

Opinions



GUEST COLUMN

THOMAS GOOLSBY
Carolina Syndicated
Columns

Hang 'em high

"Hang 'em, juice 'em or gas 'em and do it in front of the courthouse where the condemned criminal was sentenced to death," was the upshot of a bill recently introduced during the special session on crime by State Senator Frank Ballance, a criminal defense attorney from Warren County.

Senator Ballance, Chairman of the Legislative Black Caucus, is apparently serious about his proposal. He introduced similar legislation a decade ago, but the bill never made it out of committee. Now he's at it again.

Senator Ballance is a man with a vision. He wants to see a portable "tractor-trailer of death" going from courthouse to courthouse, complete with a flatbed trailer outfitted with a gallows, a gas chamber and an electric chair. Has the senator been up too high in the ivory tower of state government for far too long? On this issue, apparently not - in fact, Ballance has some very good reasons for wanting to bring back public executions. According to an Associated Press interview, Ballance stated, "The death penalty is supposed to be a deterrent, but executions are held in private at 2 a.m. What I'm saying is let's have them in daylight, out in public where people can see."

The senator makes a good point. Aren't we losing a great deal of the supposed deterrent effect of the death penalty if we "do the dirty deed in secret?" Besides, when the state takes everything that an individual has - his/her life - shouldn't we the public, in whose name the execution is performed, be made to witness the event?

For those who balk at the suggestion of public executions, isn't it worse if we carry out the sentence in secret? A "reformed carnivore," i.e., a vegetarian, once told me, "You would never eat a piece of meat again if you observed the slaughtering process." Likewise, would as many North Carolinians support the death penalty if executions were performed in public? Probably so - the finality of death and the total vanquishing of the criminal, something rarely seen in today's world, would be of great comfort to many of our scared and frightened citizens.

As a death penalty supporter, I have nonetheless always been a bit squeamish at the thought of the state taking a life. Don't get me wrong, I don't have any trouble with the court simply handing the guilty party over to the family of the victim for a little "private justice." I simply have trouble with the all-powerful and all-bureaucratic state having the power of death over its citizens. However, we don't live in a perfect world and I don't think that the North Carolina court system will begin handing convicted first degree murderers over to the victims' families anytime soon, so I'll settle for this compromise - public executions, where a family member of the victim is allowed to throw the switch, pull the lever or otherwise send the criminal into eternity.

Should Senator Ballance's bill receive serious consideration during this special session? Yes, it should. Will the bill be considered? Probably not - like most dirty deeds done by the state, the powers-that-be prefer to carry them out in private. Never forget, ours is not to reason why, it's simply to pay taxes and reelect incumbents.

Our View

Balanced budget amendment a scam

The U.S. Senate is once again considering a balanced budget amendment, the first time since 1986 when the issue was defeated by one vote.

The proposed amendment would guarantee a balanced budget by the year 2001, and here are the key words, "Unless three-fifths of the members of the House and Senate vote to allow a deficit."

