent governance, most incumbents face no real risk of defeat.

Isn't that just the democratic process in action? Hardly. The perks of incumbency - free mailings, burgeoning staff, easy access to campaign contributions, easy access to broadcast media, etc. - have stacked the electoral deck in favor of incumbents. "Congress has become a semi-permanent elite that is out of touch with ordinary people," says Palmer Stacy, president of a Raleigh-based organization, We The People, lobbying for term limits around the country. I asked Stacy, a former aide to Sen. John East, why it wouldn't be better just to take away incumbents' perks, thus making the playing field more level. "That would be even harder to do than term limits," he says.

Stacy would like to make North Carolina a test case for how to pass term limits in a state where it's hard to place initiatives on the ballot. As is, all of the action on term limits has so far occurred in easy-initiative states, beginning with Colorado in 1990 and spreading to 14 other states in 1992.

The case for legislative term limits isn't quite as easy to see as the one for Congressional term limits, because legislators do not enjoy the same powers and advantages as Congressional incumbents. Nevertheless, there's an argument to be made. Voters obviously have an incentive to seek a thrifty, contemplative, and restrained legislature which spends state money prudently and resists the temptation to over-regulate the actions of citizens. At the same time, however, voters have a parochial interest in electing legislators from their own districts who have seniority and the pull to "bring home the bacon."

There is a conflict, in other words, between what voters say they want and the votes they cast. This is not necessarily hypocritical, merely a natural result of a process which creates at best a rough approximation of public opinion. In an election in which voters enjoy perfect information about every candidate, plenty of time to decide, and detailed knowledge about the issues facing the state, the result will reflect the true sentiments of the public. Until such an election is held, however, we can justifiably question whether the public is well served by the current process and whether safeguards should be added to ensure the outcome voters generally seek - which is, of course, the ultimate purpose of democracy.

In any event, term limits and other procedural changes in North Carolina government will claim a big share of the spotlight next year. Senate President Pro Tem Marc Basnight of Manteo favors term limits, as do some other notable Democratic and Republican lawmakers. The gubernatorial veto continues to gain support, and Hunt's election creates a new opportunity to pass it. Business and education groups are also pushing the idea of an appointed school superintendent once again, and perhaps legislators will see the logic of applying the argument to other Council of State positions as well.

The best thing about procedural reforms is that they don't cost very much.

John Hood,
Columnist, John Locke Foundation, Raleigh

Students write to the President

Students in Ms. Bridges' first grade class at North Elementary School wrote the following letters of advice to President Clinton:

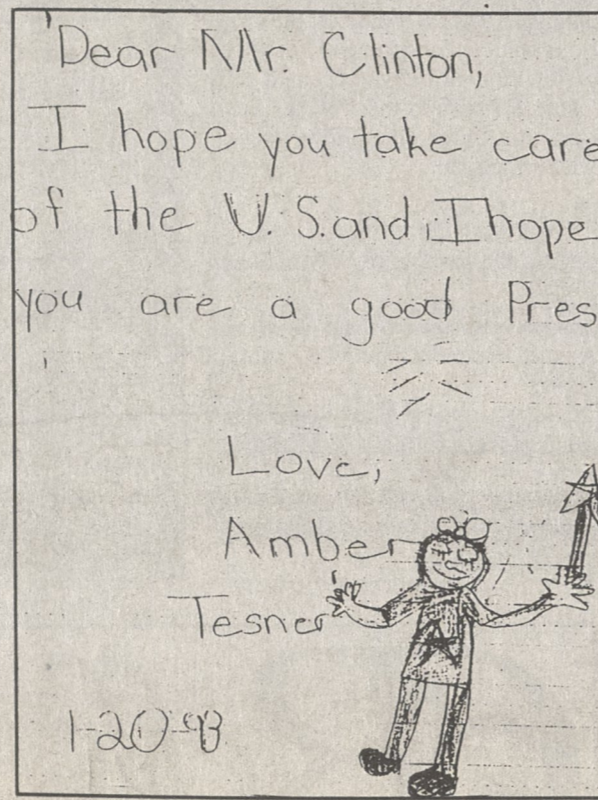
Dear President Clinton:
I hope you will be a good President.
Good luck.
Will you help the environment?
Love, Harrison Bumgardner

Dear President Clinton:
I'm glad that you've been chosen. I hope that Chelsea likes her new school too. I hope your mom is proud of you too. I know that you will take care of the world too. I'm glad for Chelsea. I know that she loves you too. I like your family to.
Love, Jacky Hagner

Dear President Clinton
I like what you said. It was good. I bet your daughter is happy! Did you like saying that?
Love, Mary Malaythong

Dear President Clinton:
I think you should help the environment by picking up trash.
How is Chelsea's school?
I am glad you are president.
Love, Sam McGinnis

