

## Opinions

**JIM HEFFNER**  
Guest Columnist



### Clumping of America

Several years ago some smart hustler packaged rocks into decorative boxes and sold them as "Pet Rocks." The guy made millions. I thought that turn of events was the height of ridicule, but now I'm not too sure.

I've been reading up on the cat litter industry, and that pet rock guy was a rank amateur.

Speaking of rank, the cat is now out of the bag. For those of you who are not aware, hold onto your seats: the cat litter industry is a \$700 million dollar industry. That's right, \$700 million.

Can you imagine that? At a time when some people don't even have the price of a pet rock, people are spending thousands of dollars annually simply because they want to keep a cat in the house without smelling it.

Let's face it, cat litter is nothing more than a feline bathroom.

The business of cat urine has become extremely competitive. Companies are searching for that elusive formula which forms the "perfect clump."

Some litter aficionados describe the perfect clump as looking like a marble-sized nugget of dark, sugar-coated chocolate. The perfect clump, of course, happens when a cat answers nature's call in the litter box, and the result is a small ball that can be scooped up and tossed out.

The litter is treated with a variety of deodorants and perfumes to neutralize the smell, and the manufacturers swear, some of them at least, that their clumps are not unpleasant in any sense of the word.

Some of their literature makes cat lovers want to run out and buy up the stuff, then force-feed liquids to their pets as fast as they can so they can compare their clumps to those of their neighbors.

These yo-yo's actually have research and development departments with, get this now, sniffing booths, where people can rate a clump's odor and where clumps are smashed to see how resilient they are.

I can picture a number of offshoot industries. Bumper stickers should sell well. "My Clump's Better Than Your Clump," would look good on the bumper of a shiny new convertible.

The next thing you know some entrepreneur will be sponsoring a National Clump Show in Madison Square Garden.

Veterinarians will probably get into the act. I can see one of them asking a client, "Besides an improper clump, does your cat have any other symptoms?" Picture a TV commercial featuring a distinguished looking vet in a white coat, with a stethoscope around his neck, holding what appears to be a chocolate drop that is partially melted.

"Does your cat's clump look like this?" he'll say. "And does it smell like the wrong side of Tarzan's loin cloth? Try Pearl's Perfumed Kitty Litter for clumps you can be proud of."

Then he'll show a round, solid clump, lay it on the table and swing away with a sledge hammer that will shatter (the hammer that is). The vet will pick up the clump and look it over for damage and say, "Pearlie's clumps are indestructible." He'll take a whiff and smile, holding the undamaged clump delicately between thumb and index finger, "H-m-m-m, and it smells good too."

A business research group in Cleveland (where else?) says there were 30.2 million cats in this country in 1993, and that the demand for a better-clumping kitty litter is ever escalating. They say that by 1998 the cat litter industry will sell 2.24 million tons annually.

That brings up several questions. First of all, who counted those cats? Then you might ask, how many times a day does a cat produce a clump? Next you'll want to know, if you have the curiosity of a cat, how many good solid clumps can you get from 2.24 million tons of good quality kitty litter, considering cats use the bathroom at least three times daily? Inquiring minds want to know.

Doesn't it seem odd that people will spend \$700 million on kitty litter, when they could just as easily toss their cats into the back yard a couple of times a day? That would save money and help alleviate their problems with crab grass.

Bring back the pet rock.