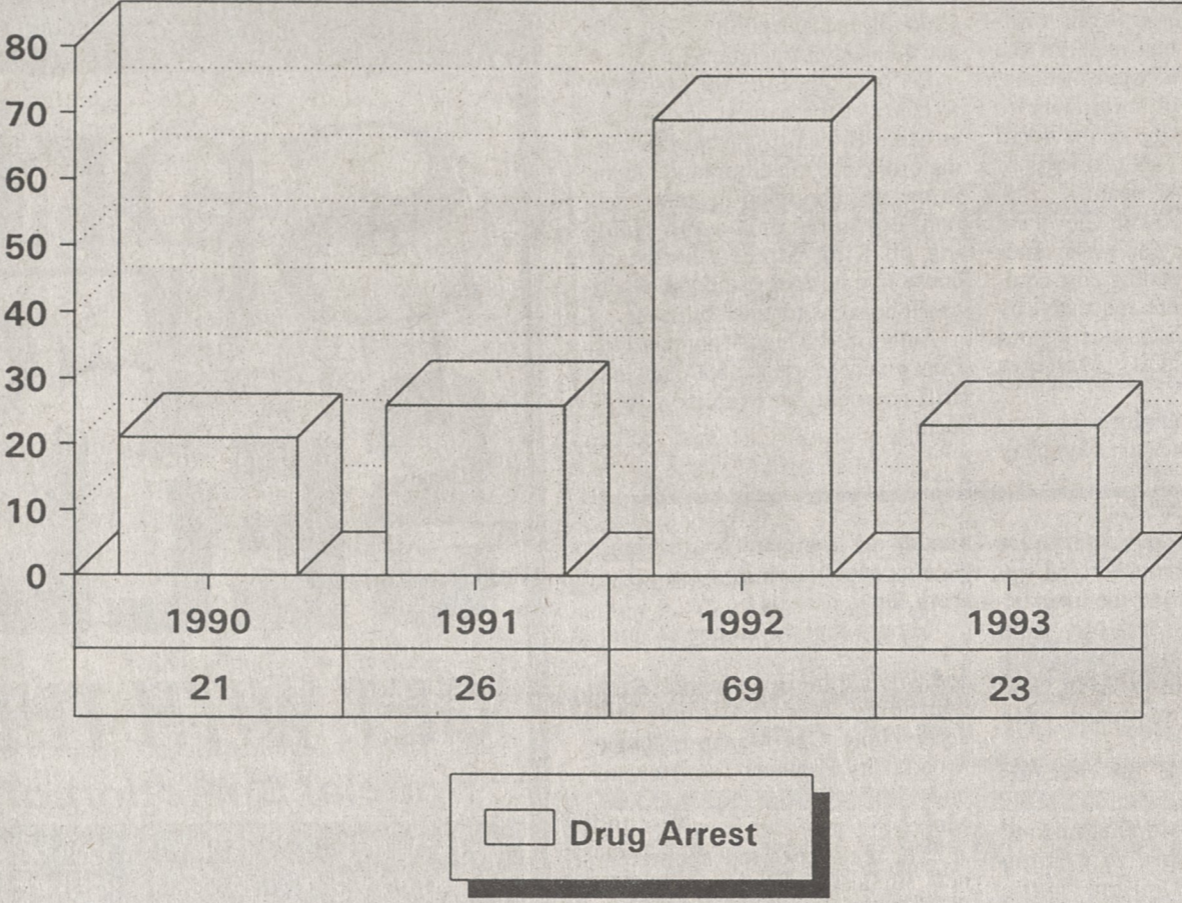
U.S. citizens need to take a look at the entire balanced budget proposal line by line. The method of balancing a budget is as important as the act. Illinois Senator Paul Simon said, on one of the Sunday morning news shows, the method used would be new taxes and cuts.

It doesn't take a genius to figure out what that means. More tax money from the citizens' paychecks, and another pass at spending cuts, which will turn out to be no cuts at all.

The country doesn't need a bogus balanced budget amendment.

Fast Facts

Drug Arrest
Kings Mountain Police Department



REFLECTIONS ON RELIGION AND LIFE

Rev. Harold Schwantes
Pastor
Central United Methodist Church



A winning effort

It has been exciting to watch the events of the Winter Olympics in Norway these past two weeks. The Olympics have provided an opportunity for athletes to prove themselves in competition with the best in the world in their event. Every one of the athletes can be proud just to have been chosen to compete in the Olympics - they are all heroes in some respect. While we may personally have our nationalistic prejudices regarding our favorites and our opinions about the judging, we still respect and admire each of the medalists for the outstanding efforts they have made, regardless of their nationality.

It is unfortunate that the Kerrigan-Harding affair has taken so much of the Olympic spotlight. Such viciousness as the attack on Nancy Kerrigan makes the athletic competition take a back seat to crime and the "soap opera" events that go with it. It suggests that athletes would rather win than play fair. We all lose when cheating is the name of the game: losers are made winners, and our world standards of excellence are lowered. The only way that the thrill of victory can be totally enjoyed is when we play by the rules.

A Gaston County police officer was an example of this principle recently. He was involved in a drug investigation several years ago in which his testimony was used to instigate a drug raid at a county residence. Drugs were found in the raid and the persons responsible were properly sentenced. But the officer could not live with the fact that he lied and had not played by the rules in catching this felon. The end did not justify the means. Even though the officer had successfully cheated the system, he could not live with the guilt in his own heart. He realized you are not a hero, or even a good person, when you cheat to win.

