

FOR THE RECORD



ICE on ice

Several weeks ago, the Chatham County Board of Commissioners took a rather brave step. At a time when immigrants are being bashed by a growing demagoguery, the commissioners declared no way, no how to joining in immigration enforcement under the Immigration and Customs Enforcement 287(g) program. The program was originally designed to detain and deport convicted criminals; but as we’ve noted before, traffic offenses now make up the bulk of ICE arrests in North Carolina.

Because it can be politically and financially profitable (although the finances are dubious), the program has quickly devolved. Intended to keep society safe, it has created an incentive for racial profiling and left thousands of broken families in its wake.

Thankfully, the people of Chatham County — not all, but a good many of them, including all of the commissioners — have seen what is happening in other counties and been repulsed.

There’s pushback as well in Washington D.C. Congressman David Price said Congress recently ordered the inspector general of the Department of Homeland Security to look into how the 287(g) program is being implemented. Price said enforcement should focus on the criminals the program was intended for. He and others are quick to note that the biggest downfall is that the program could do the opposite of what was intended. Local law-enforcement agencies need the trust of their communities to effectively do their jobs. Local law enforcement being seen as the long arm of federal authority will only serve to alienate members of the immigrant communities. They will be less inclined to report crimes and criminal activity, giving gangs a safe haven to do their business.

The pushback in Chatham and the calls for scrutiny in Washington are a sign, perhaps, that there is a shift in immigration policy. As Price noted in a recent interview with *The Citizen*, the problems encountered by local governments as they try to deal with public safety and other issues that involve the undocumented are the result of the federal government’s failure to enact a comprehensive and sensible immigration policy.

As a few hundred people in Chatham County proved the other night, there is a great deal of interest in putting an end to policies that are furthering the creation of a permanent underclass in North Carolina.

Chatham County residents have a right to be proud of standing up for some of the basic beliefs that this country was founded on. But all of us share in the shame of what grandstanding, political expediency, and quite possibly outright corruption, has wrought on the families who walk among us everyday, who attend our churches and schools and whose only crime is disrespecting a border for want of a better life.

THE CARRBORO CITIZEN

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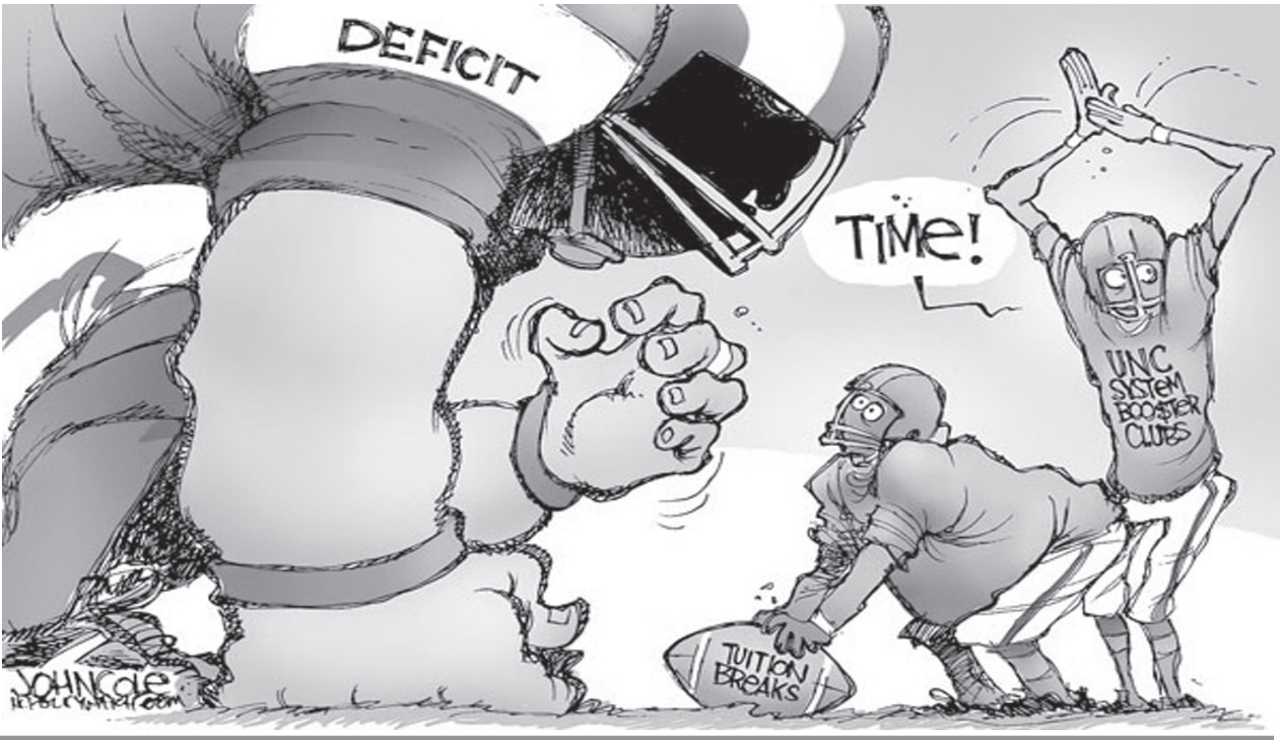
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Considering connector roads

