

FOR THE RECORD

Politicians seeming not to care

Politicians always like to quote the state motto that appears on the state seal in front of the Legislative Building in Raleigh when they are making speeches and promising to be responsive to the people they represent.

The motto is “Esse Quam Videri” — “To be rather than to seem” — a noble sentiment that is part of any definition of leadership. North Carolina would be much better off if more elected officials tried to live up to the motto, instead of only using it for rhetorical flourishes when asking for votes.

The last few days in the state’s political and policy circles don’t inspire much confidence that will happen. Saturday afternoon, several thousand people marched to the Legislative Building to support a 14-point policy agenda developed by the North Carolina Chapter of the NAACP and a coalition of more than 70 progressive organizations.

The 14 points include specific legislative demands like expanding funding for the Housing Trust Fund, more support for the state’s Historically Black Colleges and Universities, fully funding poor schools involved in the Leandro lawsuit and adopting the recommendations of commissions that investigated the 1898 overthrow of the local government in Wilmington and the state’s forced sterilization of poor and African-American women that lasted until the early 1970s.

State lawmakers adopted part of the agenda in the 2007 session, allowing same-day voter registration at early voting sites and setting up a public financing program for candidates for three Council of State offices. The marchers came back to Raleigh to build support for the rest of the 14 points, and speaker after speaker explained in detail the coalition’s proposal and the statistics that supported it.

Several candidates were on hand, including some current members of the General Assembly. No Republican legislators attended, but the *News & Observer* story about the event included reactions from House Minority Leader Paul Stam and Sen. Neal Hunt.

Stam said “there was nothing on the agenda that was practical or within our power or something I wanted to do.” Hunt said he “guessed” he saw the agenda during the last legislative session, but didn’t pay much attention to it.

Apparently Stam and Hunt don’t believe there is an affordable-housing crisis in the state or agree with many of their fellow Republicans who have long supported the Housing Trust Fund to address it.

Neither seems bothered by the fact that Historically Black Colleges and Universities have been dramatically underfunded or that the state has yet to provide the sound, basic education to every child that the state constitution guarantees them.

Most troubling of all, neither seems to care what thousands of people in North Carolina want their state government to do. Stam claims that nothing on the agenda is practical or within his power, which is nonsense since the state budget that he debates and votes on affects almost every proposal.

Hunt’s response is even worse. He can’t be bothered to even pay attention to policy proposals that affect millions of people in North Carolina, including women who were sterilized against their will by the state as late as 1971.

There is significant legislative support for many of the items on the 14-point agenda, though adopting it won’t be easy as long as it’s okay for legislators to brush off ideas that bring 4,000 people to the Legislative Building.

Stam and Hunt and other politicians who so easily dismiss the concerns of so many people seem not to be all that interested in helping the people they represent. That means they need to be reminded again and again about what the people want. Seventy organizations and the hundreds of thousands of people that make up their membership aren’t going away. Time to plan the next march.

— BY CHRIS FITZSIMON

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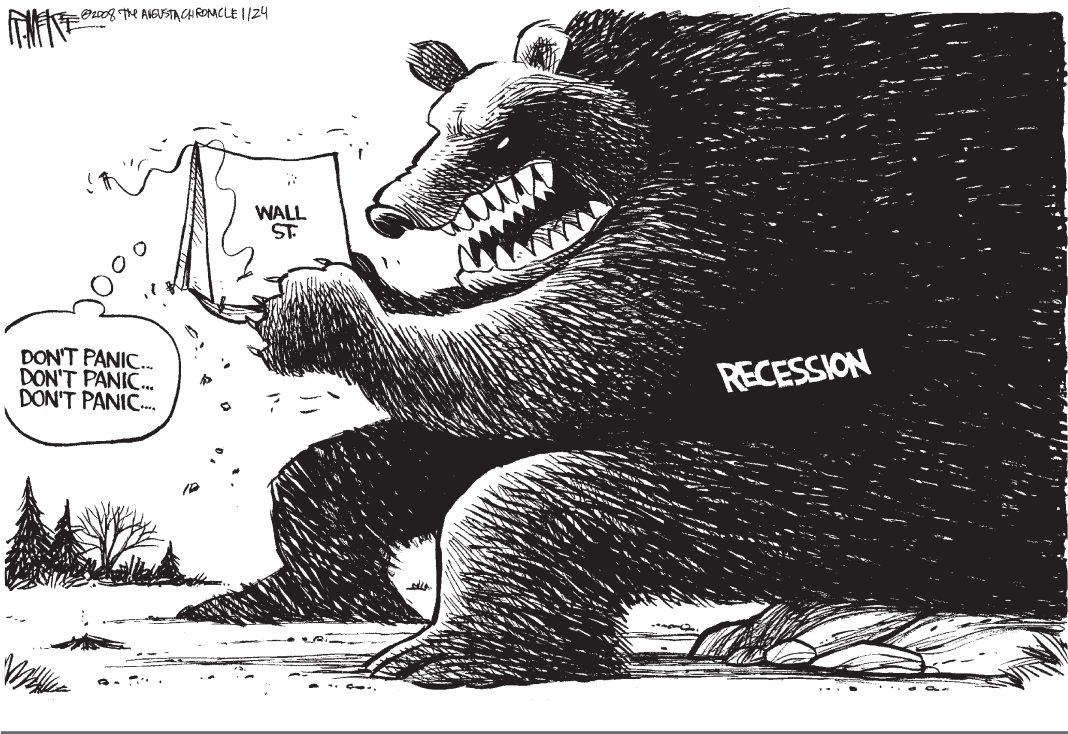
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Don’t believe Duke’s latest pitch

