

Opinion

JIM HEFFNER

Columnist



Along came a spider

I've mentioned Maria, our graphics artist before. You may remember she's the young lady who once dated a guy who transported dead bodies between hospitals and funeral homes. Maria was also kidnapped once, but that's another story.

Last Thursday morning, Maria came dragging into the office five minutes late. "I didn't get any sleep at all," she said. "As I was going into my apartment last night, I saw a humongous spider outside of the door, and it scared me half to death."

The spider sighting upset Maria so much she dreamed about them all night. My question is, if she didn't sleep, how did she dream? You have to know Maria to conjure up an answer to that.

She told me about a classmate in college who kept a small spider for a pet. I'm not making this up folks. She tells it for the truth.

Maria said the girl would pick the spider up and watch it spin a web from one finger to another and crawl around on the web. Supposedly, when the pet spider produced a litter, she got rid of the mother and all the babies except one, which she then trained along the same lines as the mother. When this spider produced a litter, she did the same thing again. "She's now into the third generation of this spider family," Maria said.

I wondered, aloud, how the girl knew which spiders were female? Maria looked at me somewhat puzzled and said, "I don't know."

Maria's friend needs to be told that if these spiders continue to produce offspring, there's a male arachnid in the woodpile somewhere.

I hated to spoil Maria's image of her spider-loving friend, but I told her the girl was pulling her leg.

I don't think she believed me. Once, when I was a young boy, my father spotted a large spider on the wall in our living room. We had one of those black, pot-bellied heaters sitting on a hearth back then, as did many houses in the Travora Mill village in York, S.C.

My dad reached for a stick of stove-wood to dispatch the uninvited intruder, but stopped short because he found he was just before putting his hand on a large black widow spider, which was poised to bite him.

The incident was a scary experience for a young boy, and my father, one of the most fearless men I ever knew, was somewhat shaken as well.

One of the dangers of growing up poor during the depression years, and immediately thereafter, was using the outhouse. Most mill houses in York lacked indoor plumbing. During the winter months spiders found ways to get into houses, and especially outhouses, so when nature called, the adventure was on. People learned quickly to check the outhouse closely before closing the door.

I knew a man who went to the outhouse on his wedding night, and was bitten by a black widow spider. He didn't die from the bite, but it was several weeks before he was able to take a honeymoon. I mean that literally.

Fortunately, those "outhouse days" are gone for all but the most rural of people.

There are just two poisonous spiders in our part of the country. The black widow is still around, and then there's the brown recluse, a transplant from foreign soil. The bite of either can kill, but usually doesn't if treated properly.

The best thing to do is avoid the vicious little varmints. Resist the urge to visit an outhouse if you chance to spot one out in the country somewhere, and above all don't take them in as pets.

I still think Maria's friend was putting her on.

Cartoonitorial



Comp Time bill is good one

This week Congress will debate a bill that is good for American workers and their families. The Working Families Flexibility Act (Comp Time) would amend the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) to give employers the authority to offer interested employees the chance to take compensatory time off, instead of cash for working overtime.

Specifically, the bill would allow employers to compensate their employees with 1.5 hours of paid leave for each hour worked over 40 hours in a seven day work period. The bill allows employees, together with their families, to decide whether to take this time off or to take the additional cash associated with overtime. This is a choice that employees at various levels of government have had and used successfully for over a decade.

The bill does not require employers to offer compensatory time, but instead makes that option available if both the employer and the employee so desire. These new options will provide many workers with a more flexible system that will allow them to spend more time with their family, run errands, or attend to whatever personal matters they may need time to address.

The changes proposed by this legislation provide relief for which millions of Americans have been asking. As the percentage of men and women who must balance work and family responsibilities grows, employers are often hampered by federal law in their attempts to accommodate employee requests for more flexibility in their work schedules. This will remove one of those obstacles and give private sector employees the

