

Like it or not, change is happening here and now

by Julian Sereno

A couple weeks ago, the population of North Carolina topped 10 million residents. That's up about 2 million since 2000. The state has 100 counties, of which 15 are urban/suburban, and are wealthy, prosperous and growing; 85 are rural and poor, depressed and shrinking.

Many of the most prosperous counties comprise North Carolina's Research Triangle, where the population now tops 2 million and is growing.

Chatham County's population nears 70,000 residents, up more than 5,000 since 2010, and 20,000 this century. Chatham has its own internal urban/rural prosperity divide. The northeastern part of the county is integrated economically into the greater Triangle, with high incomes. The western part is facing some of the tough times that are confronting other rural areas, including loss of manufacturing jobs and problems in some parts of agriculture, particularly poultry.

That brings us to the big change happening now in Chatham: Chatham Park. You've already read about the controversy surrounding it on the front page and elsewhere in this newspaper. (Disclosure: Chatham Park buys advertising in *Chatham County Line*.)

There is one point upon which I don't imagine anyone would

disagree — that Chatham Park will link Chatham County and particularly Pittsboro with the growing economy of the Research Triangle. A few weeks ago, Michael Walden, an economist at N.C. State University, suggested that over the 40 years it will take to build, it will generate \$80 billion in spending in Chatham alone; \$153 across the state.

I have no doubt that Chatham Park will be built, and I have no clue as to what it will be like. The only thing of which I am certain is that if the citizens of Chatham are involved and let their ideas be heard, Chatham Park will be much the better for it. The greater the citizen involvement, the better the outcome.

Opponents claim that the projected 60,000 new residents and 22,000 homes will bring environmental degradation and a diminished quality of life. Construction will foul streams, the Haw River and Jordan Lake.

It's the identical argument I remember from 15 years ago when another big development controversy was roiling Chatham: Briar Chapel. It was bigger than anything planned before in Chatham County, with about 2,000 homes, and it drew the ire of environmental groups and neighbors, who all opposed it on environmental grounds.

In spring 2002 the Chatham County Board of Commissioners rejected it. In the next election, the anti-development

commissioners were voted out and replaced with pro-development ones. Briar Chapel was subsequently approved.

But a funny thing happened. Newland Communities, Briar Chapel's developers, listened to the people who had opposed it and embraced environmentalism, including green building practices, water recycling and 900 acres of open green space. They touted environmentalism so wholeheartedly that it became central to their sales pitch.

Nowadays, everybody seems to love Briar Chapel. If anyone has had a problem with anything about Briar Chapel in at least the past decade, they certainly haven't told me about it.

Of course those who opposed Briar Chapel early on had a lot to do with its subsequent embrace of environmentalism. Their very involvement improved it.

There is no reason Chatham Park can't turn out ever better; I can envision it as a model for large scale development for the remainder of this century, much as Levittown, NY or Reston, VA or Columbia, MD were for the last. All we need to make it happen is for citizens to be involved and engaged every step of the way.

Julian Sereno is editor and publisher of Chatham County Line.

SOTU by POTUS

by Don Lein

First the good news. Only 31.3 million wasted their time listening to another hope and change message from the fantasy land/parallel universe that the President occupies. This compares to our naivete at the outset of our journey with the most narcissistic president of all time, when 52.3 million tuned in to listen to the message of hope and change. In all candor he fell just below the numbers for Bill Clinton, 31.4, who in spite of being the best practical politician of our age couldn't control his libido and people became tired of his frequent "Bimbo eruptions" and their consequent suits/convictions, despite adroit management by his beleaguered wife. By the way, the much maligned George W Bush garnered 37.5 million viewers for his final SOTU.

In all fairness there was a moment of true candor in the speech, when he recognized that the Republicans and Democrats were further apart ("more rancor and suspicion") than when he took office. He apparently overlooks his own pattern of condescension, insults and cynicism. He publicly wished for the capability of a Lincoln who could bridge gaps and bring contesting parties together. He apparently is too much of an ideologue to question his own preconceptions — not much intellectual growth/maturation occurring!!

If he were the historian he claims to be, he would have recognized that there were two instances in current history he could have emulated. He could have looked to the previous Democratic President, Bill Clinton, for guidance. Clinton, when presented with a Republican revolt in 1994 and led by a fairly articulate/intelligent leader in Newt Gingrich, reached across the aisle and they passed a fair amount of positive legislation. They never were friends, but they did what they felt was best for the country. That is known as politics, a subtle message that seems to have escaped the current occupant of the White House.

The best example of both sides cooperating was Ronald Reagan and Tip O'Neill. They both loved a good story, had their Irish senses of humor, but knew their responsibility was to lead the country, firstly, and be a leader of their party, secondarily. That awareness has yet to come to Obama, who clings to his progressive dogma irrespective of the damage it does to the country both domestically and internationally. In all fairness it is an article of faith of progressives that consequences/outcomes are never part of their thought processes. Progressives hold the intellectual property rights on the phrase "unintended consequences".

Among the out-of-touch comments that

were made was praise for the Iran deal and our global successes, without mentioning that Iran, at that moment, had seized some U. S. naval ships and were holding a number of U. S. sailors hostage. He pointed to Cuba as a "success" without mentioning Afghanistan, Syria, Putin, or other American international pratfalls under Obama/Clinton/Kerry. He praised the economy which is still struggling to get back to pre-recession days under George Bush. While the unemployment numbers continue to improve slightly, 4 million full time workers have stopped working and are no longer counted. The employment rate for 25-54 year olds is still 2 percent below pre-recession levels — hardly a booming economy.

