

Reflections on March Madness

by John Heuer

In March, 2003, President George W. Bush ordered the invasion of Iraq for reasons we have since learned were false. Iraq had no weapons of mass destruction, and Iraq had no part in the crimes of 9/11. Was Saddam Hussein a bad guy? Sure. We knew that. We supplied his Iraqi government with chemical weapons used to attack Iran and Iraqi Kurds. The iconic photo of Donald Rumsfeld shaking hands with Saddam Hussein in Baghdad in 1983, was witness to the cold war ethos that any enemy of the communists was a friend of ours, no matter how brutal.

Ten years later, we are just beginning to account for the cost of “Shock and Awe” unleashed on Iraq:

Thousands of US servicemen and women killed; tens of thousands wounded and maimed; hundreds of thousands of Iraqis killed; millions of Iraqis displaced from their homes. There are 900,000 US veterans waiting to have claims processed by the VA and the cost of war anticipated to rise over the lifetime of wounded GIs is estimated to exceed \$2 trillion. Rank and file service members have been prosecuted for torture, rape and murder.

Not one senior official has been held accountable for launching a ‘war of choice’ which led to those crimes.

One US service member and 22 veterans take their own lives every day; an estimated \$40 billion in profits for Haliburton; all the personal income gains achieved during this decade of war accrued to the top 10 percent. The same

opinion leaders who cheer led the invasion of Iraq, now clamoring for war against Iran.

This is madness.

During his recent visit to Israel and Palestine, President Obama told us that there is still time for diplomacy to avoid a war with Iran. But a majority of both Democratic and Republican Senators have co-signed a resolution that would support an Israeli attack on Iran, and draw us into another war.

This is madness... unless you stand to profit handsomely by the carnage. And if Crimes Against the Peace ever come knocking on your door, there is one surefire distraction. Start another war. This is madness.

John Heuer is Director, NC Peace Action, in Pittsboro.

Fracking Bill SB76 Puts NC on the wrong fast track

by Gary Simpson

These are anxious and disturbing times for citizens who pay close attention to the actions of politicians ruling the General Assembly with an iron fist. Case in point, SB76, a bill that ignores prior agreements by legislators and fast tracks the permitting of hydraulic fracturing and off shore drilling. The current bully brand of legislative manipulation that promotes and hastens these precarious operations comes across as blatantly disingenuous and ethically challenged. The people of North Carolina are being taken on a fallacious joy ride by “hot rod” legislators and their crony appointees who now occupy the driver’s seat. We’re on a tricky course where the caution flags are being lifted and its pedal to the metal with no “governor” to restrain the speed (nor to correct the course).

The partisan politics that drives the barefaced power grab sacrifices the common good for the sake of the few special interests that perceive financial gain at the expense of the greater community. This reckless brand of governance erodes what little public trust remains, further dimming the hope that fair play, integrity and public well being will ever be achieved during the rule of this General Assembly majority. This assessment is borne out over many issues promoted by our current power brokers, most recently the rush to frack paved by SB76.

The examples of clear and present dangers to health,

the environment and the social fabric of communities that accompany fracking are myriad. Stacked up against the self serving corporate propaganda campaign to promote gas and oil extraction, there is ample reason to keep the lid on Pandora’s Box. But before ever considering these individual reasons to avoid fracking and off shore drilling like the plague, there is the crucial problem that overshadows all else. The release of methane during the entire fracking process greatly exacerbates the greenhouse gas effect that fuels the planet’s ever worsening climate crisis. In terms of negative impacts, methane is like carbon dioxide on steroids. But even IF the release could be controlled (but wouldn’t be due to deregulation and cost restraints), the overarching problem still remains.