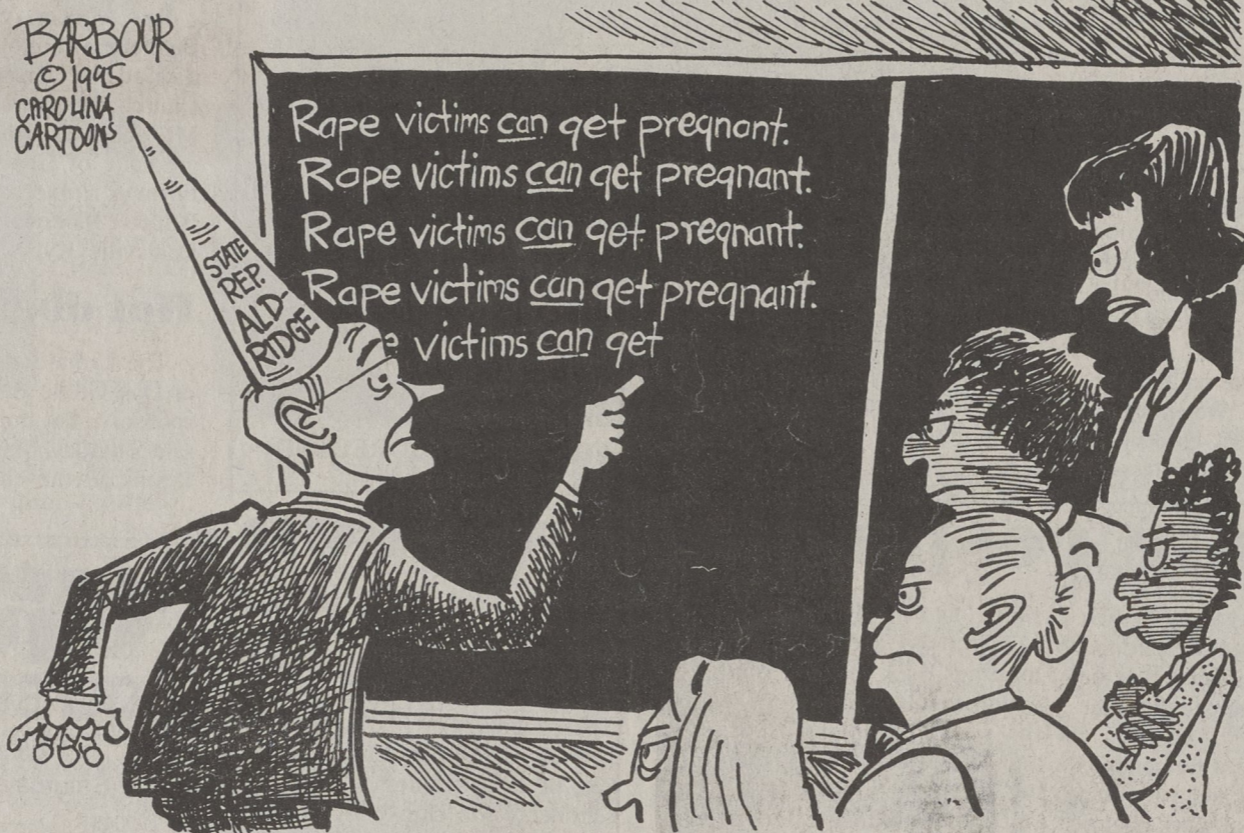
### TODAY'S BIBLE VERSE

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

"For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds through Christ."

II Corinthians 1:3-5

### Cartoonitorial



### Teachers deserve appreciation

Next Tuesday our school system will recognize its employees with our annual Employee Appreciation Day. Board members will visit each work site to deliver a note and small gift of appreciation to all employees. As this day approaches I am more than ever reminded of how valuable the service of these people is to our community.

When one assesses the attractiveness of a job offer, factors taken in consideration usually include pay, working hours, benefits, working conditions, job responsibilities, and intrinsic rewards offered by position. Let's take a look at the very important job of school teacher from this perspective in order to get a handle on the kind of people we have at work in our school system.

In terms of pay it is widely acknowledged that no one will ever get rich by teaching school. A beginning teacher in Kings Mountain with no graduate degree makes \$20,020 per year. After 30 years of teaching the salary rises only to \$35,570 per year. The local supplement for a beginning teacher is \$572, making the total yearly salary for a new teacher \$20,592. Of course, the

salary is for 10 months of employment. I would consider the starting salary fair but believe long time employees could certainly be more fairly compensated.

Most schools operate on approximately a 7 1/2 hour day for teachers. Most teachers work much longer, staying beyond the normal working hours to work at school and then often taking papers home to be graded. While I do not have firm statistics at hand, I believe it would be fair to say that many teachers work a 50 hour week or longer. Personal and family time must often be sacrificed for job demands.

The benefit package offered teachers is competitive. Health insurance is provided employees at no charge, a strong retirement system is in place, and disability insurance is in force on every employee. Adequate sick leave and vacation is offered, and vacation which cannot be carried forward can be converted to sick leave. The system carries life insurance on each employee, and additional low-cost term insurance is available for purchase. The system also provides a few other smaller benefits such as the provision of an employee assistance program and flu shots for those who so desire. The benefit package for a new teacher should be attractive.

### N.C. needs weapons carry law

Contrary to State Attorney General Mike Easley, who scoffs at the citizens who desire the right to carry a concealed firearm as "Archie Bunker" sitcom characters, more and more North Carolinians are becoming serious about their demands to carry weapons for self-protection.

