

THE CARRBORO CITIZEN

Since 2007

Your Community Newspaper
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FROM THE EDITOR

A musical salute

We have long taken pride in our music community, and for good reason. It's something for which we've been known for decades, and the institutions that have grown up as a result – our music clubs, record labels and studios – have put us on the map as a place that honors its own and their kindred spirits around the world.

The other night, the music industry tipped its hat in our direction once again, handing Grammy awards to the Carolina Chocolate Drops and Arcade Fire.

You may remember the Chocolate Drops when they first started getting together. They made their debut at The ArtsCenter and have been a steady presence around here ever since, including a gig at the McDougle cafetorium entertaining attendees of the annual Community Dinner.

The trio, who won the Grammy in the Best Traditional Folk category, draws inspiration from the black string bands that started disappearing from the Piedmont in the 1920s. Guiding them on their journey was Mebane fiddler Joe Thompson, an official national treasure, who still draws a bow in these parts.

The big celebration on Grammy night came at the very end of the show when Arcade Fire beat out Lady Gaga, Eminem and Katy Perry for Album of the Year.

Arcade Fire, you may recall, played a raucous get-out-the-vote show at the Carrboro Town Common during the 2008 presidential campaign. *The Suburbs*, their award-winning record, is on Merge Records, which was founded in Chapel Hill and spent its early years in Carrboro in a cramped suite of offices upstairs in the 100 block of East Main Street. The national press, which clearly wasn't ready for this kind of thing, keeps calling Merge a tiny label. Around here, we think they're a pretty big deal.

Big ideas

In the end, the big idea of moving the Chapel Hill Public Library to University Mall proved unworkable. And while it stirred up a lot of interest and fuss, it should not discourage those charged with thinking big from doing so.

The process was far more transparent than similar previous endeavors, another aspect that should be applauded.

The library move may not have worked, but the lessons learned have been helpful as the town looks ahead to other potential partnerships for services and facilities.

Do some good

Thinking about our water supply always helps jog the memory that OWASA customers have the opportunity for one of the easiest ways to help their neighbors in need.

OWASA's Blue Thumb program helps out residents who are unable to pay their water bills. The funds for the program are drawn from other OWASA customers who have agreed to have their water bills rounded up to the nearest dollar.

It's never going to cost you more than 99 cents a month, a rather small price to pay to make a difference. All you have to do is check the box for the Blue Thumb program on your water bill.

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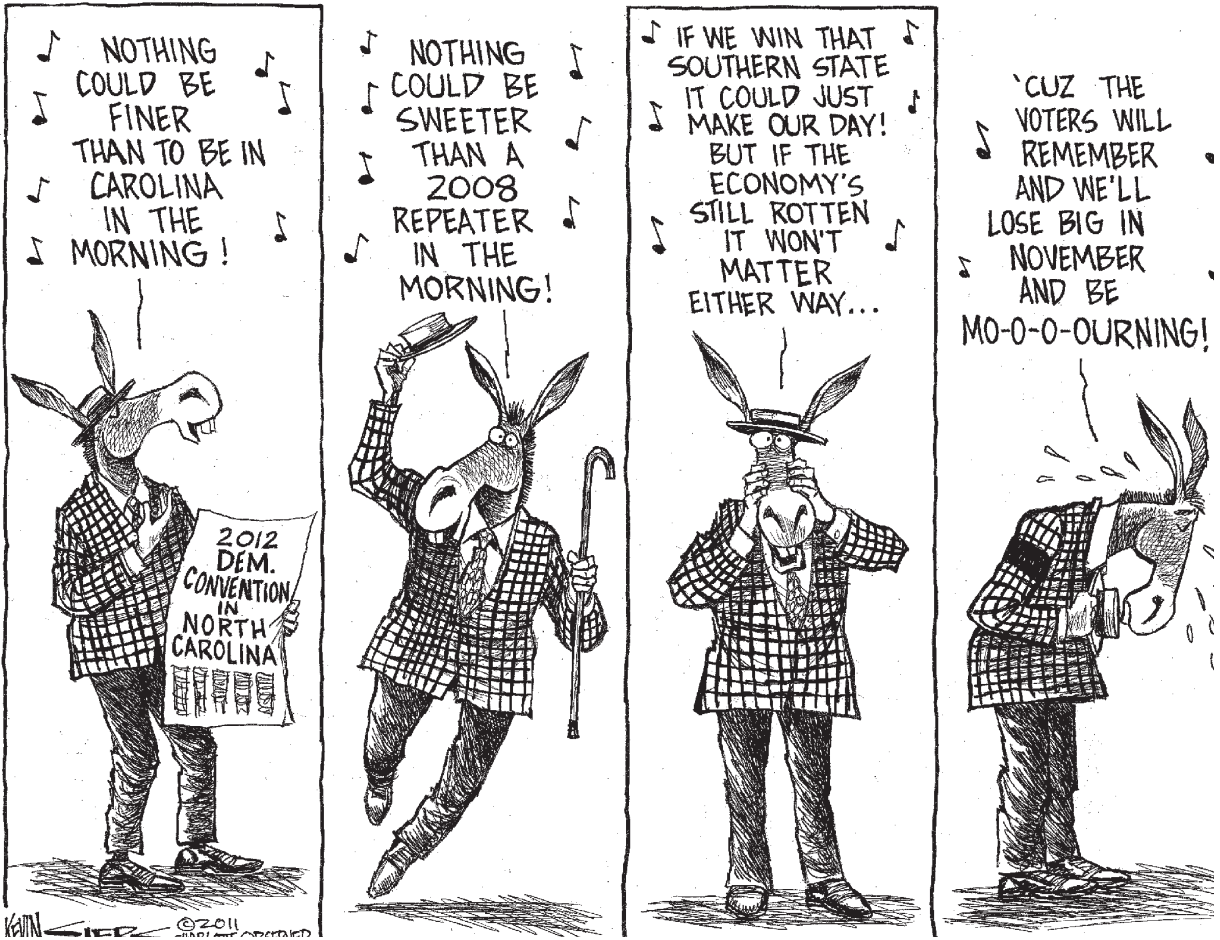
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From the library of Bob Sheldon

