

Opinions

JIM HEFFNER

Columnist



Bark at your own risk

There's an old saying around the newspaper business that it is not news if a dog bites a man, but if a man bites a dog, that's news. I don't know if the same thing applies to barking but there it was, right there on the TV news, a man was arrested in Portland, Maine for barking at a dog.

The story is not as simple as that, or course. It seems this guy was walking by a police car, and one of those drug-sniffing canines started barking at him. The man, 20 year old Johnny Mathis (not the singer) started barking back. This turn of events upset the dog immensely (what did he expect?), and the cop cuffed the barking offender and ran him in.

"A dog can go through a window, then the taunter becomes a victim," the cop said.

Really? Are we to believe a German shepherd can burst through the reinforced window of a police car? If the dog is that strong, it's a menace to the public anyway.

Isn't this a wonderful country we live in? Burning a U.S. flag is a right guaranteed by the First amendment of the Constitution, but barking at a dog obviously isn't. How do they know the guy wasn't talking to the dog? How do they know the guy wasn't a dog in disguise?

Is Santa heeled? - It isn't even Christmas yet and already at least two Santas have been arrested on weapons charges.

One of them, a department store Santa, bent over to get a hand full of candy for a youngster and a security guard spotted a 9 mm pistol stuck in his belt. Santa was taken downtown and booked for carrying a concealed weapon. With the proper permits, he would not have been breaking the law in some states, including North Carolina, but this Santa was in a midwestern state.

A uniformed Santa Claus in Baytown, Texas, pulled a gun on the employees of a truck stop and demanded cash from the safe. When they didn't respond fast enough, Santa said, "If you don't do as you're told, none of you are going to have a very merry Christmas."

F. Lee in Graham - Old F. Lee Bailey is up in Graham these days defending an alleged double murderer. Mark Crotts has already been convicted once of stabbing an elderly couple to death.

Bailey may have a little trouble getting this guy off, since he admitted to his cell mate that he did the deed. Lest we forget, however, Bailey has good luck with guys who murder two people with a knife. Besides that, if the money is there, not guilty verdicts can be bought. Bailey and his cohorts have proved that once this year.

It's a little exciting in Graham these days, though. Word is that many O.J. trial watchers are in court observing the dapper Bailey as he struts around ripping witnesses apart. Don't get me wrong, I like Lee Bailey, but witness-twisting is what he does best.

People are chasing Bailey down on the streets asking for autographs, and F. Lee always obliges I'm told.

This is the most excitement in Graham since hometown product John-Boy Isley was spotted on a street corner wearing a diaper last summer.

Your Right To Say It

Grover should be proud

To the editor:

Residents of Grover have a reason to sleep well at night. They have a volunteer fire department second to none.

Two weeks ago, I left I-85 and was driving toward Grover when the engine of my car caught fire. Within seconds volunteer firefighter Tracy Stewart (with a broken arm) was out of his truck with a fire extinguisher in hand and smothered the fire before it had completely destroyed my vehicle.

Further, he refused any show of gratitude other than a "thank you."

The Stewart family had not finished with me yet! Tracy's father told me of a garage in Grover that could probably get me back on the road. That was yet another wonderful experience.

The garage (T.N.T.) is owned by Ben and Linda Ellis who, with the expertise of one of their sons, Barney, rivals or exceeds the quality of workmanship of a group of factory trained craftsmen.

By the time I drove away I felt like a member of the family.

I would like to thank the Volunteer Fire Department, the Ellis family and the residents of Grover for turning what could have been a nightmare into a warm and pleasant experience that has renewed my faith in humanity.

Scot Mendelsohn
Atlanta, GA

Cartoonitorial



A gift! Oh, you shouldn't have

KINGS MOUNTAIN, NC, October 7, 2005 - This is Connie Chung reporting for CBS from historic downtown Kings Mountain, North Carolina where the city is celebrating the 225th anniversary of the Battle of Kings Mountain, said by President Thomas Jefferson to be the "turning point of the American Revolution."

The main streets, which I can tell you from personal experience have been packed for previous celebrations, are almost bare as the parade passes the reviewing stand which includes numerous dignitaries such as former President George Bush, fifth term North Carolina Governor Jim Hunt, long-time Kings Mountain Mayor Scott Neisler, National Park officials and 103-year-old Senator Strom Thurmond from South Carolina.

I was here at the city's Bicentennial celebration in 1975, when Vice-President Nelson Rockefeller was the keynote speaker, and as I recall the festivities were much better attended and the crowd much more spirited than they are today. I wonder what has happened here. As the parade marches by, let's listen in on the conversations between President Bush and the others and see if we can get a clue.

Bush - Mayor Neisler, I recall riding through this very downtown area on the back of a train during my re-election bid in 1992, or was it '93 or '94? You know, when you get older the years just sort of run together! Right Strom?

Thurmond - Heh? Yeah, that's his name.

