

Opinions

JIM HEFFNER

Columnist



Soppin' in the gravy bowl

I came across a piece about grits in a magazine the other day. Everybody knows that grits is/are (choose one) an identifiable Southern resource. Anybody who doesn't eat grits must be viewed as a possible Yankee spy.

I used to work with a fellow from the Bronx, N.Y. and he was constantly spouting off about grits, and how nasty they were. I have no idea how it happened but one morning when he opened his desk he found all his drawers filled with grits. It was one of those magic moments I'll never forget.

Anyway, the article stated that grits can be prepared eight different ways. What a laugh! Obviously the lady who wrote the story isn't from the South. Grits can be fixed (Southern for prepared) at least 500 different ways, probably more, and all of them good.

I like grits any way they can be fixed. I'll bet they'd even be good in a chocolate pie.

Sometimes, as I've said before, I feel sorry for those unfortunate folks who were born up North. They just don't know anything about good eating.

One of my sisters-in-law, caught in a weak moment, married one of those trespassers. My wife and I went up to visit soon after and her poorly-informed husband complained to me that his wife had the audacity to fix black-eyed peas for his supper one evening. Complained mind you!

Well, I couldn't believe my ears. I didn't know what to say to him. How can you take on the job of reeducating a grown man who has lived a deprived life?

Most of those people have never even tasted fat-back or sopped up a gravy bowl.

I remember when my Mother used to bake cakes. I had two sisters, and we all would gather around and watch her frost the cake, or, as we say in the South, put the icing on. I always considered my Mother an artist when it came to putting the icing on a tall layer cake. She would cover every spot, using a butter knife, and her hands would flow gracefully, just like a sculptor molding his clay. She never missed a spot, and when she was finished the cake was almost perfectly smooth.

My sisters and I would argue over who was going to lick the icing bowl clean, but we usually ended up sharing.

I wonder if they do that up North.

My Mom didn't cook fat-back the way most people do. She would bake it in the oven until all the grease was gone. That was when I'd grab myself a hot, fluffy biscuit, stuff a couple of chunks between the buttered layers and enjoy a feast fit for kings. I liked the kind with a few lean spots that looked like iron ore deposits in sandstone. We called it streak-ed meat, and it was absolutely scrumptious.

I remember a time when I had been dieting for a month or so and had lost several pounds. When my wife, in celebration, told me she would fix anything I wanted for supper, I said, "how about a fat-back pizza?" And I was serious.

I like streak-ed meat and eggs for breakfast, but I can't indulge myself much anymore because of a blood pressure problem. At least I can say I've enjoyed such gourmet eating in my life. That's more than a lot of folks can say who live in a certain part of the country.

Why they don't even have liver mush up there. Oh they serve something similar, but they call it scrapple, and it's much too strong.

You see what I mean about being deprived? I'd much rather sit down to a plate of white beans, fried potatoes, greens and cornbread than the biggest Porterhouse steak in Boston. Throw in a large glass of iced tea, and you can keep your fancy champagne.

Eight different ways to prepare grits? I suppose eight is enough for a Southerner at age four, but by the teen years 88 is more like it, and that's just the boys. Southern girls are even more proficient.

I guess all of us can't be born to high living, but I sure do pity those poor folks above the M-D line who have never tasted cornbread cooked in a heavy black skillet or eaten a plate of beans laced with a mess of diced onions.

That's what I call good country eating.

Cartoonitorial



Your Right To Say It

D.C. Statehood Never!

Dear editor:

Soon Jesse Jackson will unfurl his "D.C. Statehood Now!" banner on the Mall and appeal to the American people to create the state of New Columbia.

First, Americans need to envision the state New Columbia would be. A report published by Citizens United indicates the following:

\* It would be a state 1/17th the size of Rhode Island whose population shrinks annually and is already less than 47 states.

\* It would be a state dependent on federal money for 40 percent of its budget.

\* It would be a state whose primary industry would be the government. Currently, one in eleven work for the government or in services related to the government.

\* It would be a state whose residents annually receive \$2,831 in federal aid per capita -- 5 times the national average.

\* It would be a state labeled "the murder capital" where annually one violent crime occurs for every 22 people.

This time we cannot fall back on a Presidential veto to impede legislation. Americans who still believe in the Founding Fathers' vision need to unfurl a banner of their own: "D.C. Statehood Never!"