DAN COLEMAN

When your friend is an intellectual, it is often the case that his library is a window not only into his mind but to his heart. When my friend Internationalist Books' founder Bob Sheldon was murdered 20 years ago this week, I felt the best way to keep his memory alive was to select a few of his books as keepsakes.

Most remember Bob for his radical-left politics and would be surprised that his most prized books were not from the Marxist cannon. He particularly valued two books by educators, one Brazilian, one American, and a third by a Vietnamese monk.

Bob Sheldon was deeply engaged with the struggles of oppressed peoples, whether Lumbee, Palestinian or Salvadoran, and named his store accordingly. Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* analyzes education as a political act and, in doing so, has much to say about a system of oppression that dehumanizes victims and perpetrators alike.

Bob's heaviest pencil-markings highlight this passage, an affirmation of universal humanity that informed the great moral leaders of the 20th century, such as Gandhi, King and Mandela: "As the oppressors dehumanize others and violate their rights, they themselves also become dehumanized. As the oppressed, fighting to be human, take away the oppressors' power to dominate and suppress, they restore to the oppressors the humanity they had lost in the exercise of oppression."

Although Bob supported the anti-apartheid movement, he did not live to see Nelson Mandela become president of South Africa. Had he witnessed Mandela's approach to racial reconciliation, it would surely have brought Freire's words to mind.

Freire shares the critical perspective that Sheldon cast on the generous impulses of liberalism: "Pedagogy which begins with the egoistic interests of the oppressors and makes of the oppressed the objects of its humanitarianism, itself maintains and embodies oppression. ... The pedagogy of the oppressed cannot be practiced by the oppressors." This remains a challenging concept for we privileged Americans who struggle to effectively address injustice. It comes up, for instance, when we seek to understand whether Chapel Hill's "Sanitation Two"

were fired for insubordination or for organizing. Workers' self-organization is almost inherently insubordinate, at least from the vantage point of those they work for.

Bob once told me his favorite book was Jonathan Kozol's *The Night Is Dark and I Am Far from Home*. Writing from his perspective on the Boston public-school system, thousands of miles from Freire's Brazil, Kozol comes to a remarkably similar conclusion. "Schools," he writes, "cannot at once both socialize to the values of an oppressor and toil for the liberation and the potency of the oppressed."

Kozol's challenge to the liberal establishment, though different from Freire's, is equally daunting. "The liberal myth is that the wars can cease, the poor can sleep, the schools can prosper, and the children of the poor can learn, aspire and thrive, while we who have for these long years enjoyed the proceeds of their hunger, segregation, and fear, need suffer nothing. It is not so." Like Freire, Bob Sheldon was an outspoken critic of paternalistic campaigns for justice, understanding that just results cannot be achieved without some sacrifice of privilege.

One answer to the challenges of Freire and Kozol is found in the words of the Vietnamese monk Thich Nhat Hanh. His book *Being Peace* outlines 14 precepts, two of which speak directly to the concerns above. "Do not close your eyes before suffering ... awaken yourself and others to the reality of suffering in the world." And, "Do not take as the aim of your life fame, profit, wealth, or sensual pleasure. Live simply and share time, energy, and material resources with those who are in need." Bob Sheldon took these words to heart. To keep Internationalist afloat, he often worked seven-day weeks, taking shifts as a temp nurse to support the store and a simple lifestyle.

Bob kept the ideas in books like these alive at Internationalist Books and in his activism. Far from your stereotypic leftist, Bob Sheldon was a complex personality, what one friend called "a voice of radical calmness." As his books reflect, his ardent intention was to challenge liberal society to find true solidarity with the oppressed and, ultimately, to understand how all humanity might come to a place of well-being and justice.

Dan Coleman is a member of the Carrboro Board of Aldermen.

The incomplete State of the State

CHRIS FITZSIMON

Just after Gov. Beverly Perdue finished her State of the State address in the House chamber Monday night, Senate President Pro Tem Phil Berger made his way to the podium in the all-but-empty Senate chamber to deliver to the television audience the Republican response.

