

## Reporting on the real McCoys

Once upon a time I got a news tip that a bunch of police cars were gathered around our prosecuting attorney's house. It was in broad daylight and naturally I smelled a news story. I called DA Harry Camper and asked if he was having trouble. He told me to mind my own business. Harry had two desires in life. He wanted his name in the paper every day if things were good. When things were bad Harry was a clam.

The DA was in charge of all police. He was reluctant to release any information at any time but when he was sitting on a story it was impossible. I had one reporter who could write good stories when he had the information. The poor kid had no idea on how to break through Harry's rules to get facts.

It is a poor newspaperman who does not have his own snitch who knows everything about the courthouse and is willing to share it. It took a while, but I

### Media Meditations

by R. L. Taylor



got a full story on the front page the next day. A real first-class Denny Dimwit had called Harry on the telephone demanding \$900 in cash. The West Virginia State Police almost immediately had him in custody and he told them a professional criminal named Vester McCoy—one of the real McCoys—had promised him \$900 to drive a getaway car.

He said Vester had a contract to kill somebody at Coalwood and he went along to drive. Vester called the man to the porch and killed him. When Denny tried to collect his money, Vester told the poor guy that he had to collect his money from Harry and walked away. Outraged the dupe called Harry and demanded his money. He thought it was a simple business transaction. Vester was well known in court and jails and was already a two-time loser for two felonies. One more conviction meant a lifetime in prison.

Not all of the McCoy's were criminals. Vester's brother was a successful storekeeper in Roderfield, was known for his good deeds and bred miniature horses. He also served one term in the legislature and quit because it made no sense.

Vester was one of those very talented crooks who like to match wits with police. He is lost that battle twice and that gave him the two felonies that open the door for a life in the big house if he got caught again. He made friends easily, and drove most police crazy. No one ever knew why he shot and killed that poor victim over at Coalwood.

Putting the story together wasn't hard because in a small town a gathering of five police cars around one address is apt to raise questions. We ran a story that afternoon and Harry was outraged. I am sure he thought everybody would believe he paid somebody off for some murders somewhere.

Through the weeks that followed Harry threatened me every day to put me in jail if I did not tell him where I got my information. He thought I was trying to embarrass him but any fool would know he could not have been involved in such a stupid scheme. He let his assistant, Wade Watson, try the case in court. Wade was a genuine Mr. Clean, a Sunday school teacher with only one smudge on his record—he was a graduate of Duke Law School.

The case was heard before Judge Rudy Murensky and Vester stole the show by his bubbling personality and his description of a plastic umbrella that could be inflated to keep them dry. His wife was there every day. Harry never showed up and some people thought he didn't want to be seen because of the accusations. I knew Harry better than that. He was just too lazy to go to the courthouse. Vester was sentenced to life without parole.

I also think he was too lazy to have me in contempt of court for refusing to reveal where I got my information for the stories we ran. Despite what some people think, reporters have no protection when they refuse to reveal sources of information. Evidence involving capital crimes is considered essential for justice. The normal procedure is to drag a reporter before a judge. The punishment is contempt of court and in most cases it was only a three day sentence.

That never happened to me but I was ready for it if Harry will took me before a judge. I would simply plead guilty to contempt of court and walk across street to pull three days in jail. That was not hard because it was a brand-new jail and I had some friends over there. That was almost 50 years ago and I am the only person mentioned here to survive.

Today I think it is all right to reveal my snitch in the courthouse was Judge Rudy Murensky. It was innocent and helped law and order. I never could figure out how I could tell the judge the person who told me.

*R.L. Taylor is a regular contributor to Chatham County Line. He has worked as a newspaperman for more than 60 years, including serving as editor and publisher of Welch (WV) Daily News from 1963 to 1981.*

## Some observations on the healthcare war

by Julian Sereno

I support healthcare reform—our healthcare system has been in need of reform for decades. Unfortunately, it still is.

During the three-and-a-half contentious years since it became law, the Affordable Care Act/Obamacare has become the most divisive issue our country has faced since the civil rights and Vietnam war protests of the 1960's. It was enacted into law without a single Republican vote while the Democrats held a supermajority in Congress.

The Democrats got trounced in the next election, lost the House, and in came the Tea Party, right wing extremists who would destroy the country if they can't have their way. Two years later, in a vote of confidence in Obamacare, Obama won reelection and the high-profile national candidates supported by the Tea Party all lost.

Since then, the Republicans in Congress in their effort to repeal the law shut down the government and flirted on defaulting on U.S. Treasury obligations, which until they caved, made financial markets around the world quake and threatened to tank the U.S. economy and inflict higher interest rates on the national debt. Destructive and dumb, these zealous Tea Party dolts, including our own Rene Elmers, would flunk high school civics.

With the Republicans reeling and in disarray, the key provisions of Obamacare—the individual mandate and health insurance exchanges, went into effect. Healthcare.gov, the only way to apply for insurance, crashed and burned on the launchpad. Obama, whose campaign's mastery of the internet help win two elections, failed miserably, and they had three-and-a-half years to get it right. As

the old saw goes, you only get one chance to make a first impression. Barack blew it.

So what is true and what is false in all these claims and counterclaims? Let's look at some.

**Claim:** *The United States has the best health care system in the world.*

**False.** The United States has the most expensive health care system in the world. We have some of the best trained physicians, nurses and medical technicians, and the best medical equipment in the world. But our system costs twice as much as those of any of the other industrialized country, and our public health results are at the bottom, across the board.

That is but one of many lies that are broadcast in TV ads paid for by Americans for Prosperity.

