

Opinions

Our View

Beware of fraud during holidays

According to the Association of Retired Persons (AARP), the period between Thanksgiving and Christmas is the prime time for fraudulent pitches by representatives of so-called "charitable" organizations. With disasters such as the recent hurricanes and Oklahoma City bombing, requests increase even more. All citizens - and especially senior citizens - need to be aware that many telephone fund-raising requests are not legitimate. The AARP offers the following advice when you receive a request for money:

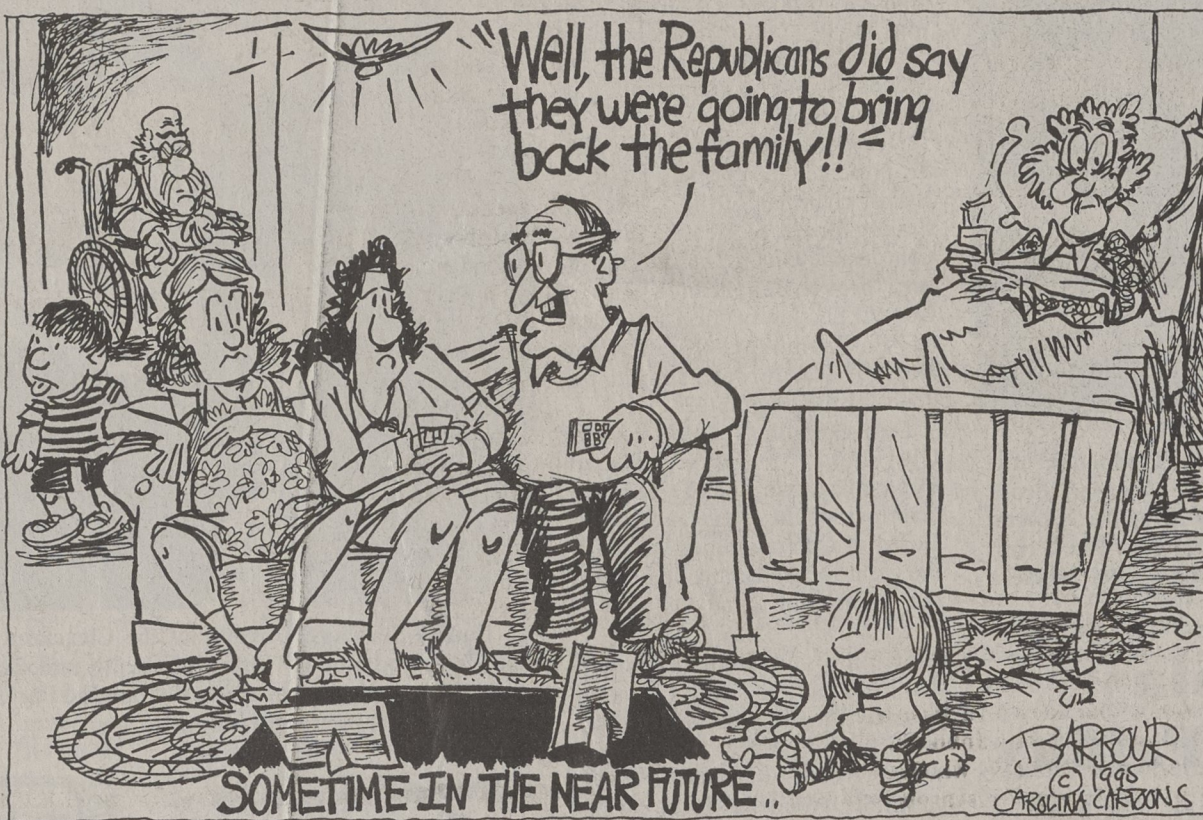
- Never respond to an emotional appeal from a caller who is seeking funds to help victims of illness, abuse, or disaster. Always demand that such callers provide you with written information before you consider giving.
- Ask that printed information about the charity, including its name, address and phone number, a statement of how and where donated funds will be used, and the charity's state registration number be mailed to you.
- Ask what percentage of the money you give will be used for a charitable purpose and how much will be kept by the fund-raiser.
- Never send cash to a charity or give out your credit card or bank account number over the phone. If you wish to contribute, write a check and note on it what the donation is for.

