

FOR THE RECORD

Following is an excerpt from the inaugural speech of Barack Obama delivered from the steps of the U.S. Capitol following his swearing in as the 44th president of the United States of America.

He is the first African-American to be elected to the presidency. In the 2008 election he received the votes of more than 66,882,000 citizens.

“ . . . Our challenges may be new. The instruments with which we meet them may be new. But those values upon which our success depends — hard work and honesty, courage and fair play, tolerance and curiosity, loyalty and patriotism — these things are old. These things are true. They have been the quiet force of progress throughout our history. What is demanded then is a return to these truths. What is required of us now is a new era of responsibility — a recognition, on the part of every American, that we have duties to ourselves, our nation and the world; duties that we do not grudgingly accept but rather seize gladly, firm in the knowledge that there is nothing so satisfying to the spirit, so defining of our character, than giving our all to a difficult task.

This is the meaning of our liberty and our creed — why men and women and children of every race and every faith can join in celebration across this magnificent mall, and why a man whose father less than 60 years ago might not have been served at a local restaurant can now stand before you to take a most sacred oath.

This is the price and the promise of citizenship.

This is the source of our confidence — the knowledge that God calls on us to shape an uncertain destiny.

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So let us mark this day with remembrance, of who we are and how far we have traveled. In the year of America's birth, in the coldest of months, a small band of patriots huddled by dying campfires on the shores of an icy river. The capital was abandoned. The enemy was advancing. The snow was stained with blood. At a moment when the outcome of our revolution was most in doubt, the father of our nation ordered these words be read to the people:

‘Let it be told to the future world ... that in the depth of winter, when nothing but hope and virtue could survive... that the city and the country, alarmed at one common danger, came forth to meet [it].’

America, in the face of our common dangers, in this winter of our hardship, let us remember these timeless words. With hope and virtue, let us brave once more the icy currents, and endure what storms may come. Let it be said by our children's children that when we were tested, we refused to let this journey end, that we did not turn back, nor did we falter; and with eyes fixed on the horizon and God's grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations.”

THE CARRBORO CITIZEN

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LETTERS

Site sets precedent

Locating a waste transfer station anywhere in Bingham Township, on rural, agriculturally zoned land, would set a dangerous precedent: countryside lost to industrial/commercial use is lost forever. We would be left with permanent, grievous damage to our air quality, watersheds and quality of life.

The commissioners have been informed about resources in the private sector that can provide waste transfer services immediately and indefinitely. Utilizing these resources would allow time to pursue sustainable alternatives to waste disposal instead of pouring 10 million of our tax dollars into a “temporary” solution. As taxes continue to climb, our money should be spent wisely.

I urge the county commissioners to defer purchase of the Howell Property to allow time to solicit proposals from vendors who use existing waste stations for interim disposal services; use community input to search for alternative sites for progressive facilities with industrial/commercial zoning near major highways, namely, I-40 or I-85, within a 15-mile radius of the trash centroid; and engage in strategic discussion with neighboring municipalities and counties for economically sound, sustainable waste management, such as privatizing and waste-to-energy solutions.

We need our commissioners to make socially, economically and environmentally sound decisions about waste disposal.

KATE TOZZOLINA
Hillsborough

Disagree with site

I disagree with the headlong dash to locate the waste transfer station in rural Orange County for the following reasons:

This is an industrial-type facility, it should be located in an industrial or

commercial zoned area. If I, as a private citizen, wanted to build this type of facility in rural Orange County, there is no way I would get approval from the county to do this. It would be a violation of zoning ordinances. The costs to purchase this outrageously large property with no infrastructure (i.e., water, sewer, etc.), build the facility, make road and truck improvements and haul water and operate it with unpredictable fuel costs and landfill fees -- is far beyond what it would cost to pay private contractors.

I want my tax money spent more wisely. The chosen sites are located too far from major highways. The criteria used to pick a site should be modified to allow industrial sites a few miles farther from the “centroid.” Waste-to-energy should be more seriously considered as a long-term solution.

PAUL ROCKWELL
Bingham Township

Hazards of infill

A high-density housing development, Colleton Crossing, is being proposed behind our neighborhood, the Highlands. This new development is to be built in an area of land recommended for preservation in the town's Upper Bolin Creek Conservation Map adopted by the Carrboro Board of Aldermen in 2005. All of our current elected officials were endorsed by the Sierra Club in their election campaigns, so it is unclear why any of these officials would support developing this very beautiful and fragile tract of land. Additionally, the area in question does not have access to convenient public transportation, so residents will be using their cars to exit the new development. One of the proposed exits brings this vehicular traffic through Claymore Road, which, without shoulders or sidewalks, is not equipped to handle high volumes of traffic. We are fortunate that many peo-

ple, including children, take advantage of our community by walking, running and biking on our streets.

The additional car traffic would be a safety hazard for pedestrians and would discourage residents from walking and biking and encourage even more car travel, even for short distances. Are we the only ones who think destroying wildlife habitats and encouraging more vehicular traffic isn't “green”? Is this what the citizens of Carrboro really want?

MIKE AND DEBORAH ADLER
Carrboro

Housing important

In reference to the story in your January 15 issue, “University, town hashing out differences on Carolina North”:

1. Congratulations to all concerned for their decision to use RDU airport for medical air service instead of Horace Williams airport. It also improves better utilization of facilities in RDU.
2. There was a proposal to utilize the airport space for biotech research. It is better use and allied to educational activities and should be pursued to the end.
3. Council member Jim Ward said that the space should be utilized for housing for the employees. It is a welcome suggestion. The benefits are a) employee satisfaction and as an employee welfare measure; b) employees need not use a car, [thereby] adding to pollution and traffic jams; c) it is a national savings of gas and expenditures on pollution control.