Sincerely,  
George Plonk

Blue should cancel raises

To the editor:

Speaker Dan Blue recently put himself in a public relations firestorm for giving \$10,000 pay raises (a 25% increase) to two of his staffers. Why? The general public found Speaker Blue's stroke-of-the-pen \$10,000 raises outrageous and extravagant after they were still struggling to pay for the General Assembly's \$600 million tax increase of 1991 which was the largest in state history. It's no wonder why state workers found the raises grossly unfair. Last year the General Assembly, led by Speaker Blue, told state employees a \$522 raise was the best they could do in the current budget austerity. The Speaker's raises obviously shocked and offended a large majority of North Carolinians. The Speaker released an editorial essay last week on the subject in an attempt to douse the flames. As the Republican leader in the House I am compelled to give my views on the matter and explain why I think the raises were clearly wrong.

Speaker Blue has come under fire for this being a "back room deal" between himself and then Senate President Pro-Tem Henson Barnes. He said this was not a back room deal because the Speaker of the

House and the President Pro-Tem of the Senate have had the power to give raises this way since 1969. I guess the logic here is that 24 years of doing something makes it right. Frankly that doesn't wash. It's wrong to conduct business this way now and it was wrong to start the practice 24 years ago.

The Speaker has also attempted to justify the raises by saying he has a budget of \$403,000 for salaries and even after the raises he will still return \$130,000 to the state. Wait a minute. Why does a part-time Speaker need a full-time staff costing \$270,000? He can pick up the phone and get priority service from the over 150 full-time General Assembly Staff. Therefore even \$270,000 for staff is too much to justify.

One of the Speaker's responses to this problem has been to recommend the General Assembly hire a consultant to design a pay plan for the staff. The Associated Press reported the Speaker said, "We have absolutely no pay plan. Salaries are arbitrary." The fact that the General Assembly salaries are arbitrary is obviously true, but why not save the cost of the consultant and implement the pay plan used by the rest of state workers? Their basic pay plan has been in place since 1951 and it seems to be serving them well. That approach would ensure fairness to all state employees.

The Speaker said in his editorial "I believe we must do all we can to fairly compensate our workers." How fair is it to compensate two of his staff over \$50,000 when classroom teachers and other state employees received a \$522 raise? How many state employees can ever expect to receive a raise of \$10,000 in one year?

What needs to be done now and for the future to resolve this controversy? I introduced legislation two weeks ago to end this practice which will take care of the future. The simple and responsible thing for Speaker Blue to do now is to admit the pay raises were wrong, cancel the pay raises, and support my bill to eliminate this practice. All North Carolinians would support and applaud him for this, and it would be as easy as the stroke-of-a-pen.

Rep. David Balmer,  
House Republican Leader

Musical outstanding

To the editor:

The performance of "The Sound of Music," given by the Kings Mountain choral, drama and band students, was outstanding.

My hat is off to the students, teachers, and support persons for all the hard work they have done to bring us such an excellent musical.

Lynda Stewart

DONALD MITCHELL

Interim Pastor,  
First Presbyterian Church



Reflections on religion and life

A short while ago I received the tape of a sermon entitled "What Christ would say to Clinton." Preachers, like surgeons, should not be timid, but that title seemed to be presumptuous. Who among us has such insight into the mind of Christ?

The tape, however, did start me thinking about what Christians might want to say to their new president.

They would first of all want some reassurance that Bill Clinton had made his own claim to the Christian faith and had thus provided some common ground for discourse. For those who paid attention during the presidential campaign, that ground was clearly staked out. In a speech delivered last September at Notre Dame University, but carefully prepared with a national audience in mind, candidate Clinton, as he was then, testified to his own Christian faith. "My faith is a source of pride to me," he declared. And a few days later on an ecumenical Christian cable network he added these comments: "I had a tough childhood, a not all that easy adulthood at times. My faith has enabled me to keep living and keep going and keep doing things."

The president shares a Southern Baptist background along with his Vice President. But both men, while identifying with Christian believers, are extremely careful not to scare off unbelievers. There is no suggestion that they would consider imposing their faith on anyone. Their statements of religious commitment are so free from any taint of rigidity or of sectarian feeling, that one sociologist has called them examples of "a generic American faith." This is a bland and inoffensive stance in which denominational brand names have little significance.

It's ironic that George Bush supported a conservative social policy even though he was a member of the Episcopal church which is well known for its liberal social platforms. And the present occupant of the White House, though belonging to a denomination with a reputation for conservative social policies, puts his weight on the liberal side of most controversial causes.

But a "generic Christian" is still a Christian, so what would the president's fellow Christians want to say to him? Given the wide range of differences among Christian groups that's also a presumptuous question, but here is one man's opinion:

First of all, I would ask him to be a man of his word, as a follower of Christ ought to be. This means he would refrain from making promises he knows cannot be kept. It also means that he would speak with integrity. When that quality prevails in the White House there is some chance that it will also characterize the other branches of government. We lack leaders whose word we can trust.