If the representative of the charity does not honor the above requests, it's safe to assume their "charity" organization is a fraud. Legitimate charities will gladly provide you with the information you need to make an informed decision. If you have questions about a charitable solicitation you receive over the phone, by mail or in person, or if you think the solicitation is a fraud, contact the Attorney General's Office, P.O. Box 629, Raleigh, NC 27602, phone (919) 733-7741.

Count your blessings and give to food drive

Kings Mountain area citizens have a unique opportunity to show special gratitude for their many blessings during the Thanksgiving season. The Cleveland County Jaycees, which is comprised of young men and women from all over the county, in cooperation with the Kings Mountain Herald, Cleveland Times, The Printing Press, Food Lion, Harris-Teeter, Bi-Lo and Ingles are sponsoring a food drive to provide a traditional Thanksgiving meal to at least 50 needy families in the county. Area citizens can help by donating turkeys, sweet potatoes, green beans, cranberry sauce and fixings for dressing and rice and gravy. Each of the grocery stores listed above will provide drop boxes for canned items. As you purchase your groceries between now and Thanksgiving, think about your fellow citizens who aren't as fortunate as you, and purchase some of the above-mentioned canned goods and drop them in the boxes as you leave the store. If you would like to become more personally involved and make a financial contribution or help distribute the food, call the Jaycees at 480-7703.


Cartoonitorial



The great bagel debate

One of my associates, Betsy Congdon, is leaving the newspaper business to go to work in a new restaurant specializing in bagels. She and I have engaged in spirited debate about the merit, or lack of merit, of the bagel since she put in her notice. Although Betsy has lived in the south for a while, as Briscoe Darling would say, "She ain't from around here." She is from Buffalo, N.Y. I have a lot of Buffalo jokes, but I will restrain myself. Betsy is a willowy, blonde lady, with a ready smile and a world of enthusiasm, especially for the bagel. I don't like bagels. I cannot think of a single reason why anyone would risk their teeth and jawbones by eating one of those concrete-like baby inner tubes. Betsy says I'm wrong and they are delicious. My wife, Ann, likes bagels very much, but I can't think why. Webster's defines the bagel as a hard, glazed, round roll with a chewy texture and a hole in the middle. In my mind that's about all you can say about a bagel. Betsy, Maria Trakas (Betsy's replacement), and I debated the bagel extensively the other morning, and I suggested that a good use for them might be for roofing a house, or as replacement tires on one of my grandson's toy trucks. Bagels could be tied together and used as life rafts. They could also be used as clay pigeons for trap shooters, although I'm not too sure double ought buckshot would damage them much. Betsy and Maria tell me I'm being unfairly negative about bagels. When I told them bagels were tasteless, they both disagreed. Seems they now come in different flavors. As far as I'm concerned a strawberry bagel is still a challenge to the mouth and the digestive system, regardless of the flavor. Lots of people eat bagels smeared with cream cheese, another flavorless item. A bagel with cream cheese is like dry toast and pabulum, although toast

JIM HEFFNER
Guest Columnist




does have a little flavor and is much easier to chew. I suppose you might be able to make a bagel palatable by soaking it in water for a couple of days and dumping a bowl of hot grits and a dollop of margarine on top, but I wouldn't bet on it. Betsy says you can make a delicious sandwich by slicing a bagel in half, stacking several cold cuts on one half, then capping it with the other half. Frankly, I have no intention of ruining my chain saw for the sake of an impossible-to-eat sandwich. As I get older, I learn more and more. I've often wondered why so many New Yorker City residents are rude and unfriendly. It occurs to me they eat a lot of bagels up there, and many of those people are suffering from broken and chipped teeth. Their nerves are on edge, because of their penchant for gnawing on those over-inflated teething rings. Throughout our lives we are faced with many choices. I choose to refrain from eating, or I should say, attempting to eat, bagels. I respect your right to chomp on those cast iron doughnuts all you like. Your dentist will love you for it. There is one good thing I'll say about bagels. Their existence will provide a living for my friend Betsy. Go in peace, Betsy, and luck to you. Remember, make sure your group insurance has an injury-by-bagel clause, and don't drop any of those things on your tootsies.