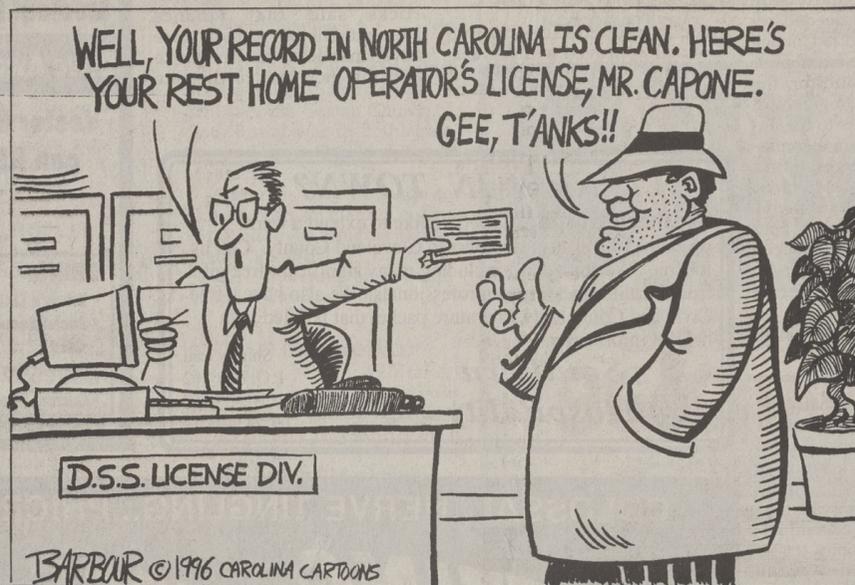


Rep. Sue Myrick
NC 9th District
Guest Column

same option that their counterparts in the public sector have had for years

While the option of choosing between more time or more money may not seem that important to some salaried workers, the flexibility this option provides single parent households who are dependent upon an hourly income, is immense. Any working mother who has had to choose between making money to put food on the table or missing work to nurse a sick child, will appreciate the flexibility this bill offers. Hard working fathers will also enjoy the extra time as they will now be able to attend more Little League games and PTA meetings with their family.

As a wife, mother, grandmother and former small business owner, I know firsthand how hard it is to balance the responsibilities of work and family. This bill offers a common-sense approach to help with this balancing act. Hopefully it will garner the President's signature and become law - a law that "works" for "working families."



THOM GOOLSBY

Syndicated Columnist

Federal study outlines massive problems in Parole Commission

A recent study by the National Institute of Corrections concluded that North Carolina's parole system is one big mess. With no guidance or policies for reviewing cases, denying or granting parole, nor even revoking parole and sending criminals back to prison, our state's parole system ranks as one of the largest bureaucratic disasters in the country.

Since 1993 the Parole Commission has been chaired by Juanita Baker, a Hunt political appointee, who heads the five member panel and a staff of 100 workers. Their job is to review the cases of thousands of criminals who are eligible for parole each year in North Carolina. Last year, the commission granted parole to over 4,000 inmates.

A seething federal report stated, "The majority of the staff do not feel there is any direction provided, nor are there any documents which lay out proper procedures for handling cases, making decisions, recommendations, or related to any aspect of the daily operations of the commission."

In response to this blistering critique, Ms. Baker demonstrated her keen grasp of the obvious. She stated, "I think it paints a picture that there is much needed to be done here." A more appropriate response for Ms. Baker would be to apologize to the people of North Carolina and resign.

As North Carolina is preparing to spend \$75 million next year renting prison spaces from various counties and prisons in other states for over 4,000 of our inmates, we currently have no idea how many backlogged inmates could be released from our prisons. The federal report noted that as the commission works its way through its substantial backlog of cases, many offenders are immediately released. However, the report states that "no one really has a handle on the magnitude of the problem or the number." It is also very unsettling that no backup system exists if and when staff workers become sick or go on vacation. Their work simply does not get accomplished until they return.

Besides the financial concerns related to the great expense of incarcerating individuals who can and should be released, we cannot forget about public safety concerns. With no guidelines or policies for reviewing cases and no full time victim coordinator, our Parole Commission risks numerous nightmares of Orwellian proportions.

Bureaucrats with little or no guidance from above are apparently given free reign and the keys to every jail cell in the state. Could anything be more ridiculous and absurd than our current parole system? Think of the thousands of dedicated law enforcement officers who risk their lives to protect the public in tracking down and arresting criminals. Try to imagine the countless hours spent by prosecutors, judges, court clerks and bailiffs to run the criminal justice system in our state. Don't forget about the tens of millions of our tax dollars spent to pay for law enforcement, our courts and the prison system.

With the current state of affairs in the parole system, all of the hard work of thousands of dedicated professionals and the countless tax dollars are hurled out the window, thanks to a bumbling bureaucracy. With no job descriptions or even a system or performance evaluations, none of the staffers of the Parole Commission know what they are expected to do, nor can their bosses even evaluate how their subordinates are performing.

Such an out-of-control system is a travesty and an outrage to the innocent, law-abiding and tax-paying citizens of North Carolina. Immediate action must be taken by Governor Hunt to establish a professionally run organization that can and will be held accountable for protecting the public and guaranteeing a fair and equitable parole system that upholds our society's ideal of justice. Our current parole system is in fact no system at all, but one outrageous mess.

Sidewalk Survey

By Elizabeth Stewart

Are you tired of The Olympics?



PAUL DOVER
Production Operation
Kings Mountain

No. I have tickets for track, field, archery, basketball, canoeing and equestrian events this week in Atlanta and I am excited.



WAYNE LOWERY
Self-employed
Kings Mountain

Not really. Virgil (my pet parrot) and I stayed home while my wife went to Atlanta and really enjoyed the Olympics. I enjoy the TV coverage.



W.D. HOLDER
Club Manager

No. I don't think the TV coverage of the games has been enough.



EMILY BLAKE
Student
Kings Mountain

Yes. I wish they would put something else on television for us to watch.



SCOTT SMITH
Student
Kings Mountain

No. I love the gymnastics best of all. I'd like to see more on TV and would like to be there.

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