He lauded the efforts on behalf of "Renewable" energy and pointed out the jobs that have been created in that area, without, of course, mentioning coal, which increased government regulations are putting out of business, with massive job loss. Another job loss category occurred in his rejection of the Keystone Pipeline, while lobbying on the international scene for a similar one to be built in Africa. He lauded the inexpensiveness of renewable energy offerings while failing to mention that they are subsidized by our tax money and utility payments. He also indicated that there was too much regulation and "red tape", but that is not a new theme in his rhetoric. Facts

are that 184 major new regulations have been added since the Obama regime came on the scene, costing us an estimate of \$80 billion dollars each year. He went on with fantasies about Obamacare, but even he cannot make a silk purse out of that sow's ear.

Why do we never hear these facts?? A simple illustration will suffice. On November 22, Hillary Clinton had the chutzpah to proclaim about campus rape policies that "Every survivor of sexual assaults deserves to be heard, believed and supported". This, incredibly, from the woman who oversaw the "bimbo" patrols and who set out to destroy the reputation of any woman who accused her husband of lecherous activity. How successful was she? Look at how the press treated Paula Jones, Kathleen Willey, Juanita Broaddrick, for starters — trailer trash, at best. Yet how does the press treat another accused serial lecher named Bill, Cosby, that is, and his victims — that Bill is guilty until proven innocent!! Sort of like the N&O and the Duke Lacrosse case!! Will we ever get an unbiased press where we are given all the facts? Not unless we demand it.

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

State of the Union

by John Heuer

As a member of the national board of directors of Veterans For Peace, I listened with a keen ear to both President Barack Obama's most recent State of the Union address, and to the Republican response by South Carolina's Governor Nikki Haley.

Gov. Haley, who ordered the Confederate flag removed from the State Capitol in Columbia following the racist murder of nine church-goers in Charleston, deserves credit for that action, as well as for speaking out against those Republican presidential candidates who pander to racist, xenophobic, Islamophobic prairie fires of public fear and resentment. And she won my heart when she paraphrased my mother, in reference to the belligerent bluster of her party's presidential candidates: "Sometimes, to be heard, you have to speak very softly."

But fear and resentment seem to be the coin of the realm when politicians seek to whip up a lynch mob. Gov. Haley quickly turned to attacking the Obama administration for being dominated by "Washington bureaucrats and union bosses," without any mention of the fact that union membership in the US has dropped from well over 30 percent in 1950 to well under 15 percent today. With terrorism, both domestic and foreign, on the rise, why try to turn the people against workers who are struggling to earn a living wage?

But even more far-fetched was the claim of Gov. Haley that "when we fight wars we win them!" She must have been referencing our conquest of Grenada and Panama, because those are the only so-called "victories" won by our military

since 1945.

In his State of the Union remarks, President Obama cautioned that we must learn the lessons of Vietnam and Iraq. He asserted that although the US is the most powerful military force in the history of the planet, we still are not capable of fixing every crisis on the globe.

His focus on the US as the nation that must learn the lessons of Vietnam and Iraq evidenced no regard for the unfathomable violence and destruction, anguish and pain, rained on the people of those nations by our hand.

On a different note, the president referred to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's call for "unarmed truth and unconditional love." I was reminded then of previous speeches in which President Obama had praised the legacy of America's landmarks of justice: "Seneca Falls, Selma, and Stonewall." These were epic milestones in our nation's struggles for women's suffrage, civil rights, and LGBT rights.

This was the Barack Obama I worked for in 2008, and I remember well how I danced at his inauguration with a couple of million of my best friends in January 2009. But the high hopes I had for his tenure have been dashed by his militaristic responses to international crises: the drone strike in Pakistan that kills "suspected" militants and their children; his silence on Israel's war on the people of Gaza; his "cutting the grass" as the Israeli generals and politicians call it. And his promise to close the American torture gulag in Guantanamo still remains unfulfilled.

During his speech, President Obama referred frequently to the advantage of our diversity, while failing to respect the lives of those who will never make it to our shores. Under his

administration, anyone, anywhere, anytime can be declared an enemy, and targeted for assassination, while the identities of these "suspects" often remain unknown to the drone operators. Suspicious behavior is enough to warrant the targeting of a person, sometimes an entire family or a village, to be burned alive by hellfire missiles.

I applauded Obama when he promised to end officially sanctioned torture by US agents, although he has been steadfast in opposition to any accountability for the architects and practitioners of those dark arts. That de facto impunity for torturers all but guarantees a return to the torture regime at some point in the future. Donald Trump is not alone in gleefully anticipating the prospect of torturing our so-called enemies.

President Obama must know that condemning state torture, as Obama did, but himself engaging in state murder, as he practices by releasing a "kill list" every Tuesday morning — selecting targets for extra-judicial execution — is not a hero's path but the way of the hypocrite.

The death toll from US militarism since 9/11 is in the hundreds of thousands. The numbers of refugees created by our wars are in the millions. Thousands of US servicemen — and women — have been killed, tens of thousands wounded and maimed, close to a million of our post-9/11 veterans have applied for disability benefits, all in the pursuit of... what? What was achieved with these terrible costs?

This question hints at what President Obama was speaking about in his reference to the lessons of Vietnam and Iraq. But it is clear that he has not yet learned those lessons himself.

John Heuer of Pittsboro is involved in the peace movement and the human rights movement.