Easley snubbed defenders of the Second Amendment with his typical glib and half-baked comments. He compares the right to pack a concealed weapon as akin to Archie Bunker's solution to airline hijackings - issue all passengers a gun so the hijacker doesn't have an advantage. Such reckless disregard for the rights of law-abiding individuals concerned about protecting themselves and their families continues to demonstrate that Mike is out of touch with most citizens. Don't forget, this is the same Attorney General who opposed and fought hard against the crime victims who sued to have the state's prison cap abolished.

Easley, and politicians like him, conveniently forget when they argue against a citizen's right to carry a concealed weapon just how well the law has worked in the states where it has been tried. The closest example is the Sunshine State. Since Florida liberalized its concealed weapons laws in 1987, over 267,000 concealed weapons permits have been issued. Only 19 of them have been revoked for firearms-related incidents. During that same time frame, the homicide rate dropped 22 percent.

The anti-gun crowd strongly opposes concealed-weapons legislation. They claim that a lawless, wild west mentality will end up ruling North Carolina's highways and neighborhoods. However, they conveniently overlook the many success stories where the innocent have effectively protected themselves and forget that a concealed weapons carry law will simply decriminalize what may otherwise law-abiding citizens are already doing. Besides, if anyone is going to be carrying a weapon, don't we want it to be law-abiding citizens?

New legislation that's winding its way through the General Assembly poses a threat to individual citizens injured in accidents through no fault of their own. The bill seeks to change the way North Carolina juries punish defendants in civil damage suits by limiting punitive damages and giving the monetary award to the state, not the injured person.

**BOB McRAE**  
Superintendent  
Kings Mountain Schools



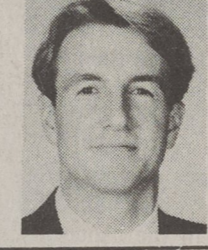
In the Kings Mountain District Schools working conditions are quite good from a standpoint of facilities. Well maintained buildings, all of which are air conditioned, are available. Adequate supplies and materials are available with rare exception. No applicant should be turned off due to working conditions.

The list of job responsibilities for a teacher is overwhelming. If a teacher only had to teach, there might be little room to complain. However, today's teacher not only must teach but also must be (among other things) a counselor, social worker, patrolman, cheerleader, surrogate parent, and legal expert. The teacher must work under the closest of public scrutiny and must often be subjected to intense, and often disrespectful criticism. This is a job description which cannot be written as it constantly grows larger and perhaps less appealing.

Most teachers take the job for the intrinsic rewards, the satisfaction offered by seeing young people grow and mature and benefit from what they learn in school. Thank goodness that is still important to many people who consider teaching as a career.

Teaching is not a bad job, but it certainly is a challenging one. As we approach our Employee Appreciation Day, I want you to know how lucky we are in this system to have such a competent, dedicated group of employees - not only our teachers but our other folks as well. They are working harder than ever before, and I believe doing the best job they have ever done. In invite you to join us at this time of year in saying thanks to these fine people. A note, a phone call, a personal chat - you decide what is appropriate. The people who work with our children deserve our thanks in tangible ways and always appreciate hearing from you. Kings Mountain District School employees, you certainly have my personal admiration and appreciation for a job well done.

**GUEST COLUMN**  
**THOMAS GOOLSBY**  
Carolina Syndicated  
Columns



The legislation, backed by the medical doctors' lobby, big business and insurance companies, attempts to reduce both the number and the amount of jury awards given to individuals injured by faulty products or negligence.

Supporters of the bill claim that it will stop the "crap shoots" that punitive damages have become. Opponents of the bill cry "foul." They point out that punitive damages exist to punish wrongdoers who act grossly negligent by making them pay large amounts of money which, in theory, will make them think twice about repeating such outrageous behavior. Denise Tomczak, a woman injured by silicone breast implants, is concerned that the current proposed \$250,000 punitive cap will not "hurt" huge corporations like Dow Corning (the producer of silicone breast implants) and, thereby, not stop wrongful behavior.

Additionally, the bill's provisions increase the threshold for punitive damages from grossly negligent conduct to intentional conduct. This means that in order to be held liable, the owner of a chicken plant who chains the exit doors locked would be required to know that such action might cause the deaths of his employees in the event of a fire.

Although lawyer-bashing may be the "cause du jour," we cannot allow big business and big medicine to strip citizens of their 200-year-old right to punish wrongdoers. Just imagine the slick, well-paid lobbyists in double-breasted Italian suits wandering the halls of the legislature and feigning disgust over the current "unfair system" that holds corporations and medical doctors liable for negligent acts. They are not representing the interests of average North Carolinians. This legislation endangers the safety of innocent, law-abiding citizens by substantially reducing corporate and medical responsibility. The little guy deserves better and any attempt to deny him fair treatment should be thwarted.