JIM WARREN

Climate change is causing extensive damage at an accelerating rate. Oxfam International reports that weather disasters have quadrupled in 20 years, with a quarter billion people impacted annually. Arctic sea ice could be gone by summer 2012 – further disrupting weather systems. And the world’s top scientists recently amplified their call for urgent reduction of greenhouse gases.

Yet Duke Energy is beginning construction of a large coal-fired power plant near Charlotte, using crafty public relations to imply the new Cliffside plant would be “good for the environment.”

With its January 29th approval of the plant, the Easley administration joined Duke’s PR campaign. The trick: Masking the new unit’s pollution behind upgrades already required by state law at an existing Cliffside furnace.

Also central to the ruse is the assertion that the new unit would be cleaner than four older ones to be retired. But those four furnaces combined are less than one-quarter the size of the new 800-megawatt unit, and they sit idle most of the time.

Following state approval, the deception increased as Duke ran an open letter from CEO Jim Rogers in full-page ads across its service area. Included are nine references to “global warming” and related terms, plus a statement that Cliffside will “eliminate 90% of regulated emissions.” Since no other pollutant is mentioned, readers are led to believe the reduction refers to greenhouse gases.

In truth, the new unit would discharge six million tons of uncontrolled carbon dioxide each year – over 12 times more than the small units to be retired – five to 10 times more

mercury and 13- to 50-fold increases of other toxic metals such as arsenic.

Cliffside could fail before completion, as did six nuclear plants Duke tried to build in the 1980s. The project is particularly risky for stockholders and electricity customers due to an unstable energy market and global economy. Cliffside’s cost estimate has already

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doubled – to \$2.4 billion dollars. Upcoming carbon regulation will drive power bills even higher and Wall Street is reacting by tightening financing of coal-fired power. (Rogers supports carbon regulation for others, but is lobbying for Cliffside to be exempted.)

Dozens of U.S. coal-power projects have been cancelled and are being offset by efficient, renewable energy alternatives that are proving highly successful in the free marketplace, even as coal and nuclear rely on billions in public subsidies.

North Carolina doesn’t need more electricity generation – just to stop wasting half of what is produced, as we belatedly must do with water. A 2007 state study confirmed we can easily save enough energy to offset growing demand while expanding

renewables and creating tens of thousands of jobs. For far less than Cliffside’s price tag, solar water heating could be added to every home in the region, nullifying the need for new plants.

Duke CEO Rogers talks about energy efficiency. But his long-delayed efficiency proposal seems designed for Duke to make exorbitant profit from modest programs, limit widespread energy efficiency and provide PR cover to build coal and nuclear plants.

As the nation’s foremost climate expert, NASA’s James Hansen, emphasizes: The best thing North Carolina can do to tackle accelerating climate change is to cancel this veritable global warming machine. We must do our part here, so the U.S. can help developing countries avoid repeating our mistakes.

Recognizing the gravity of climate change, a statewide coalition of nonprofits cannot afford to rest until Cliffside is stopped. We don’t have time to wait for Duke’s vague promise to become carbon neutral in a decade or so, because the new plant alone would offset most statewide efforts to reduce CO₂.

People across North Carolina must continue calling on CEO Jim Rogers to be straight with the public and walk his green talk by cancelling this unnecessary plant. And we must demand that our leaders stand up to the giant power companies that have long used their financial influence and deceptive propaganda to stifle democratic decision-making.

Jim Warren is director of the North Carolina Waste Reduction and Awareness Network, www.ncwarn.org

LETTERS

HFCS offers benefits

The February 6 article “HFCS: A ban worth getting excited over” may mislead consumers about high-fructose corn syrup.

Dr. Walter Willett, Harvard School of Public Health Nutrition Department Chairman, told *The New York Times*, “There’s no substantial evidence to support the idea that high-fructose corn syrup is somehow responsible for obesity.”

New research continues to confirm that high-fructose corn syrup is safe and no different from other common sweeteners like sugar and honey.

High-fructose corn syrup is a natural sweetener and has the same number of calories as sugar. The U.S. Food and Drug Administration granted high-fructose corn syrup “Generally Recognized as Safe” status for use in food and reaffirmed that ruling in 1996 after thorough review.

