

# Our "Star Spangled" Country

*"Oh say can you see... the land of the free and the home of the brave"*

What is happening to us and our country? Many of us sense "storm clouds" of problems descending upon our country and our lives. Others do not. For our readers in the *Chatham County Line* I've been collecting news articles since the beginning of this year. The results signal big problems in our country. While some still see life through "rose-colored glasses," we'd better look at some real data. I'll describe and summarize some of the problems noted in our media beginning with our economy.

It's time to take a hard look at our country and our apparent lack of concern for our people. Let's look behind the rhetoric. Increasingly this is a nation of growing wealth at the very top of the income level versus lives of increasing economic struggle in the middle classes and dire poverty levels in the rest.

Older people have had the best income advantage that America offers compared to the recent exorbitant and unnecessary financial gains of the upper classes. If you were an adult in the 1970s you were living in an era of relative prosperity for all not seen since that time. Now ordinary people are finding it increasingly difficult to fund their families. A new financial calculator was released by the United Way of NC to help define financial needs of our families. For example, a family of two adults and two children in Wake County will need an annual income of \$70,200 just to meet basic financial needs, "just to get by." The United Way staff do not advise where to get the \$70,200 if you don't have it!

Are we the home of the free? Not from economic struggles and increasing awareness of control in this country by the economically advantaged and increasingly rich populations. Looking at household wealth in 2016, upper income families increased their wealth from \$740,100 to \$810,800, middle income wealth decreased from \$163,300 to \$110,200, and lower income families decreased from \$18,500 to \$10,800. Do the voters in upper income households have any awareness or any interest in improving income inequality?

Forbes magazine lists information about the 400 richest Americans. In 2016 the average Forbes member had a net worth of \$6 billion. These individuals have as much wealth as 16 million African-American households and 5 million Latino households. While the US has the preponderance of high wealth individuals, our middle class has less than half the wealth of other middle classes in much of the rest of the developed world. No one in political power seems to be starting another "war on poverty" or even commenting on the increasing income disparities in our country.

Let me mention other issues noted in our press. In addition to the problems in our national economy, North Carolina now has a new status... We are rated as last in the nation in unemployment benefits. Over the last several years 170,000 people lost benefits in our state. Only 10 percent of the unemployed are even eligible now and our average benefit of \$247 is lowest in the nation. This will be a real problem if or when unemployment increases.

North Carolina seeks to make it possible for you to gamble your hard earned money with advertising suggesting you might just win big and solve all your problems. We have a state-sponsored gambling lottery which is generating maximum gambling and lottery

**Advice Line**

By Dr. Betty Phillips



## Are we actually free or are we bogged down by debt and anxiety?

profits as well as addictions which increase theft, domestic violence, embezzlement, bankruptcy, divorce, child abuse, and even an increase in suicide rates, according to our local media.

Meanwhile is the federal government helping us or leading us astray? Wow! The federal government is borrowing \$1 trillion this year, roughly double what it borrowed last year, causing the dollar to continue losing value. What about supposed new tax cuts for us tax payers? Taxpayers earning \$3.5 million a year now will by 2020 have a tax cut of \$182,030 per year. So, if you belong to that crowd, clear sailing ahead!

If you ever feel like shooting guns, no problems, there are lots of guns you can use. The US has 5 percent of the world's population and 42 percent of civilian gun ownership. According to data, more people in the United States are being shot by guns compared to other countries.

Our government tells us they are concerned about our safety so they are spending billions of tax dollars on modernizing the nuclear arsenal. What does that signal to the rest of the world? The US has bigger and better bombs than you do. Do you believe this is helpful to you?

State regulations are increasingly controlled by industry representatives resulting in less public input into issues affecting our lives. Newspapers discuss a new Atlantic pipeline in the works in North Carolina with federal hearings run by industry representatives actually limiting public input. According to a newspaper article, people interested in testifying about this were herded into rooms with recording machines set up by the Federal Bureau of Ocean Energy Management. This new pipeline may cause increasing damage to our environment. The gas in the pipeline will be mostly methane. It was stated that all pipelines leak into the air and this pipeline will be crossing 320 rivers, creeks and streams in the North Carolina areas. A recent article describes the pipeline which would contribute to "climate change that is already bringing rising seas and heavier flooding to Eastern North Carolina." The pipeline will cause "environmental damage as the massive infrastructure project cuts into forest and runs through wetlands."

Offshore drilling is a serious threat to our oceans, a significant issue for our public health. A recent article heralded "Public unheard at drilling public meeting." The writer was attempting to testify at a hearing

conducted by the Federal Bureau of Ocean Energy Management writing that we are in "deep trouble" at the issue of government control of the process. The so-called public meeting allowed no testimony! The author of the article described this as "indoctrination" with "only one side of the issue on display— pro-oil."

How will North Carolina fare based on the new GOP tax law? We don't know yet. The new

our lawmakers actually helping or hurting us? So what can we do with all these problems? Public awareness is a good place to start, then public discussion, voting, and political pressure to help regular citizens. Remember the welfare of the least among us reflects our moral values.

In closing, please remember the Golden Rule. My website article written several years ago (but still on my website), reminds us of the power and the glory of the Golden Rule. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you! The road to heaven is paved with these glorious words. You all will travel on this road some day. Travel with love!

*Need Advice? Send questions to BettyPhillips@BellSouth.net or 466 Eagle Point Road, Pittsboro 27312. Questions can be anonymous. www.bettyphillipspsychology.com*

500 page federal tax law was passed with no hearings, no expert testimony and no time to fully study the law. Do these elected officials even care about us? Answer that for yourself.

The moral of this story is that we need to pay attention to what is actually happening to our area and our nation. Why? Our media rhetoric continues about the "land of the free and the home of the brave." Are we actually free or are we bogged down by debt and anxiety? Are



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