### Your Right To Say It

### Hearings needed on Ruby Ridge, Waco massacres

To the editor:

Innocent civilians who speak out against government excess are being attacked viciously in the media over the Oklahoma City tragedy. President Clinton and his media clones have attempted to lin the bombing nut (McVeigh) with radio talk show hosts and any opponent they can smear with the blood of innocent children. Such cowardly political attacks are detestable.

All evidence indicates McVeigh was set off by the Waco and Ruby Ridge tragedies - not talk show hosts, militia elements nor armed law abiding citizens. Everyone who knew McVeigh agree this was the case. They're not alone.

Millions of people across this country and the world view the Waco and Ruby Ridge incidents as flagrant examples of excessive federal power, ignited by incredible bungling on the part of the BATF and FBI, possibly including illegal surveillance and entrapment. Both matters should have been handled by local law enforcement.

Of course, federal agents claim they were acting reasonably within the law. Whatever and wherever the truth lies, it is yet to be determined.

It will still hangs darkly over the Waco massacre like an ominous storm cloud. It's not likely to dissipate until that despicable matter is aired thoroughly.

Citizens must demand complete and open hearings by Congress on the Waco and Ruby Ridge slayings - events which preyed so heavily upon McVeigh's disturbed mind triggering his cowardly act of revenge. Open hearings could go a long way toward defusing so much distrust and grievance these days between the people and our federal bureaucracy.

This country cannot abide distrust between federal agents in the field and large parts of our civilian population. History is littered with terrible consequences resulting from such discourse between the people and their leadership.

Maybe we need to clear the air more so than to enact new oppressive law. Stirring more unrest by curtailing our freedoms may provoke worse incidents in the future, instead of insuring our safety.

Remember the words of Ben Franklin who noted most clearly, "They that can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety deserve neither liberty nor safety."

Rodney Dellinger  
Gastonia

### Thank God for good neighbors

To the editor:

On April 10, Monday morning, 6:55 a.m., our house was broken into by a thief. He stole a radio and cassette recorder. I was asleep.

The good neighbors called me. When I answered the nice lady said a person came into the house twice, the second time carrying the radio and cassette player. I called the police. They came out.

The doors to my room were closed. He stole my brother's radio and cassette. I looked around and I missed going through his room.

About 7:55 Monday night, the good neighbors came to me and told me where he was. I pinned him down with my knee in his neck and twisted his arm back until police got to him.

I had help from good neighbors.

Bobby Rathbone

### Jump start your compost bin

To the editor:

Here is some information for those who have signed up for the Kings Mountain Backyard Recycling Program. And for those who haven't signed up yet, read on to learn how to do so.

Spring has sprung, and the grass is growing! Now is the perfect time to take your compost bin off of your block of leaves. The empty bin may be refilled with a combination of leaves and grass. If you're just starting out, go ahead and set up your compost bin and start adding the "brown" and "green" material that's in your yard and kitchen.

Grass is a type of "green" material while leaves are considered "brown" material. When combining the two, you want about three parts of "green" material for every one part "brown". Mix these materials in small quantities for better results.

Other than leaves and grass, you may also throw in shredded newspaper which is "brown" material and kitchen trimmings, which are "green" material. When you're filling the bin, always be sure to alternate brown stuff with the green stuff. After the bin is full again, leave it alone to process the materials. Watch it over the week to see how quickly the materials in the bin biodegrade. In about seven days, these materials will be reduced to about half full and the bin can be filled up once again. If you want to speed up the process, you may turn the materials daily to make sure the contents maintain a consistent moisture level (like a wrung out sponge). For additional information on composting, look to your Composting Instruction Guide.

Nature's recycling system is amazingly efficient. At the same time you're getting rid of your yard waste, you can look forward to a pile of rich dark humus to spread over your lawn or garden or around your trees and shrubs. Humus helps maintain a good soil structure which aids in plant growth.

If you want more information on the Kings Mountain Backyard Recycling Program, call the Public Works office at 734-0333. You may sign up for your composter today by calling the Program Coordinator at 1-800-595-6446. The 3 feet x 3 feet plastic bins are available for about half the retail price. You may use Visa, Master card, Discover or a personal check to reserve your bin.

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Kings Mountain Public Works

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