Secondly, I would remind the president that he recently took a public pledge "to preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States of America." The first amendment to that Constitution provides for the separation of church and state, but in our generation, the sense and spirit of that amendment have been turned upside down. As William E. Simon recently observed: "The First Amendment is now routinely invoked to bully and bludgeon religious freedom in any public setting." I would ask our president to use his influence to restore the balance intended by the framers of the Constitution, so that expressions of religion which do not infringe on the freedom of others, may be respected and protected instead of being excluded from public life.

Thirdly, I would say to our president that he should publicly acknowledge the long term damage being inflicted on our society by the enormous annual toll of unrestricted abortions. As a nation, we need a leader who will help us to rise about the pro-life/pro-choice stalemate in order to address the disastrous consequences for our nation of denying life to millions of unborn babies. If our hopes for the future lie with our children, we diminish that hope every day.

Fourthly, I would suggest to the president that he be thankful for those who preceded him in the White House. While it was politic to demean George Bush in the heat of the presidential campaign, he should be grateful for much that he inherited from his predecessor. We all stand on the shoulders of those who precede us and a gracious acknowledgement of that fact would soften much of the strident and divisive tone of political debate.

Finally, I would remind President Clinton that Christians, even those of the "generic" variety, are meant to be people of prayer. He will need every day the wisdom that God promises to those who ask for it. The following words of Abraham Lincoln ought to be framed for his desk:

"We have forgotten the gracious hand that preserved us in peace, and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us; and we have vainly imagined in the deceitfulness of our hearts that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own...we have become too proud to pray to the God who made us."

May that never be true of President Bill Clinton.

■ Donald Mitchell is interim pastor of First Presbyterian Church.

KM Schools haven't lost tax revenue

The telephone started ringing as soon as the paper was on the street Wednesday.

"Lib, did you leave something out of that story about the school board or are you a fortune teller now?"

No, I'm not a fortune teller and yes, there was an error. Ronnie Hawkins, chairman of the board, said there is a chance that sales tax distribution allocations to Kings Mountain may be cut by county commissioners at budget time. Yes, cuts would hurt the system but no, county commissioners have not yet cut allocations to the schools from \$500,000 to \$250,000. I was wrong and I apologize to Hawkins, the school board and administration and the county commissioners.

If you read Supt. Dr. Bob McRae's column, also in last week's Herald, he stressed the need for county commissioners to continue the current method of redistributing sales tax revenues based on taxing effort rather than on per capita basis. If that method stays in place, Kings Mountain will continue to receive approximately \$500,000 per year to address our capital needs and can make reasonable progress in keeping our facilities and equipment in working order.

McRae says we need to lobby our county commissioners to leave the current sales tax redistribution plan in place and lobby our legislators to look for ways the state can assist with facility and equipment needs.



Small town funding became a controversial issue in the recent county commissioner race. Some candidates took flak during the campaign and the rumor mill has been grinding out talk since that the way tax distribution is made will be changed. If the change is made to half per capita and half taxation, as it was proposed by some candidates in the recent election, the local system stands to lose about \$250,000 but it hasn't lost it yet.

Kings Mountain Schools received from Cleveland County \$1,658,175.00 in current expense funds last year, equaling the same per pupil amount as the year before. In addition, Kings Mountain got \$525,000 from sales tax distribution last year and \$281,000 in capital outlay monies. Kings Mountain is asking for \$300,000 in capital outlay funds in the upcoming budget and is keeping their fingers crossed that the sales tax distribution monies will be the same.

The county schools don't get tax distribution money because they don't tax themselves. Kings Mountain has a school supplement tax. Because commissioners have redistributed proceeds based on the taxing effort rather than the per capita population we get over a half million dollars for capital outlay from that fund. It's a fact that if commissioners revert to partial or total funding based on per capita the system will indeed lose big bucks.

Budget time is just around the corner and one county commissioner is yet to be seated. A three-month dispute between two of the candidates over how to count the paper ballots from the November county commissioner election is still on.

State Supt. Bob Etheridge says local superintendents and boards of education need \$5.6 billion to bring North Carolina school buildings up to par and projected instructional technology needs in the next five years will top \$601 million.

The School Facilities Finance Act of 1987 required that each school system file a facilities plan with the State Board of Education. The local system estimates long-range public school facilities needs at nearly \$10 million, including \$1,935,090 for additions; \$5,972,300 for remodeling and renovation and \$88,000 for equipment.

Schools are big business. It's no wonder my phone is ringing off the hook.

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