High-fructose corn syrup offers numerous benefits, too. It keeps foods fresh. It enhances fruit and spice flavors. It retains moisture in bran cereals and helps keep breakfast bars moist.

Consumers can see the latest research and learn more at www.HFCSfacts.com.

*Audrae Erickson
President, Corn Refiners Association
Washington, D.C.*

Brushes With Life

Everyone who’s ever picked up a paintbrush and touched a canvas knows the thrill and release of creation. The joy of pressing the shutter on an old Leica camera and hearing that click as you immortalize the look of a stranger or a towering building or golden-hued sunlight resting on the treetops. The nurture of knitting, the mood of music, the praise of poetry; these are the pleasures of being an artist.

There are artists who have spent hundreds of hours, thousands of dollars and millions of moments of inspiration to be what they considered to be “artists.” Some measure their success in canvases sold or number of exhibitions or word of mouth in their communities.

Many other artists don’t consider themselves artists. They do their drawings in notebooks that never see the light of day, instead hibernating in bedside table drawers. They write poetry that plumbs the depths of angst and despair like Sylvia Plath. They create paintings that, like Van Gogh’s, never get sold in their lifetime.

Anyone who can afford the materials can be an artist. Getting your art shown is another matter. The trick to getting your art shown is two-fold: You must have the confidence to put yourself out there and try and make a deal. And you must make someone believe in your art enough to display it to the world.

We mentally ill can be a shy bunch. Aside from bipolar mania, we generally keep to ourselves. But our dreams of being artists are realized with the Brushes With Life gallery. Here is a gallery that shows folk art, amateur art, outsider art, classically trained art, abstract art. The only way to have your work shown is to have a mental illness, which is seldom an asset.

Through creation, the mentally ill find peace. Art springs from the heart; but more importantly, the mind. A mind that is heavy with anxiety and pain can get a release from art like nothing else. The gallery is the best kind of therapy there is for those who struggle with mental health challenges. Joy is real when you overhear two strangers gush over a photograph you’ve taken, not realizing the artist is standing right next to them. Brushes With Life has grown over the years, developing a consistent roster of talented artists. Many of these artists you see in my film. Their journey through art is a way to relieve pain. We are all better off that they are expressing their pain. Turning pain into joy is the most productive occupation on Earth.

—Philip Brubaker

Editor’s note: *Mr. Brubaker’s film Brushes With Life: Art, Artists, and Mental Illness will be presented by the Nothing to Hide Mental Health Coalition and the Hillsborough Arts Council Thursday, Feb. 21, at 7:30 p.m. at Sunrise Church, at the intersection of New Hope Church Rd. and I-40. For information, call Peter Kramer at 913-4055.*

GUEST COLUMN

No dumping

On a nature hike two weeks ago, I was totally grossed out when I glanced over the bridge railing over a small stream on a dirt road and saw five deer carcasses. Bloated and stinking, they spanned the pool created by the turbulence of water falling from the culvert under the road. The remains of three other deer and one hog were also in the ditches near this bridge. I had pointed out to the other nature lovers that horns had been removed from one skull with a hacksaw and small emerging tusks could be seen on the pig, but I didn’t call anyone over to look at the gruesome scene below the bridge. This sight is all too familiar.

I was born in Durham and grew up roaming widely in the area as a child. As an amateur naturalist, I lead hikes and explore with others seeking to connect with the natural world. I know that hunters and hunt-club members enjoy the out-of-doors as much as I do and probably send more money to preserve “nature” than I have. This “guts in the stream” thing is not new. It is a pattern of behavior that must be passed on from experienced hunter to the novice, from father to son. I didn’t have much hope that this misguided practice could be changed until I heard about hunt clubs up north arranging for dumpsters to be placed around counties in convenient spots so that carcasses could be placed in them and recovered for compost or animal feed. Apparently, some industries appreciate the raw (literally) materials for their products and help fund the dumpsters. This is a great solution to a long-standing problem of dumping deer carcasses in streams.

Even if the local hunters can’t organize the dumpsters, a better method for disposing of their waste is hilltop dumping. Vultures in this area are constantly patrolling the countryside for rotting meat. Within a day or two, turkey vultures will sniff it out and black vultures will follow soon after. Behind my home last week, I watched as two Red-tailed hawks drove the dozen or so vultures away from and carried off a fox carcass.

The critters out there are hungry and ready to help us clean up our mess if we are only ready to alter our patterns a little bit to ease the risk to them. Roadsides and bridge crossings are confusing and dangerous places to have a meal. So next time, carry the leftovers from your hunting trip into the woods a bit farther and go uphill. Even better, follow the higher standard of the dumpsters. But please, please stop fouling our shared waterways with rotting deer corpses. Let’s change for the better and end the misguided practice of carcass dumping in streams and rivers.

—CHRIS CARTER
Saxapahaw