

LETTERS

From 1A

probation to teenagers who kill their newborns.

It couldn't be because someone could walk into any local business or school and kill someone or commit other criminal acts and spend a very short time in jail and very quickly be released, and in many cases, to continue their life of crime.

Police risk their life every day to catch criminals and many times the criminal is out on the street before the officer finishes the paperwork for arresting them. Surely the justice system could not be at fault for this. It must be the guns.

Surely it couldn't be because we have very little meaningful discipline in our homes or schools.

It surely couldn't be because our government decided it best to take God out of schools.

Surely it couldn't be because our school systems teach the children that they are nothing but glorified apes who have evolved out of some primordial soup of mud by teaching evolution as fact and by handing out condoms as if they were candy.

Surely this could not be the fault of groups who protect many people from facing penalties for their own actions.

It couldn't possibly be because we teach our children that there are no laws or morality that transcend us, that everything is relative and that actions don't have consequences.

It couldn't be because we are rapidly being led down the path to Sodom and Gomorra by all the things listed above and by people who believe what they do is no one's business but their own and do not believe they should have to face the consequences of their actions.

It couldn't be, when many years ago, we stopped requiring our children to say sir and ma'am, we started the decline of respect for anyone and anything.

Nah, it must have been the guns. Just stop selling guns and

everything will be great again. Please wake up America. This is a people problem.

J. Don Shields
Shelby

Thanks from kidney association

To the editor:

On behalf of the Cleveland-Rutherford Kidney Association, I would like to thank everyone who helped with our annual appreciation awards banquet. We would especially like to thank Mrs. Brenda Thrasher for being our guest speaker. We appreciate all the volunteers who donated or served food and helped with the program: James and Kathy Grigg, Lisa Fitch, Missy Fisher, Jane Ingle, Wayne Butler, Ruth Butler, Hazel Canipe, Alice Harmon, Nancy and Skip Pinkerton, Pam Ledford, Cora Brantley, Ann Van Dyke, Ginger Burleson, Linda Petty, Ophelia McCraw, Sharon Ledford, Renee Ledford, Terri Dixon, Ingles Supermarket, and Carolina Trophies.

We also wish to thank all the wonderful volunteers and generous contributors who continue to support the association. Without your assistance, we could not even hope to help our clients.

We would also like to take this opportunity to thank members of Dover Baptist Church. These six men generously donated their time and skills to rebuild the porch of CRKA's patient support center: Richard Morgan, Claude Brown, John Brookie, Franklin Hicks, Forrest Bridges, and Clarence Queen. Through their efforts, they have clearly shown true love and concern for their fellow human beings.

We also wish to thank Colleen Ellenburg and Susan Collins for helping solicit prizes and contributions for the Johnny White Memorial Party (annual motorcycle rally). They do this in loving memory of

their husbands who died from kidney failure.

We appreciate all our volunteers in their continued support in this fight. Kidney disease is not only the battle for the patient's body, but the finances, the mind and the soul of the family. With good people like you, we can continue to ease their burdens.

Margaret Ledford
Executive Director

Alien pests march on the Blue Ridge

To the editor:

Each day now our Blue Ridge forests are greener, as summer comes on with a rush. But research scientists tell us that the mountains are also seeing some new and very unwelcome guests: bugs, diseases and plants from other countries.

Exotics are moving on the Blue Ridge because of increased travel and trade, and our toothless attempts to stop them.

"Things get by you. We don't have security at all the piers in the country," one federal inspections scientist told me recently.

You may already know about damage from kudzu, Asian chestnut blight, and of course the European gypsy moths that are expected to spread throughout the Blue Ridge by the year 2020. But there are plenty of newer arrivals, and no known way to halt them:

- Millions of dogwoods have been felled by an Asian fungus, and more die off each year.

- A European insect has obliterated nearly all mature Fraser fir trees, which grow wild only in the Blue Ridge.

- An Asian insect is spreading and expected to arrive in the Smokies in another 15 years. It kills most Eastern hemlocks, and one scientist says it could drive the Carolina hemlock to extinction.

- Forest Service specialists predict that the butternut may also become extinct during the coming century because of yet another imported disease.