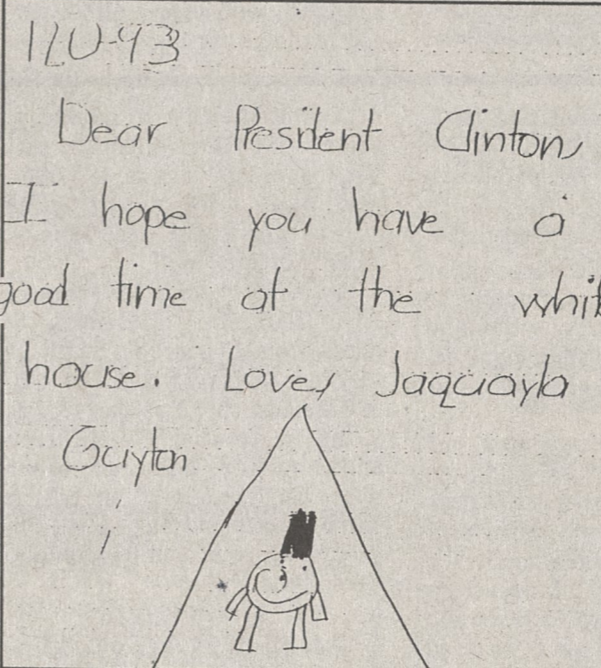
Dear Mr. Clinton,
I hope you take care of the U.S. and I hope you are a good Pres.
Love,
Amber Tesner
1-20-93



Dear Mr. Clinton:
I hope you take care of the U.S. and I hope you are a good President.
Love, Amber Tesner

Dear Mr. President:
I like your speech. Will you help the environment look good?
I hope you will be a good President.
I hope you will try to help the poor get food.
Love, Elizabeth Robbins

120-93
Dear President Clinton
I hope you have a good time at the white house.
Love, Jaquayla Guyton



Dear President:
I like your daughter Chelsea and you too.
Love, Kristin Price

Dear President Clinton:
I hope Chelsea will have a good time.
Love, Josh Pruitt

Dear Mr. President:
Break a leg!
Good luck!
Please help people get jobs.
Love, Lorie

Dear President Clinton:
I love you, Mr. President.
Love, Dennis Moore

Dear President Clinton:
You are the nicest President.
Break a leg, Chelsea. How is your new school?
Love, Shontay Strickland

Dear Mr. President:
Help the environment. I hope you are the President again
Love, Chad Schott

Dear President Clinton:
How is her new school? Help the Army to get people in Africa food.
Love, Dymeria Bigger

Dear President Clinton:
I hope Chelsea will have fun. Did you really promise to us that you will be a good President?
Love, Sara Boone

Dear Mr. Clinton:
I hope you'll be a good President for us and we hope you'll be a nice President for us too. And can you be nice to me?
Love, Tranou Thommovorgsa

Dear President Clinton:
I hope you have a good time at the White House.
Love, Jaquayla Guyton

Dear Mr. President:
I liked your speech.
I think your daughter is pretty.
Love, Holly Courson

Dear Mr. President:
How is your Chelsea doing? Do you like your home?
Love Jeremiah D. Adams

Dear President Clinton and Chelsea:
I like you. I know you are having fun.
Love, Josh Eppers

Dear Chelsea:
I am glad that your dad is the President. I hope that you like your school too.
Love, Jacky Hagner

Dear President Clinton and Chelsea,
I like you.
I know you are having fun.
Love, Josh Eppers

Say, it ain't 'Zoe'

I've been paying close attention to the news this week, this being the first week of the Clinton presidency, and several items caught my eye. President Clinton, of course, cannot be faulted with all the bad news, just as he isn't responsible for everything good that happened, assuming anything good did happen.

Much has been made of all the promises the Clinton team made during the campaign. I've heard two radio stations talk about the breaking of promise number 18 or promise number 44, ad nauseum.

I suppose the most publicized item concerning the new administration has been the demise of the Attorney General nomination.

Zoe Baird withdrew before she was rejected for that high office. She exhibited good judgment by quitting, or being fired, before the vote got to the full senate, assuming it would have ever made it out of committee.

Baird hired illegal aliens as servants, knowing they were illegal and knowing she was breaking the law. To top that off she didn't pay their social security taxes, another violation of the law. She at first invoked motherhood as her excuse, then ended up blaming the whole thing on her husband.

We are well rid of Zoe Baird. I wonder what this says about the other Clinton nominations? Did his team take enough time to screen candidates or did they just submit the names of the first wild-eyed radicals that popped into their alleged minds? Only time will tell.



Remember the Exxon Valdez? Two tankers have spilled more oil in the past couple of weeks in different parts of the world, and there has been a marked absence of screaming by the doomsday people.

I am deprived. So far I haven't seen an Elvis stamp. Will they go the way of the Kennedy half-dollar? This country stopped using the half-dollar as legal tender when they started producing the Kennedy half. There are billions of them stowed away by misguided people who think they're gaining in value, and most of them are worth exactly fifty cents.

I've heard three sports announcers refer to Clemson University as Clemzon this week I wonder why they don't call Charles Manson, Manzon? I guess most of those people are graduates of Zouthern Cal or Zyracuse. It's enough to drive a person crazy.