In a sense, all of us can compete successfully in the Olympics without breaking the rules. All competitors must start somewhere, and it is up to everyone to work to raise the level of competition to a higher standard. I'm not much good at any athletics, and I don't have the courage to ski down hill at 80 miles an hour. But I must try to be the best that I can be in what I do, so that the standard of excellence for the world at least has to seek to be as good as I am. Somewhere, at one time or another, all the Olympic athletes had to be as good or better than the competition to be able to compete in the Olympics. If they had not faced this earlier competition, it is doubtful these athletes would have worked as hard as they have to be as good as they are now.

One of America's great downfalls in recent decades has been a loss of the desire for excellence among many workers. Both apathy and dishonesty have contributed to a situation where many other countries have been able to surpass America in quality and productivity. We have proven in history that we can do the best, but our failure to keep the standard of excellence as our guide has allowed the competition to beat us.

Consider what we could be and what we could accomplish if we were to return to that standard again. Instead of profit taking or the "easy way," suppose every corporate board were motivated to one thing: to produce the very best. Consider what every governmental and private service agency could do if all who worked at every level were giving maximum service. Consider what every church, synagogue, or religious organization might accomplish were their members to labor for God's Kingdom with the same diligence as an Olympiad.

Better yet, consider what you might accomplish if you were to give your very best effort to your occupation, your church or service club, your family, your life. I'm not suggesting that we would all end up being interviewed on world-wide television because of our accomplishments. But I do believe we would all be happier, and this world would be a much better place to live.

The Apostle Paul gives us good advice and his own personal witness about this in his letter to the Philippians, and with it, I close: "Beloved, I do not consider that I have made the goal my own; but this one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God." Let those of us then who are mature be of the same mind.

Your Right To Say It
Facts on utility rate increases

To the editor:
I wanted to clarify some information I have read during the past two weeks regarding facts some people believe to be true. Here are the facts regarding utility rate increases:

NATURAL GAS

There has not been an increase in gas since 1989 until July 1993 when rates were revised 2% for everyone. In December 1993, due to the constant fluctuation in the price of gas we purchased, the city went to a flex rate which means this rate can go down as well as up benefitting the consumer if prices fall. And, at this time a new category of customer was created to give the Supplemental Social Security Income recipients a discount equal to the discount given them in electricity. This benefitted 156 fixed income families.

ELECTRICITY

There has not been an increase since 1987 until March 1992, when Duke Power increased its wholesale rate 3.4%. The city was forced to pass the same rate increase, with no increase to the SSI customers. In July 1993, rates rose 2% for all customers, except for the SSI customers. Again, the most needy, a total of 217 customers, have not experienced an increase.

WATER AND SEWER

In July 1991, rates were increased 12% for industrial and residential use. For the average homeowner that uses 7,000 gallons, the increase totaled \$1.68. The increase was needed to pay the bond principal payments.

In April 1992, rates increased 9% to industry and residential users to finish raising the funding level needed for payments on the bond and payments to Crowders Creek Waste Treatment Plant. Again, the average homeowner paid an additional \$1.67 per month.

November 1992 both were increased 5% adding another \$.88 to the residential customer.

In July last year the City increased industry's rates 2.7% because of the low usage with the assumption that usage would equal last year's plus having a new industry in line for a total year.

So in conclusion, water costs to the residential customer since 1989 has increased \$4.23.

GENERAL FUND

In is true that the city has proposed to purchase a new fire truck. But it will not cost \$500,000. It costs \$250,000 and it takes a year to manufacture before we take possession and make payment. This request has been denied for funding by City Council for the past three years. But we will eventually have to purchase one. We now operate a 1960 model which increasingly is getting more difficult to find parts for. And, I think you can agree that the citizens want the best fire protection possible.

I want to encourage each citizen if they have any questions regarding the city to call me at City Hall for information. I am there for you regarding our city's affairs. I may not know they answer right away, but I will find out and give you a call. You deserve correct information to hold us accountable as your public servants.

Mayor Scott Neisler

Fiske not independent

Dear Editor:

We have heard much recently about the appointment of a "special counsel," Robert Fiske, to investigate the Whitewater-Madison Guaranty affair. We need to remember that he is not an "Independent" Counsel, as was used in prosecuting Watergate and Iran-Contra, but an appointee from Janet Reno. If memory serves us, we remember that Janet Reno fired every single U.S. District Attorney right after taking office in order to protect Dan Rostenkowski.