Weeds make up another battalion of invading exotics. Great Smoky Mountains National Park is now home to 350 kinds of them - more than a fifth of the park's plant species. Two dozen are "noxious to native plant communities."

Research entomologist William Wallner recommends that the U.S.:

- Inspect shipping thoroughly in the countries where the stowaways originate.

- Immediately identify and issue alerts on the highest-risk pests worldwide.

- Enact laws that will permit the U.S. to sue those responsible for all losses caused by exotic pests. Penalties now are pitifully small and infrequent.

A new federal effort against exotics by the Clinton administration may add up only to feel-good public relations maneuvers. But these aliens aren't from Roswell or the X-Files, they're for real. We should persuade town councils and county commissioners to:

- Pass resolutions urging state and federal officials to take effective action.

- Insist on more research to keep out new exotics, and deal with the ones already here.

- Demand tough inspections and penalties to clean up international shipping.

It's time to fight back. If you love your mountains, get to work!

Steve Nash

We need to pray for Russian people

To the editor:

Over the Easter holidays, my husband, Pastor Brady Jackson, and our daughter, Nikki, visited in Vladimir Russia.

Kings Mountain House of Prayer, where Rev. Jackson is the pastor, has made many contacts in this Russian city. The focus of this trip was not to see the beauty of the country, but to reinforce loving and caring ties with the people. In light of the conflict surrounding Europe,

we had no idea of what to expect on this journey. Yet in the middle of economic and ethnic turmoil God still moved.

Most of the people with whom we talked were concerned about the Kosovo crisis. Just like us, opinions varied on what should be done, but the overriding thought was that the Russians did not want to break fellowship with the Americans. We had the opportunity of ministering in The Vine Church and other outreach places. We also revisited some of the schools where we had gone before. In every place we visited we were warmly welcomed as old friends.

The people in Russia are faced with many difficult issues. As part of the body of Christ, it is important that we remember them in our prayers.

Teresa Jackson
Kings Mountain

Budget bill always lengthy

To the editor:

When it comes to legislation, the budget bill is always the biggest, in more ways than one.

It's the most far-reaching, touching the lives of every citizen of the state.

It's the most time-consuming, requiring countless hours of work by lawmakers and staff.

It's the biggest in terms of size, totaling 237 pages this year.

And it's the most widely debated.

This year, the budget-writing Appropriations Committee debated the spending bill for more than nine hours, ending at 1:30 a.m.

When the bill hit the floor, House members spent more than 12 hours discussing the bill and voting on 41 amendments. They rejected proposals to give legislators a 3 percent pay raise - the same as state employees - and to give top state officials only a 1 percent raise.

Lawmakers approved shifting \$3 million from small school systems to low-wealth systems. They voted to suspend a

House rule that requires adjournment at 9 p.m. and worked into the early morning. At 12:27 a.m., the bill passed by a surprisingly wide margin of 115-4.

The lopsided vote was a confirmation of what lawmakers had been saying for several days: the proposed budget was a good one.

As the chairs of the Appropriations Committee said, the budget was responsible and responsive. Spending increased by only 4.4 percent over the current year, the smallest increase in three years, and most of the increase went into education.

The budget included money to hire roughly 1,000 new teachers. More than half of those will be necessary to keep class sizes within state law.

Teachers will receive an average 7.5 percent pay raise under the budget. The budget included almost \$250 million for the third phase of a four-year plan to raise teacher pay to the national average.

The goal of the four-year effort is to recruit the best and brightest students into the teaching field - and to keep them in the classroom.

Smart Start, Gov. Jim Hunt's program to prepare young children for school, received an additional \$58 million.

Lawmakers also have good news for state employees. The new budget gives a 3% increase to all state employees as well as a one-time \$125 bonus. Two other items that are very important to state workers were also addressed. The first: the state will cover premium increases for the state health plan which is estimated to be \$100 million. Second, prescription drug cards are added to the program.

House passage of the budget took the last major piece of legislation off the agenda. Negotiators from the House and Senate must agree on a final budget, after the Senate passes its version.

Rep. Andy Dedmon

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