Hanging tough on education

In a recent meeting of the General Assembly's Education Oversight Committee, State Board of Education Chairman Jay Robinson called on legislators to support the latest plethora of school reforms. Without continued support for the latest in a long line of "magic pills" for public education, Robinson believes that North Carolina's school performance will never rise above its ranking of forty-eight out of fifty states. Robinson told the panel what the average North Carolinian has recognized for quite some time: "I think the biggest problem we had was getting people at the local level to believe us." He is referring to failed reform effort after failed reform effort over the past decade as our state has continued to rank at the bottom of national SAT scores. The problem with having tried and quickly failed in so many attempts at reform is that no one any longer takes a new plan seriously. Robinson apparently believes that things will get better if we simply stick with the current slate of proposed remedies. What is Robinson's answer to our education dilemma? He simply wants to be given the power for overseeing public education that was once elected Superintendent of Instruction. Apparently, Robinson believes that he and the rest of his Governor-appointed state Board of Education, rather than the publicly elected Superintendent of Public Instruction, can

Thom Goolsby
Carolina Syndicated Columns



somehow be more effective in improving student performance. As for any real reforms, all of Robinson's words sound familiar. We've heard them a hundred times before and will probably hear them a hundred times again: get parents involved, shift power to the local level, reward teachers for performance, etc. The problem is that nothing changes. The enormous public school bureaucracy, managed and run by professional "educrats," will nod their heads in approval and then continue on with "business as usual." Is there an answer? Yes, and the solution is seen daily in our free enterprise system. It all comes down to one word - competition - and that can only come about when the government-run public school monopoly is broken. The quickest way to break such a

monopoly is by giving citizens a tuition-tax credit. Such legislation was presented last year in the North Carolina legislature. Liberal politicians, lobbyists and big government proponents acted quickly to crush the bill that attempted to give tuition tax credits of \$1,000 a year per child to every North Carolina family. Tuition tax credits would "jump start" education in the Tar Heel state because, finally, the public education system would be required to compete for the privilege of educating the thousands of school children who are currently taken for granted. Each child whose family would be able to afford private education due to the tax credit would mean a savings of several thousand dollars in state funds. The result - put up or shut up time for the slothful leviathan known as education. Would the public schools be up for the task? Could they compete with the private sector, particularly, if the private sector was partially subsidized by tax credits? Isn't such an effort at least worth a try? Could thing actually be any worse than they already are? Don't forget, the goal is to educate our children. The current system is not doing it and no one in the public schools takes reforms seriously. Why not add a little competition? Thom Goolsby is managing partner and a trial attorney with the Currin Law Firm of Raleigh and Wilmington and teaches at Campbell Law School.

Bob McRae
Superintendent
Kings Mountain Schools



New state requirements

I would like to begin today's column by correcting a piece of information I shared a few columns ago. I stated that this year's eighth graders would be the first students required to pass a state computer proficiency test in order to receive a high school diploma. Since that time the State Board of Education has decided to put this off as a graduation requirement until next year. I apologize for the confusion, however we acted upon information we had been given by the State Board earlier in an effort to better prepare our students. They will continue to receive the additional nine weeks computer instruction in the eighth grade, however, this year's seventh grade class will be the first group required to pass the test as a graduation requirement. They will take the test next year. Speaking of the State Board of Education, the current board has enacted sweeping changes in regards to how local school systems are governed by the Board and the Department of Public Instruction. You need to understand what is happening as it will have a dramatic effect on our system.