BY JAMES CARNAHAN

I disagree with Alderman Dan Coleman’s statement (*Citizen*, 2/5/09) that Carrboro’s Connector Roads Policy “fails in its stated goal ‘to disperse newly generated traffic and to give a sense of connectivity and unity to the town as it grew.’”

I believe the policy will help us realize the stated goals incrementally over time, as more connections get made. In addition, I think it also achieves a critical unstated goal (according to an Environmental Advisory Board member who helped craft the policy): reduction of vehicle miles traveled (VMT) and the fuel conservation and CO2 reduction associated with VMT reduction.

While I agree a re-assessment of the Connector Roads Policy will benefit Carrboro, I would strongly oppose any effort to water it down. As it is, the ultimate build-out of the current policy will produce a limited grid, and compromises recently implemented in the cases of the Autumn Drive and Sweet Bay Place connectors undermine the goals that have evolved over decades of work on the policy.

I see revisiting the connector policy as an opportunity to strengthen it and ensure the desired outcomes. The Statement of Purpose Coleman cites from the 1986 policy document needs to be amended to include the objective of reducing trip lengths in order to save fuel and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The safety issue that postponed the Autumn Drive connection needs to be addressed. If safety can only be achieved by inclusion of sidewalks, then the town needs to consider ways to get these sidewalks built in a more timely fashion. Comments from neighbors of a possible connection on Claymore Road clearly indicate the need sometimes to upgrade roads when they become thru streets. Claymore is a N.C. Department of Transportation

maintained road; by what mechanism would we get pedestrian and safety improvements in such a case?

I think it is important in this conversation to have a clear definition of the term “commons.” For me, “commons” comprises a broad spectrum of public realm facilities — infrastructure such as water, sewer, schools, transportation and a variety of open space including unimproved natural areas, large regional parks and small neighborhood and pocket parks; and paved public gathering places, large and small. Roads are certainly part of our commons, but they are purposefully planned, built and maintained primarily for the use of wheeled vehicles — bikes, cars and trucks. Some have proposed at recent hearings that bike and pedestrian paths should replace the proposed connections for motorized vehicles, but that would frustrate very important goals of the connector policy. Clearly, everyone would like to become less dependent on single-occupant car use — and paved vehicular roads *support* that goal by providing efficient routes for small transit vehicles: car pools, van pools and minibuses.

Comments heard from Claymore residents in the Colleton Crossing public hearing tell us something about our policy on required recreation amenities. Claymore’s narrow cul-de-sac streets serve public gathering functions that will be lost if it becomes connected. Our ordinance needs to foster the creation of truly functional “commons” facilities. Here we see a need for paved public gathering space: small piazzas where folks can set their chairs to chat and younger children can bounce a ball.

Alderman Coleman’s discussion about Robert Moses’ and Durham’s freeways seems a bit like comparing peas with pachyderms. Carrboro is nowhere as big as those towns, and we’re talking about simple two-lane streets, not multi-lane high-speed thruways.