Pull back the curtain of misinformation that seeks to cover up reality and skew public opinion. What we find is the inconvenient but unavoidable truth that even without extracting more fossil fuels from her bowels, Mother Earth already has a glut of atmospheric greenhouse gasses caused by the mining, production and usage of non-renewable energy sources. More is not better. This and prior generations of humanity have already sewn the wind for all future generations to reap the whirlwind. Still, those holding the seats of corporate power and influence and their political minions continue to lead the fossil fuel charge with full knowledge of the consequences of

their actions. But all the money spent on misinformation to bury the evidence, shape public opinion and buy votes cannot alter the inevitable outcome. In the end, the laws of physics win. (The misinformation campaign that causes folks to bury their heads in the coastal sands of denial will not stop them from drowning as the rising seas engulf the beaches. And contrary to an oft quoted aphorism, these rising tides will not beneficently “float all boats,” but rather disastrously sink them.)

We stand today at the most critical ecological and sociological juncture humanity has ever faced, and it feels like the moral compass is out of whack. The needle has been manipulated and bent to favor vice over virtue and avarice over altruism. We allow, condone and promote global dependence on dirty, destructive and diminishing energy sources that sentence our progeny to a hellish existence on a hot and hostile planet. This behavior is tantamount to shoving another six pack in front of an alcoholic and calling for a toast. Such wanton business as usual is the perfect storm of insanity and immorality combined.

John Heywood’s observation from 1562 rings truer today than ever: “It is an ill wind that blows no man to good.” It’s time to catch a new wind; time to track in a new direction. There’s no more time to waste. SB76 is one more piece of legislation that puts North Carolina on the wrong fast track toward calamity.

Gary Simpson is a member of ConnectCHATHAM: Environmental and Natural Resources Education Network – www.connectchatham.org.

March Madness

by Don Lein

Here we sit on Tobacco Road and enjoy March Madness, recognizing that while there are athletes in short pants cavorting on hardwood across the fruited plain, no one really can appreciate it as much as those in the Old North State. While others can talk about Naismith, Springfield, peach baskets, etc., it is during the middle and latter part of the 20th century when the greater Raleigh area became a hotbed of basketball passion with each of its four institutions having periods of success. Unfortunately, Wake moved to greener pastures, while NC State’s success was a sometime thing and Duke and UNC had excellent local success and periodic remarkable success at the NCAA level. We have nonpareil Coach K, another coach who promised eternal fealty to the Jayhawks and their fans and another coach trying desperately to gain traction where no coach has gone since Jimmy V. “May the better participant emerge victorious.”

While March/April will bring clarity to the Triangle, no such mood will prevail in

the nation’s capital. Instead of hoops and bouncing balls we have a mix of Eastern and Western Cultures with the trappings of the Kabuki Theater on one hand and the Emperor’s New Clothes on the other, with a little Potemkin Village thrown in. The President first postulated the idea of a “sequester” and then violently ripped into Woodward when he reminded him it had originally been his idea. Such has been the mode of Chicago “organizers” since before Capone. It was also edifying as to what was slashed and what wasn’t – million dollar vacations for the first family of 4 individuals and golf with Tiger Woods stayed in the budget, to the tune of \$1.4 billion which is more than double what England pays for the entire Royal Family, tuition payment for veterans didn’t; a million and a half grant to Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston to study Lesbian obesity stayed, visits to the White House for schoolchildren did not, etc.. The Government Accounting Office in 2011 indicated there were the following number of overlapping programs: 56 dealing with financial literacy, 82 dealing with teacher quality, 44 job training programs, 20 for homelessness, 18 for nutrition assistance at a cost just south of \$200 million

dollars with no noticeable sequester cuts, yet park rangers will become more scarce, airline waits are threatened to stretch to hours and children will be uneducated for lack of funding.

“Firemen First” was a phrase first coined several decades ago by Charlie Peters to describe how governments fight attempted budget cuts. When a budget cut is proposed, the mayor immediately shuts down a fire house, while protecting a whole host of nepotistic incompetents behind closed doors. If you can’t afford to go to Washington to find representatives of the species, we have a large population of them in Raleigh. If you can’t identify them by sight, simply generate an inquiry at a state agency and when you reach someone who refuses to answer your call, you have hit pay dirt! The administration proposed sequestration 18 months ago and had ample time to establish guidelines to agencies as to what could/should be cut, but again the President wants to create more “crises”, so that he can usurp more power and continue his promised fundamental transformation, that he has been his modus operandi since the inception of his reign.