However, the houses must be given on a rental basis to be occupied for as long as [the renters] are employees and have to then be vacated to make room for incoming employees.

The real demand for rental houses has to be assessed before taking up this scheme.

MAHALINGAM LAXMAN
Chapel Hill

Animal research is vital to human health

DR. CAM PATTERSON

Editor's note: This article is a response to a letter to the editor in The Citizen arguing against the expansion of a UNC research lab in southwestern Orange County.

As a medical doctor and heart researcher, I think it is important that the community has the facts about how vital animal models are to the medical research we do at the university to improve human health. We are concerned with the welfare of animals and do not use animal models when better alternatives exist. But we still can't adequately treat the most common diseases that afflict our society, and some of the studies required for experimental research require animal models. The idea that stem cells or other stem systems can mimic the wonderful complexities of a living human or animal body is unrealistic for now and in the immediate future.

One of the very first diseases for which animal testing resulted in treatment and diagnostics was hemophilia, research that was begun at UNC in the 1940s with pigs and dogs especially bred to exactly mimic humans who have that devastating disorder. It literally took scientists decades of animal research to develop these therapies. Without that work, individuals with hemophilia would be suffering bleeding disorders and premature death. Now even a gene therapy cure for hemophilia is not that far off with continued use of animal models developed here in Chapel Hill.



Animals are also essential to the development of vaccines. One requirement of vaccine research is the activation of the immunologic response, and the only way that can be done is with an animal. The development of the arthritis drug Vioxx would have benefited from more animal testing, not less, because additional animal studies would have enabled researchers to detect the cardiovascular complications that caused the drug to be pulled from the market. Cellular studies would not have revealed the complicated interactions between the blood cells and the blood vessel walls that lead to the cardiac toxicity of Vioxx. I know that's true because I have been at work for at least a decade trying to do that myself, and no one has yet made this sort of thing, nor are we likely to any time soon.

As valuable as our animal models are, we carefully consider each study case by case and use viable alternatives

whenever we can. Animal research is expensive, takes longer and requires reams of paperwork that scientists would rather avoid. When we do use an animal model, it is out of necessity and a passion to cure the diseases that we study.

Every proposed use of animals in research at UNC is carefully reviewed by a team of scientists and community members. No project is approved unless the reviewers are satisfied that the use of animals is justified in conjunction with the proposed research. When the study is in progress, specially trained veterinarians – not the research scientists – monitor the treatment of the animals, ensuring that they are healthy, free of suffering and humanely treated. We are also monitored by outside agencies such as the Association for Assessment and Accreditation of Laboratory Animal Care, the National Institutes of Health and the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Far from being outdated, animal research has become more valuable than ever as advances in fields such as genetics, proteomics and imaging are enabling researchers to get more information out of the studies. Animal models play a vital role in current, leading-edge research to improve human health. We owe a debt of gratitude to the scientists who, through animal studies, have learned so much and helped so many of our patients.

Cam Patterson is chief of cardiology for the UNC-CH School of Medicine, UNC Hospitals and the UNC Health Care System.

Property tax relief needed

ELAINE MEJIA

This month, property owners in Orange County are receiving notices in the mail telling them how much the county's tax assessors think their homes are worth. According to the county's tax office, property values in Orange County increased by 22 percent over the last four years.

Orange County is not alone. Other counties in the relatively prosperous and fast-growing Triangle area have seen large increases in property values in recent years. In 2007, Wake County found that values had increased 43 percent since the previous revaluation in 2000. Next up is Chatham County, which is slated to revalue its properties in 2009.

While knowing their homes are increasing in value may reassure homeowners, many worry their tax bills will go up as quickly as their homes' values. In most instances, that doesn't happen. Counties typically lower their tax rates when they revalue properties so that the amount of revenue collected is the same as, or only slightly higher than, what the county was collecting before.

The circuit breaker kicks in when a person's income is below a certain threshold — say, \$40,000.

But certain homeowners will see substantial tax increases as a result of a revaluation. If the value of your home goes up considerably more than the average countywide increase, you will likely pay more even if the county cuts the tax rate. At a time when some 360,000 North Carolinians are unemployed, this can be a tough pill to swallow for a family struggling in today's economy.

North Carolina can act to protect the assets of low-income families who find themselves facing dramatically higher property tax bills. The state currently allows low-income senior citizens to exempt a portion of their property from tax or, if they qualify, defer a portion of their property taxes so the bill will ultimately be paid when the property is sold or transferred to another owner. It's time to extend assistance to people who are under the age of 65.

The best way to do this — and one that is employed by several other states — is called a property tax “circuit breaker.”

The circuit breaker kicks in when a person's income is below a certain threshold — say, \$40,000 — and his tax bill exceeds a certain percentage of that income — say, 5 percent. The property tax he pays above that 5 percent would be refunded to him through the state income tax.

So let's say this taxpayer earns \$40,000 and owns a \$250,000 home taxed at a rate of 90 cents for every \$100 of home value. His property tax bill would be \$2,250, but 5 percent of his income is \$2,000, so he would receive a refund of \$250 through his income tax.

The state is facing a budget crisis, but helping families stay in their homes is too important a priority to not address this year. The good news is North Carolina's property taxes are low compared to most other states, so there is room to increase the property taxes of higher-income homeowners.

By establishing a property tax circuit breaker the state could make taxes fairer to low-income working families and people living on fixed incomes, help struggling families to stay in their homes and keep communities diverse and vibrant. That's a lot of benefits for one simple policy change — a change that's long overdue.

Elaine Mejia is the director of the N.C. Budget and Tax Center.