Using changes enacted by the 1995 General Assembly as a springboard, the State Board of Education has developed as a guide for its work a new plan called "The New ABCs of Public Education." The State Board of Education has been legislatively designated as the primary overseer of public education in North Carolina. The role of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction has been brought more under the supervision of the State Board. The term "New ABCs" needs to be further explained so that you will understand more about the three primary areas of emphasis from the State Board. The "A" stands for strong accountability. Individual schools will be held accountable for student performance. Certain required state tests will be used to monitor progress in schools. Annual performance standards based on growth in achievement by students will be established. A two-stage plan is in place for schools that do not make satisfactory progress. As a first step, small, select teams of educators will be assigned by the state to these schools to help them achieve their goals. If a school continues to fall short of assigned goals, an interim leader will be provided and tenure will be suspended for the principal and teaching staff until the school is making expected progress. This process clearly sets up the most demanding accountability process under which we have operated. We will work diligently to reach our goals, and I believe we can avoid any need for outside assistance. The "B" stands for the basics and high standards. The state testing program will be targeted only at the basic skills which all students should master. In the elementary and middle grades the focus will be on reading, writing, and mathematics. At the high school level students will take end of course tests in English I and II, Algebra I, Biology, U.S. History, and Economics, Law, and Politics (ELP). Our primary focus in teaching our children is to be on these most basic subjects. Of course, we will not abandon all other subjects but must realize the primary importance of what has commonly come to be known as the basics. The "C" stands for maximum local control. No particular method for improving student achievement and learning is to be imposed from the state level to local schools. State laws and policies which get in the way of this local flexibility are to be changed or modified. The stated intent is to give local schools and the parents of the students who go there more control and flexibility to make decisions about how those schools operate. I think this is a move in the right direction and welcome it if it actually happens. I am cautiously optimistic, however, as I have heard these winds blow before. Time will tell. I am pleased with the efforts of the State Board of Education in regards to the New ABC's. Improvement in schools seldom comes without focus. If the State Board's efforts at providing that focus come to fruition, our children will be better served. Excellence is no accident, and I appreciate the State Board's hard work in pursuing the excellence we all desire.

HERALD LETTER POLICY

The Herald welcomes your letters to the editor for publication in each Thursday's paper. We ask that you follow these guidelines: Keep the letters brief and to the point. Letters in excess of 600 words will not be accepted. Type and double space, if possible. If not, write legibly. Sign all letters and include full name, address, and telephone number for verification purposes. The Herald reserves the right to edit letters for any reason and reserves the right to reject any letter for any reason.

Servants do the right thing

One of my favorite greeting cards is an offering by Sandra Boynton in which a room full of horses is voting upon an issue of some substance to the animal world. But situated directly in the crowd is one cow who sticks out like a sore thumb. And the look on her face betrays her realization that the room is absent of any bovine counterparts. The horse at the podium declares, "All in favor of the motion please signify by saying, 'neigh.' All opposed to the motion please moo." The caption on the inside reads, "Just because you're outnumbered, you're not necessarily wrong." That sentiment captures a truth that even the most amateur student of history soon discovers - there can be a difference between what is popular and what is right. On the eve of our November 7 election date, those words offer rich material for thought. Many of us will go to the polls to cast our votes for those who will serve. Furthermore, many of us will speak with those who are elected both before and after the votes are

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on Religion and Life
Rev. Dick Newsome
Pastor
First Presbyterian Church



cast. And mixed in with the jargon will be requests that each candidate listen to the people, respect his or her constituency, and reflect the will of the citizenship. No doubt those words will be spoken with the best of intentions and the highest of hopes. But I would like to add the view that something more needs to be said - something which changes the nature of decision-making a great deal. While it is deeply important that a public servant have a feel for

the common consent, the opinion of the majority is not and cannot be the final guide. The final guide in any decision - public or private - should be the heartfelt belief that the decision is simply the right thing according to one's faith and ethics. I realize that such a view places a great deal more weight on the shoulders of our decision-makers than simply voting according to the collective swell. But I imagine that they know well that public politics is risky business and an endeavor fraught with conflict. And among what little I know of each of them is the knowledge that they are fully capable of such important reflection. The Lord has blessed each of them with sound minds and sound hearts. And I trust they will use them to the fullest. So good advice for the rest of us is to communicate our proper wishes for our candidates, and to support them as we are able in the years ahead. Good advice is to remind them that they are always in our hearts and always in our prayers.

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