The reality in DC is that we now spend double what we spent during Bill Clinton’s last year and we borrow 35 cents of every dollar we spend. Although there are some economists that would indicate that is a good thing, all governments who have tried that approach have failed economically. Economists often complain about a world that will not behave as it should in their theories. What the economy needs is more private sector jobs, not higher levels of dependency. If the President wants more jobs and the tax revenue they will generate, he should let the economy grow. As JFK pointed out, if you want more tax revenue growth and more jobs, lower the tax rates. Of course, if the President were serious about jobs he would follow his union supporters’ requests and okay the Keystone Pipeline. Instead, he seems happier wandering with his fellow-travelers in the anti-carbon Potemkin Village of environmentalism.

When do you think the Emperor/President will recognize he has no clothes? I suspect when he finds out that he has no place to put his cigarettes.

Don Lein is a regular contributor to Chatham County Line. A Chatham resident, he is active in a variety of civic and sports organizations.

Culture wars gone wild

by Julian Sereno

I’m glad I haven’t worked in an office for a while. Whatever fun there used to be — particularly in a newsroom — often involved bawdy banter and filthy jokes, with a generous helping of vile and profane language. You get fired for lot less than that nowadays.

In a confluence of political correctness and high tech, a dirty joke overheard at a recent Silicon Valley conference went viral and led to the firings of both the man who told the joke and the woman who found it offensive. She complained about it on a tweet, while posting the potty-mouth joker’s photo. She has received threats, and Silicon Valley is divided, and all a’twitter.

As ridiculous as this may seem, it moved to the absurd in a report about it on BBC World News Radio, the gold standard for political correctness. The reporter continually referred to the telling of a dirty joke as an act of misogyny. It most certainly was not.

Misogyny is deadly and very real. Misogyny happens

when women fall victim to domestic abuse. Misogyny happens when women are kidnapped or hoodwinked into slavery, sexual or otherwise. Misogyny does not happen when someone tells a crude and tasteless joke. To conflate them is an insult to the tens of millions of women all over the world who really have suffered at the hands of misogynists.

What happened to make telling dirty jokes a firing offense happened with the best of intentions — the law banning sexual harassment in the workplace. But the way the law was written has had some disastrous consequences.

Anything that created a hostile work environment was actionable. What constitutes a hostile work environment, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder.

Employers were faced with the reality that somebody telling a dirty joke would be a Federal offense. The salty of mouth and the politically incorrect could either zip their lips or pack their desks.

It was that same law that led to President Clinton’s impeachment. It was under it that he was sued for sexual harassment by Paula Jones, the Arkansas state employee who claimed Clinton propositioned her while he was governor. Clinton was not guilty of sexual harassment. But under the provisions of that law, anyone who was

intimately involved with Clinton was compelled to testify about the relationship — which is how Monica Lewinsky was compelled to testify.

That means anyone who was ever unfortunate enough to be involved with a creep can be compelled to testify about it in open court if somebody else sues the creep for sexual harassment. So much for personal privacy.

Now, with smart phones and webcams, all privacy has been virtually eliminated. Anyone anywhere can be captured on film and posted on online. That’s what happened to Silicon Valley’s potty-mouthed joker; it was the backlash that brought down the accuser.

A few years ago I attended the 60th birthday party for my friend Al Carson, the editor of the Oxford Public Ledger. In the fellowship hall of the Episcopal Church in downtown Oxford, F-bombs rang out as then-79-year-old Flo Johnston, the religion columnist for the Chapel Hill News, and Chatham County Line’s very own R.L. Taylor, then 80, started channeling the old Durham Morning Herald and Durham Sun newsroom.

It was music to my ears. Too bad nobody got it on tape.

Julian Sereno is editor and publisher of Chatham County Line.