**Claim:** *That government funded universal health care leads to rationing and death lists for the elderly.*

**False.** Government funded universal health care as practiced in Canada, Great Britain, Germany and the rest of the civilized world results in healthier populations with less morbidity (illness) and longer life expectancy. The medical care is every bit as good as is available in the United States, and no one in any of those countries has to worry about losing their job, their house and their life savings if they get sick, as has been the case here. No one there is denied medical treatment, including old people.

**Claim:** *That Obamacare is a job killer.*

**True.** Health insurance and its administration is an enormous expense for U.S. businesses, and adds to the cost of all the goods and services they produce. It is a huge disincentive for hiring full-time employees. It also puts U.S. businesses at a competitive disadvantage with overseas companies that don't face similar expenses. The cost of retiree health

insurance ads about \$2,000 to the price of each car GM sells.

**Claim:** *If you like the health insurance plan you have now, you can keep it.*

**False.** That particular falsehood approaches hoax or even canard status. It was used to tout the plan and sell the public on it. But it was an impossibility from the start, because all such policies would be rewritten in accordance with the new law, and therefore would no longer exist. Obama got caught in a lie. And as he scrambles to get insurance companies to keep writing old policies instead of dropping coverage, he is breaking the law—his own signature law.

**Claim:** *Obamacare is fatally flawed and won't work.*

**Nobody knows.** In spite of the disastrous launch, we won't know whether or how it will work until it is up and running. Check it out next summer; how it is doing then will probably form the basis for next fall's Congressional elections.

Anecdotally, it seems the older you are the better deal you get. Young adults, already stuck in a rotten economy not of their making, are forced to pick up the tab.

Obamacare appears like a Rube Goldberg contraption slapped on top of a broken down health care system still based on business paying the freight and insurance taking a nice cut. I'll be surprised if it works well; it won't be cheap.

But then again maybe it will work after all. Maybe the Republicans hate it so much because they are afraid it will work.

One thing is clear. The vicious fight over Obamacare isn't going to end anytime soon. It's too bad that all of the horrible charges each side hurls at the other are true.

*Julian Sereno is editor and publisher of Chatham County Line.*

## Fully fund public education without vouchers for private schools

By Ed Crabtree

I believe in public education. Sadly, too many people seem to disagree with me. Somehow, they have been misled.

Misguided souls, including too many in our Legislature, believe budgets for public education ought to be cut. They believe that their tax money ought to be spent in better ways, or preferably, given back to them. Some do not have kids and think that they ought not to be forced to pay for something that they think they don't use. Others prefer to send their daughters and sons to private schools and feel their taxes would be better spent as vouchers to help pay for private schools.

I don't really have a beef with private schools, but I strongly feel that public education funding needs to continue funding public education. Those monies should not be diverted to private schools for the elite. Fund public schools publicly, and allow private education to be funded entirely privately—not with public funds.

If anything, our State needs to find new ways to entice good teachers to continue to be good teachers and to do away with obstacles that keep potential teachers out of our State. For example, North Carolina has a dire need for math and science teachers, and yet, our public schools refuse to sponsor visas to hire highly qualified and experienced math and science teachers who would like to teach here.

I, personally, do not have children. Some might say I have no stake in education and that I ought to butt out and leave the discussion up to parents; but the truth is that everyone has a stake in public education. Investing in our teachers and schools IS a better way to spend our tax money, and despite the terminal presbyopia of those who think otherwise, public education does benefit us all.

I agree with Thomas Jefferson, who said, "I think by far the most important bill in our whole code is that for the diffusion of knowledge among the people. No other sure foundation can be devised, for the preservation of freedom and happiness... Preach, my dear Sir, a crusade against ignorance; establish and improve the law for educating the common people."

George Washington said, "Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom."

And FDR said, "The school is the last expenditure upon which America should be willing to economize."

When people are educated, they are better prepared for the

workforce. People who are well-prepared for the workforce make more money, and in turn, they pay more taxes. They also reinvest in the economy by spending the money they make.

Beyond the obvious fiscal benefits I just mentioned. A better educated and informed public makes better decisions, decisions about health care, decisions about politics, decisions about preventing unwanted pregnancies, and decisions about raising children.

Jefferson, Washington, and FDR got it. They understood that when everyone has the chance for a good education, society benefits. Jefferson said that public education was the basis for preserving our freedom and our happiness. That's why it makes no sense for the so-called legislators in Raleigh to call for cutting education costs, cutting teacher pay, cutting teacher incentives, etc.

Most discussions on education bring up "bad teachers." Yes, it is probable that our schools harbor a few bad teachers, but my guess is that they are vastly the exception and certainly not the rule. People don't go into teaching because it's a lucrative career. They enter the profession because of a passion they have for disseminating information. My favorite professor in college said that teaching is a calling, a calling much like the calling to ministry, and that it haunts someone until he or she answers that call. We ought to consider that calling and revere our public school teachers.

Spend our efforts rooting out bad teachers. Get rid of them, or help them become good teachers. I am sure that doing that alone would be rewarding to the good ones we already have.

I am fortunate to have had some pretty amazing teachers as I grew up in public schools. These were souls dedicated to making us better people. I know several dedicated people who are currently teaching in North Carolina's public schools. They are great teachers like the ones I grew up with, but they are growing weary of our Legislature belittling them and cutting their pay and benefits. I'm tired of that, too.

Mitt Romney said that everyone should get the best education he or she can afford. That thought struck me as incredibly elitist. Let them eat cake, as long as they can afford it. We can do better than that! We need to make sure good education is available for everyone, not just those wealthy enough to buy theirs.

*Ed Crabtree, a life-long North Carolinian and proud product of public school lives in Durham, seven time zones apart from his partner of 14 years. Skypping to Egypt and searching for gainful employment fill his days.*

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