Bush - But, anyway, it seems like both sides of the railroad tracks were just packed with people waving flags and banners with my picture on them. The town looked so neat. I really wanted to stop for a few minutes and shake some hands and say a few words, but they had this big speech scheduled in Ranlo and we had to meet certain schedules, you know. But what has happened here? Why such a small crowd for such a monumental occasion? And, by the way, what's that big concrete wall and hedge bush over there right in the heart of downtown? And all those yellowjackets flying around, and those little rats scurrying around that hedge bush... that's an eyesore to this lovely little town. Is there no pride here anymore?

Neisler - Well, sir. Let me start at the beginning. Yes, I remember your ride through Kings Mountain and that was a great day in the history of our town. That was a proud moment. You were on that train, too, weren't you Mr. Thurmond?

Thurmond - Heh? Yeah, that's right, Sonny.

Neisler - As for that big concrete wall, that is a recycling center. It was a gift from Cleveland County to Kings Mountain back in '96, and the little hedge bush went with it. Please don't misunderstand me now, Mr. President, it is a recycling center and not a trash dump. It only accepts items that can be recycled like newspapers, plastic drink bottles, aluminum cans, and such. Because it was a gift we're very proud of it.

Bush - I understand. But where are the rats and yellowjackets coming from?

Neisler - Well, we don't call 'em rats and yellowjackets, sir. We call 'em Sergeant KMs, or SGTkMs. That stands for Shelby's gift to Kings Mountain. They're not pests, they're just a little high on caffeine right now from drinking those last few drops of soda that are always left in the bottom of soft drink bottles and cans.

Bush - But why the small crowd here today? You don't have to answer that. I'd be embarrassed to come out myself if a recycling center sat right smack dab in the middle of my hometown. Why wasn't this thing built in a more inconspicuous area of town?

Neisler - Well, we wanted to do our part to save the environment, even though we could have done that by



GARY STEWART

Editor

curbside recycling or at least putting the recycling center down at the Community Center. We took a survey and 99 percent of our citizens wanted it down there but our guardian angels across the creek said that would be too dangerous for the kids playing little league ball and swimming, even though the kids would have had to cross two parking lots and walk all the way around the Community Center to get to the spot where we wanted to locate the recycling center. But it was a gift - it came from county tax and grant money - and you can't look a gift horse in the mouth.

Bush - Mayor, read my lips! Tax money, whether you call it county funds or state or federal grants, is your money. The last time I heard the county tax rate was the same for people living in Kings Mountain as for those living in Shelby, Belwood and Polkville. Not only should you have looked the gift horse in the mouth, you should have kicked it in the (bleep).

Neisler - You may be right, Mr. President. But our guardian angels know what's best for us.

Hunt - Sorry to interrupt you, Mr. President. But, mayor, you know I'm a big football fan. I won the grid-picking contest at N.C. State by a narrow margin back in '95, and it would have been a runaway if I'd picked against the Wolfpack more often. How are the Mountaineers doing this year?

Mayor - Great, sir. We've won the state championship three years in a row and are undefeated again this season. But we're not the Mountaineers anymore. We're the NIMBYS.

Bush - The what?

Neisler - NIMBYS. That nickname went along with the recycling center. It stands for not in my back yard, or Ingrates or Rednecks if you prefer. It's a good thing fans don't have to drive through downtown to get to the high school or we'd never have a crowd there either. Shelby's crowds have dwindled down to nothing since they located one of their recycling centers in that big front yard of their high school. And they cut out their Christmas parade and Fourth of July celebrations when their third recycling center was located in front of the old Courthouse. You know they'd never hide a recycling center on a back street!

Chung - So, there you have it. A small town in North Carolina whose forefathers fought so valiantly to stamp out British rule in 1780, swallowed their pride and joined their neighbors in a fight to save the environment. By the way, Mayor, how's the program working?

Neisler - Overall, in the county the percentage of families recycling has grown every year. You hardly ever see a car at our recycling center, though. Most people around here got in the habit of taking their trash, I mean, recyclables, to other dum - uh, I mean, recycling centers long before ours was ever built. This center here was a gift that was never really fully opened.

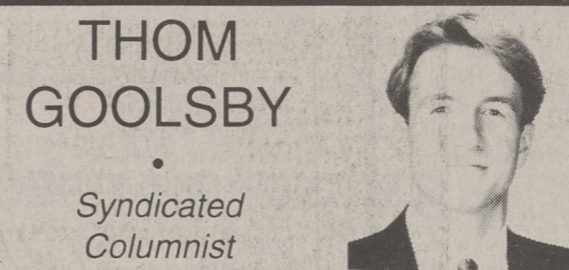
Chung - Thank you, Mayor. Back to Dan in Washington (Mr. President, Mr. Thurmond, there's the helicopter. Let's get out of here!)

The suffering of victims never ends

Imagine being the parent of a 17-year-old high school cheerleader and receiving a telephone call that your daughter has been hurt at school. You rush to the hospital only to learn that your daughter is dead, shot by an angry young man who believed she spurned his affections.

After recovering from the shock and tragedy of your beloved daughter's death and the haunting funeral that always accompanies the loss of an individual taken so young in life, your nightmare is only beginning. Such is the story and ongoing saga of the parents and family of Norma J. Russell, a student at Durham's Northern High School who was murdered back in 1986.