Just how independent is Fiske? Yes, he is a Republican, but so is Robert Packwood. Though he was named a U.S. attorney by President Ford, he remained in office through President Carter's term at the suggestion of Democrats - many of whom are now in the Clinton Administration. He was a lawyer for prominent Democrat Clark Clifford in the BCCI scandal. He has also worked closely with new FBI Director Louis Freeh, and served under Philip Heymann, who was Chief of the Justice Department's criminal division under Jimmy Carter, and until recently, was Mr. Clinton's Deputy Attorney General. In addition, Fiske is a former law partner and protegee of Lawrence Walsh, who was definitely no friend of Republicans.

Mr. Tom Jipping, the director of the Free Congress Foundations' Center for Law and Democracy, points out that Fiske had tax problems of his own after he took improper deductions for a land deal. Jipping also recalls the difficulty Fiske had in maintaining confidentiality when running the American Bar Association's screening committee on judges. In that case, Fiske granted the radical leftist Alliance for Justice a first vetting of potential conservative Reagan judicial nominees. That caused enough backlash from conservative senators that Fiske was later blocked from an appointment to be Dick Thornburg's Deputy Attorney General under George Bush.

If Richard Nixon had been fortunate enough to have had Bill Clinton, Janet Reno or Robert Fiske on his staff, he would have retired after eight years as serving as President with Watergate skillfully swept under the rug.

Richmond C. Beecher, Shelby

The NCAA and its double standards

What is it with the NCAA? They are always so high-minded about players. They will punish a college severely for allowing a dirt poor country boy to receive a \$60 pair of shoes as a gift, but they will allow some of their coaches to run around acting like barbarians and brainless bullies.

Temple coach John Chaney is the latest to display his immaturity. Last week his team lost a one point game to the University of Massachusetts, and Chaney went wild after the game.

He charged into a news conference, where the Massachusetts coach was being questioned, yelling and screaming epithets. He told the world, via ESPN, that he would "kill him!" He had to be restrained or he might have attacked the winning coach.

Chaney's punishment was a one game suspension, nothing for the university. If one of the Temple players had been caught selling a ticket, the University would have been suspended from post-season play for a year or so and not allowed to appear on television for a couple of years, costing the institution millions.

You decide which is the worst infraction. Northwestern basketball coach, Ricky Byrdsong ran amok in the gym at a game and refused to take part in coaching activities. He went up into the stands running around yelling and acting like a wild man. I don't even know if the NCAA or the college took action.

JIM HEFFNER
Columnist

Byrdsong has taken a leave of absence, probably to cover himself. He has stated that he was stressed out and that he would "seek the counsel of friends, colleagues and professionals recommended to me by the university." One of the friends will probably be John Thompson of Georgetown. Thompson is the godfather of black coaches and the NCAA appears to be scared stiff of him.

The whole shooting match reminds me of the antics of Bobby Knight, the godfather of white coaches, also feared by the NCAA. Knight, as you will recall has thrown a metal chair across a basketball court while a game was in progress, kicked a ball during a game, kicked his son during a game and slapped one of his players during a game. He usually gets the standard NCAA punishment for coaches, a one game suspension.

Ohio State football coach Woody Hayes, a few years back, grabbed a Clemson player by the neck and slugged him during a bowl game. I'm not sure, but I don't think Hayes was punished at all.

The only coaches I know of who lost their jobs for alleged misbehavior are Dana Kirk of Memphis State and Jim Valvano, and they were punished by their universities not the NCAA.

Kirk's problems had to do with misappropriation of funds as I remember it, and Jimmy V. was victimized by a hack writer. He may have been completely innocent.

Several years ago, when Eddie Sutton was coaching at Arkansas, he left the bench during the game and took a seat in the stands. As far as I know, the NCAA remained silent.

I simply don't understand why the organization uses a double standard. If Chaney had been able to get to the Massachusetts coach and punched him, would he have been suspended for the year? I doubt it, but that's what happens to a player. I guess it could be argued that a press conference is not part of a game.

Are student athletes being properly served by coaches who run rampant, and by an organization that turns a deaf ear to their misbehavior?
I don't think so, how about you?

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