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COVID-19: Will it Divide Us or Strengthen Us?

by Randy Voller



Unlike previous “disasters” the COVID-19 pandemic has affected society across the board.

For example, Julian Sereno, our publisher and editor emeritus, quarantined himself in the mountains of Virginia with limited access to such modern niceties as high speed internet..

Of course if Julian just wanted poor access to broadband he could have relocated to parts of Chatham County where residents are still stuck on the equivalent of a “digital dirt road”. But that is a topic for another day.

We are facing an unprecedented situation and in the words of American astrophysicist, author, and science communicator, Neil DeGrasse Tyson, “If a predatory enemy to our species can’t unite everyone on Earth to fight it, I’m left wondering what hope remains for civilization.”

Indeed. Right now, we need to come together community by community, county by county to address the challenges during this crisis and when it ends.

Before the pandemic Chatham’s poverty rate was

approximately 10.3% with a child poverty rate of 16%. These numbers were considerably higher in the Black and Latix communities. When the pandemic ends these numbers will increase further for all communities.

Our local businesses, especially in our downtowns, are struggling as well. Business is off by as much as 75%. We need to support our local businesses.

Now.

The situation is grim across the country and our state, but we can focus on Chatham County and ensure



Pittsboro, North Carolina. Sunday, April 5, 2020.

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that we take care of our people. This starts with the basics: food, shelter, health care, and supporting local businesses.

Practice social distancing. Give to local food charities. Support Take Out Tuesdays at local restaurants. Call ahead to buy fresh food from regional farmer’s markets and sign up to receive CSAs. When ordering online, use your nine-digit zip code to ensure that sales tax revenues come to Chatham County.

Randy Voller is publisher of Chatham County Line.

Afghan Peace Pact Faces Uncertain Future

by Barry Reece



After nearly two decades of conflict, the United States recently signed a peace agreement with the Taliban. The agreement is aimed at ending America’s longest war and bringing U.S. troops home from Afghanistan. More than 18 years have passed since the United States invaded that

nation in the wake of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001.

The historic deal, signed by chief negotiators from both sides, could see the withdrawal of all American and allied forces in the next 14 months. Under the agreement the U.S. would draw its forces down to 8,600 from 13,000 in the next three to four months. The complete pullout would depend on the Taliban meeting

their commitments to prevent terrorism.

The U.S.- Taliban agreement is viewed skeptically by many war-weary Afghans, particularly women who fear a comeback of repression under the ultra-conservative Taliban. To end more than 18 years of war, the United States hopes to reduce the massive toll among civilians. More than 10,000 civilians were killed or injured from fighting in Afghanistan during each of the past six years. The number of civilian casualties has now surpassed 100,000 according to the United Nations.

Unfortunately there are some people who want to undermine the fragile U.S.-led efforts to end the war in Afghanistan. Recently gunmen opened fire on a political gathering in Kabul. At least 32 were killed and 58 were wounded. Insurgents used rocket-propelled grenades and machine guns to target the gathering. Kabul is the capital of Afghanistan and the nation’s largest city.

The United States has been in talks with the Taliban

The number of civilian casualties has now surpassed 100,000 according to the United Nations.

for more than a year. A reduction in violence would show the Taliban can control their forces.

Dr. Barry Reece is a U.S. Army veteran and an active member of Veterans For Peace, Vietnam Veterans Against the War, and Peace Action.

Esperanza

by Alirio Estevez



The most beautiful word in the Spanish language is, in my opinion, Esperanza (hope). I love not only its meaning but the cadence when one pronounces it. Esperanza is poetic. Esperanza leaves you with a sweet aftertaste. Esperanza inspires you to

continue fighting for your dreams. Esperanza invites both speaker and listener to dream about better times. Esperanza encourages our minds to sail into universes full of optimism. Esperanza is a word and an idea we need to embrace today.

When I pass by a silent playground, my esperanza is to see children and their parents playing, laughing, and having a great time. When I walk by an empty sports field, my esperanza is to observe boys and girls running after the ball, while cheering parents shout their names aloud with pride. When I drive by a school building full of boisterous silence, my esperanza takes me to the moment when students, parents, teachers, staff will get together to celebrate life and the joy of seeing each other again. My esperanzas help me endure these hard times.

I truly hope that as Americans, as human beings, we will learn lessons from this ordeal and make our world better. My heart is full of esperanza. Farmworkers, some undocumented, are in the fields harvesting crops for us.

If we have food on our table these days is thanks to them. My esperanza is that people will realize how vital their labor is and will reciprocate by demanding that all of them be allowed to remain in the country so they can pursue the American Dream. Grocery workers have risked their lives by shelving fruit, vegetables, and other supplies while earning minimum wage or just a little more. My esperanza is that we citizens will show our appreciation by demanding better work conditions and a living wage. Many of our brothers and sisters have lost their jobs and have seen their health insurance terminated due to the crisis. My esperanza is that each one of us will support a stronger safety net for everybody in our beloved country; nobody should fear that they will not be able to provide for their family in harsh times, or that they will not be able to go to a doctor when confronted with any disease. Every person and every family in America deserves to live in dignity. My esperanzas will never die out.

In order to make my dreams and my esperanzas come true, I know a lot has to change. I hope we will elect leaders who truly have empathy, who understand people’s feelings and travails; leaders who truly feel it

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is their mission to help every person in our county, not just their partisan base; leaders who are humble enough to accept their mistakes and learn from them; leaders who consult scientists and experts so they can make informed decisions to enhance the welfare of our fellow citizens; leaders who welcome feedback even if said feedback challenges their guts. And of course, I hope we change ourselves and come to the conclusion that we are all one (*e pluribus unum*), that by helping my neighbor, I help myself, my family, and all my loved ones. My well-being depends on my neighbor’s well-being. Tu esperanza es mi esperanza.

“You may say I’m a dreamer,” John Lennon’s *Imagine* says,”but I’m not the only one. I hope one day you’ll join

us, and the world will be as one.” I feel this way. My esperanza says we will make it through these tough times, and we will be better and stronger. What does your esperanza say?

Alirio Estevez is a NC Educator and a volunteer for the Hispanic Liaison and the Chatham Literacy Council. He is a proud immigrant and proud to be an American citizen.