The murderer, David M. Mancuso, was found guilty of second-degree murder and sentenced to life in prison plus three years. However, the pain, suffering and torment of the Russell family did not end with Mancuso's conviction. The reason? In North Carolina,



THOM GOOLSBY

Syndicated Columnist

"life in prison plus three years," does not mean much of anything. Consequently, Mancuso is up for parole this year, as he will be every year from now until the time he is released - and he will eventually be released.

In an effort to thwart Mancuso's attempts at parole, the Russell family must yearly dredge up the painful emotions surrounding Norman's death. They must make pleas to the all-powerful Parole Commission in an effort to keep Mancuso in jail. This year, Norma's

GUEST COLUMN

Debbie Clary
North Carolina House



Here are the facts

We've all heard the term "sick and tired." Well, I'm sick and tired of reading the liberal garbage, scare tactics that are being used against the elderly and poor people of this state and country.

A recent letter in a local newsletter referred to Republicans as a slash and burn budget crew and that elderly, frail and disabled persons, as well as veterans, should be afraid. Remember six months ago? Then it was the school children that were going to starve because of those mean spirited Republicans. All those mean spirited Republicans have done is upset the apple cart for those who have been living off the public trough for too long. Republicans are successfully cutting to the chase, cutting the bureaucracy and reducing spending.

In my recent appointment as Chairman of the House, Aging Commission, I feel a great responsibility to the elderly of this state. I would be the first on the battlefield if I thought for one moment that services to the elderly were in jeopardy. I find most of what I've read and heard in the news to be "hot political rhetoric," scare tactics, and outright lies.

I do not deny that we are slowing the growth of Medicaid, but we are not cutting off services to our elderly. In slowing the growth, I look at it as a challenge to make more health care choices available to our elderly. Ask anyone if they would choose adult day-care services, in-home health care and community based services over the rest home and I'll bet I know what they'll say. Community based services and in-home health care is the lower cost alternative to a nursing home. We are at a turning point in care choices for the elderly and I see slowing the growth of Medicaid as a blessing to the elderly that have been trapped by the strong lobby of the rest home and nursing home industry. This industry has been so strong in political circles that money intended to spur growth in other alternatives for health care for the elderly has been stifled. Well, here's our chance to look at the lower cost alternatives, the ones I find more people want.

When you cut through the phony attacks and get down to the facts, America is faced with two choices: Adopt the Republican Medicare Preservation Act and secure the program for future generations, or allow the program to go bankrupt. The Republican Medicare Preservation Act will save Medicare from bankruptcy while still increasing spending on the program by nearly \$2,000 per beneficiary, per year by the year 2002, preserving seniors' right to choose their own doctors and expanding beneficiaries' choices for care, and holding seniors' share of premium cost to their current level. Republicans are working to save Medicare for the next generation, while the Democrats are trying to preserve it as a political issue for the next election.

The group that is leading the attack on Republican plans to save Medicare is probably the worst offender. Using your taxpayer money to fight against the very changes you voted for last November, the National Council of Senior Citizens receives 96% of its funding from federal grants paid for by the taxpayers. While they claim to be fighting for seniors and the poor, they are really fighting to protect their place at the public trough.

Each state will receive a 7.24% increase in FY '96, almost double the 4.3% projected average anticipated growth of state Medicaid spending this year (source: Health Care Financing Administration, based on compilations of actual and projected state expenditures as reported by the State Medicaid Directors). At some point we must cut the growth of the Medicaid program. It currently takes about one fifth of the states' budgets, and spending has increased about 20% per year. If Medicaid is not reformed, states will have to spend \$688 billion of their own money, between 1995 and 2002 (Source: The Heritage Foundation).

There is one other issue I would like to address. I'm tired of hearing that Republicans are only cutting taxes for the rich. Republicans are cutting taxes for America's families. Here's what the GOP plan does:

Promote the financial security of the American family by providing \$245 billion in tax reductions. Fully 70% of the tax relief measures in the plan will benefit families with income less than \$75,000.

Provides a \$500 per child tax credit to single income families earning less than \$75,000 a year and multiple income families earning less than \$110,000 a year.

Provides tax credits for families that choose to adopt a child.

These are things you don't see in the scare tactic stories.

(Debbie Clary represents Cleveland County in the N.C. House.)

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sisters are taking 12,000 signatures to the Parole Commission. The sisters have worked very hard over the past six months gathering names of outraged citizens. When asked by a reporter what the impact of Mancuso's release would be, Norma's mother said, "We would walk in fear."

One day, and it is inevitable, the Russell family will begin their "walk in fear." Despite their pleas and cries of indignation, Mancuso will not spend life in prison. In the not too distant future, he will be a free man.

It sounds all well and good, after the long and painful ordeal of a murder trial, when the criminal is convicted and the judge says, "You are sentenced to life in prison plus three years." However, such words are only hyperbole and propaganda for our double-speak criminal justice system that is anything but "just" to victims. The Russell family and Norma deserve better and Mancuso deserves worse.

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