There was little left to say. Perdue spent the better part of her 38-minute address calling for lower corporate taxes, a smaller government and an end to burdensome regulations on businesses, all significant parts of the Republican agenda.

Berger gave it the old college try, recycling the Republican campaign talking points about taxes and why Democrats in North Carolina are to blame for everything that went wrong in the national economy. But after Perdue's address, Berger's remarks rang as hollow in substance as they did acoustically, echoing weakly in the empty chamber.

Perdue did do a little more than endorse the Republican corporate agenda. She vowed to protect every state-funded teacher and teacher assistant currently in public schools and to expand her College Promise initiative to give high school students a chance at two years of career training or a two-year college associate degree.

She also announced that the state budget shortfall is now \$2.4 billion, down another \$300 million from last week, when it was reduced thanks primarily to rosier revenue projections. Reducing the corporate income tax could cost as much as \$400 million, which means the budget hole is roughly \$2.8 billion.

Perdue didn't propose any new revenue to address that shortfall. She was silent about keeping the 2009 temporary tax increases in place or letting them expire. And there was no mention of her thoughts about legalizing video poker to raise several hundred million dollars.

We'll find out Thursday how Perdue wants to balance the budget, when she presents her spending plan to lawmakers. She did say Monday night that there would be further funding reductions and that as many as 1,000 state jobs will be eliminated through early retirement.

Specifics about budget cuts and revenue were not all that was missing. Perdue talked about the need to invest in education, but said nothing about the state's troubled

mental health system and the need for more investments in community services.

Nationally recognized early-childhood programs like Smart Start and More at Four didn't warrant a mention either. Neither did desperately underfunded affordable-housing programs or the 45,000 children currently on a waiting list for subsidized child care, making it impossible for their mothers to work or go back to school to increase their chances for a higher-paid position.

People in Wake County hoping for a statement of opposition to the efforts by the current school board to re-segregate the schools came away disappointed. And folks worried about the troubled State Bureau of Investigation and Highway Patrol were also ignored.

No speech can cover everything, but an effective State of the State address gives the General Assembly and people of the state a broad overview of how North Carolina is doing and how the governor plans to make improvements.

Perdue made a different choice, using most of her time to present Republican talking points and repeat her earlier commitment to teachers in public schools.

Progressives in North Carolina looking for inspiration didn't find much. Families who rely on state services to take care of a loved one with a disability or mental illness who were looking for reassurances didn't receive any.

Maybe Perdue's budget will be different and call for new revenue to protect programs that the state's most vulnerable people need. Maybe she will recommend keeping the 2009 tax hikes in place to fund More at Four and Smart Start so at-risk kids don't start school well behind their peers.

Maybe her budget won't exploit low-income people by legalizing video poker instead of raising money honestly and fairly.

Maybe, but it's hard to be too optimistic after Monday night.

Perdue's staff issued a news release after her speech that said she had laid out her vision for North Carolina. The problem is, it seemed like only one of her eyes was open.

Chris Fitzsimon is executive director of N.C. Policy Watch.

Wolf in sheep's clothing

The following is a statement from Fourth District U.S. Rep. David Price on the GOP leadership's proposed continuing resolution for the budget. Price is the ranking member of the appropriations subcommittee that oversees funding for the Department of Homeland Security.

If ever there were a wolf in sheep's clothing, this so-called "continuing resolution" is it: Far from continuing to fund the government through to the end of the fiscal year, the measure would in fact drastically slash the investments Democrats have made in our economic recovery – and undermine our national security in the process.

Compared to most other departments, Homeland Security is pretty well protected in this bill, and the Defense Department actually gets an increase. But the strength and security of our country are about much more than how much we spend on weapons systems or how thoroughly we police the border. They are about the investments we make in our people, in our nation's ability to recover from the current economic downturn and compete in the global economy.

In this light, this Republican spending plan would weaken our security by undoing the investments we have made in putting Americans back to work and laying the foundations of our future competitiveness. The cuts are disproportionately focused on the small fraction of the budget – domestic discretionary spending – through which we invest in our people and in our economic capacity. For example, the bill will cut \$1 billion from the National Institutes of Health, \$139 million from the National Science Foundation, \$1 billion from the Environmental Protection Agency and \$246 million from university-based agriculture research funding.

I am especially concerned about the impact of these cuts on the Research Triangle, where federal research funding is a major economic driver. The Triangle's success over the last 50 years is no accident: Our business community is populated with companies that were "spun off" of federally funded research projects. The Fourth District alone accounts for \$799 million of the \$1 billion in NIH research conducted in North Carolina. These investments are a powerful way to spur job growth – to say nothing of attacking dread diseases – and without them we have little hope of meeting the president's call to out-innovate our international competitors.

The best cure for our budget deficit is a recovered economy, not a "continuing resolution" that could more accurately be called "Continuing the Recession." The notion that economic recovery will be somehow promoted by undoing the very investments that have been critical to our recovery is nothing more than wishful thinking.

LETTERS POLICY

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