There was one item for the Sensitivity Index. James Smith, of the Southern Baptist Convention complained because the Budweiser Clydesdales appeared in the inaugural parade. Smith described their appearance as "overkill," because of their connection with a beer

manufacturer. If you've ever seen those magnificent animals, you might think Smith was guilty of overkill. Please, if you write me, use an Elvis stamp.

I was disappointed with Senator Orrin Hatch, who, in a headlong dash to appease those who criticized him for his tough questioning of Anita Hill, described Baird's lawbreaking as "minor."

The standard was set years ago. Attorneys General must be squeaky clean.

Now the new president has removed many abortion restrictions. This will ensure that more federal money will be spent on abortions. I thought he was going to control inflation. Abortion, to me, is still murder.

There were lots of stories about teens and guns this week. Over in the world class city a student was relieved of his nine millimeter pistol. He says he brought it to school for protection. The police in a neighboring town stopped a car load of cruising teens and found a small arsenal in their auto.

The most shocking story was the one out of Lorain, Ohio, where two junior high students admitted to concocting a plot to murder one of their teachers.

Is it time for police to start arresting parents? They are responsible for their children after all. Certainly drastic steps are going to have to be taken at some point.

Can anyone tell me why prices go up when a drug is approved for use in this country? Medicines that are prescribed for years in Europe, quadruple in price when they come to America.

Worth Repeating....

By Gary Stewart, Editor

A lot of Southerners, including many from Cleveland County, were in Washington, DC for the inauguration of President Clinton and Vice-President Gore. They're the first all-Southern President and Veep since anybody living today can remember.

Before leaving Arkansas and Tennessee, they circulated these instructions to their citizens who were planning to attend the inauguration:

Before leaving for Washington clean red mud from windshields and remove hog and chicken feed from pickup bed.

Any cardboard box can be made to look like a suitcase if brown shoe polish is smoothly applied. Boxes must have tops, but no ropes. When a few miles out of Arkansas or Tennessee, remove overalls and brogans and put them in your box. Change to your Sunday suit, clean shirt and good shoes (wear socks!).

Limit occupancy of your car or pickup to a reasonable number of riders. It looks country to overload a vehicle.

Those going on their tractors should leave three weeks early. Remember to drive on the right side of the road at all times, except when passing an older tractor or buddy on a wagon.

Enroute always buy a full tank of gas. A dollar's worth at a time requires too many gas stops.

On arrival in Washington immediately get settled in a tourist or boarding house. If they don't feed, try to locate near an all-night cafe. Leave soda crackers, Viennas, R.C. Colas and Moon Pies in the car or pickup. First class tourist homes do not take kindly to guests who prepare food in their sleeping rooms.

DO NOT TAKE LIVE CHICKENS OR HOGS - for some reason people in Virginia think they have good hams. For the sake of national unity, we don't want to show them up. Besides, their dogs would chase our chickens and our hogs would eat their dogs, making a heck of a mess.

You do not have to take the Sears catalog with you. Up there the out-houses are always inside and they furnish a rolled paper substitute, but remember to turn the knob on the white bowl as this is a house rule and creates less air pollution problems. Brother Al Gore gets all heated about this pollution and we don't want to set him off.

If invited by a county agent, fertilizer manufacturer's representative or hog vaccine manufacturer's salesman to have a drink in his hotel room, DO NOT SPIT tobacco juice on the carpeted floor. When asked what you drink, don't say "stump juice." Tell them all classy people from Arkansas drink B&B (Bourbon and branch water).

AND ABOVE ALL ELSE - Don't let any Yankee show you up. Constant screaming of "He's a good ole boy" will make it difficult for them to engage in conversation on their intelligence level. You can also keep up the chaht started by Cousin Slick. "It's Time for Change!" As you know, we plan a change of underwear on the first of every month. First cousins change with second cousins, but always keep it in the family. Willie has passed a decree, even when divorced you can still be cousins in Arkansas and Tennessee.

And, while we're at it, let's get this one out of the way:

A man in a brand new Cadillac was driving through the country one day and saw an old farmer leading a mule. He stopped and started a conversation:

"Where are you going with that mule?"
"To town," said the farmer.

"I'm heading to town. How would you like to ride in a brand new Cadillac?"

"I'd like that fine," said the farmer.

"What are you going to do with the mule?"

"Don't worry about the mule," said the farmer. "He knows the way to town."

So, they started to town and were driving along about 35 miles per hour. The man looked in his rear view mirror and saw the mule galloping along, right on his bumper.

He decided to leave the mule behind. He put the pedal down and got up to 40, then 50, then 60 and then 70 miles per hour. He looked in the mirror and the mule was still right on his bumper.

"What should we do about your mule?" he asked the farmer. "I'm doing 70 miles per hour and he's right on my bumper. His eyeballs are bulging out and his tongue is hanging out the side of his mouth."

"What side's his tongue hanging out?" asked the farmer.

"The left."

"Well, just stay in this lane," said the farmer. "He's fixin' to pass."

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