But in the case of Paris, the grand boulevards (which predate the automobile by decades) have emerged as a central feature of their commons. Not only do they enhance the movement of vehicles, including various forms of public transit, they also contribute immensely to the public realm Paris is famous for — the cafe society and street life created by expansive sidewalks generously lined with trees. On-street parking everywhere adds to a pedestrian sense of safety. Multi-story mixed-use buildings put a multitude of employment, cultural and institutional activities within walking distance of a multitude of residents. The Paris of the Piedmont has much to learn from our distant “namesake.”

Coleman mentioned New Urbanist “tenets.” I know folks in our community want planning policy guided by more than doctrines, and there are references available that attest to the importance of making these connections.

Consider, in closing, this from the executive summary of “Growing Cooler: The Evidence on Urban Development and Climate Change,” by Reid Ewing, et al:

“One of the most comprehensive studies, conducted in King County, Washington, by Larry Frank of the University of British Columbia, found that residents of the most walkable neighborhoods drive 26 percent fewer miles per day than those living in the most sprawling areas. A meta-analysis of many of these types of studies finds that households living in developments with twice the density, diversity of uses, accessible destinations, *and interconnected streets* [my emphasis] when compared to low-density sprawl drive about 33 percent less.”

*Carnahan is a member of the Carrboro Planning Board and a founder of The Village Project.*

Invest in families to keep kids in school

CHRIS FITZSIMON

Speaker Joe Hackney presided at a news conference with fellow House Democrats Tuesday to announce that the lawmakers were renewing their commitment made two years ago to improve the state’s high school graduation rate, though Hackney acknowledged that it’s not clear funding will be available for new investments in dropout prevention programs.

The announcement came the same day as more bad news about the state budget emerged, tempering last week’s excitement about North Carolina’s share of the federal stimulus package. Elaine Mejia of the N.C. Budget and Tax Center gave a legislative briefing Tuesday afternoon that an upcoming BTC report will show that next year’s shortfall could exceed \$4 billion, close to 20 percent of the state budget.

The finding is based on revenue and spending estimates presented by legislative economists in recent days. It assumes a 2 percent cost-of-living increase for teachers and state employees and a 1 percent increase for retirees.

Without any pay raise, the budget hole is \$3.8 billion. North Carolina’s share of the stimulus package will help considerably, but could leave more than half the shortfall for state lawmakers to address. No wonder Hackney was reluctant to promise more dropout-prevention money.

Hackney said House education leaders would travel around the state to listen to suggestions from local communities and to check on some of the 120 community programs funded by grants from the General Assembly.

The grants were declared ineffective by the anti-public school crowd last fall for not improving graduation rates,

ignoring the fact that schools didn’t receive the money until halfway through the school year.

Despite some slight improvement recently in the annual dropout rate, roughly three of every 10 North Carolina ninth graders leave high school without a diploma. Roughly half of African-American male ninth graders do not graduate, one of the most shameful statistics in our state.

Nobody disagrees about the devastating effect dropping out has on the students and the state. High school dropouts are three and a half times more likely to be incarcerated than high school graduates. One study found that each dropout costs the state \$4,000 a year.

Hackney readily admits that the dropout prevention grants are just part of the solution and that some may work and some may not. He mentioned other efforts the House would support, including Communities in Schools that last year provided case managers for more than 21,000 students at risk of dropping out. Ninety-eight percent of them stayed in school. The program is not yet available in every county and this year the group is asking lawmakers to fund graduation coaches in schools with the highest dropout rates.

It’s just one example of what all lawmakers know but some are reluctant to admit, especially this year. Keeping kids in school saves money and lives, but it requires more investments up front, and not just in grants or the extra funding that ought to go to Communities in Schools.

All but one of the states that scored higher on math tests in 2007 have a lower percentage of children living in

poverty than North Carolina; all but two of the states that did better on reading do. The same trend exists when considering the percentage of children eligible for free and reduced lunches.

Poverty remains a powerful predictor of student success, whether the measurement is test scores or graduation rates. If lawmakers are serious about preventing dropouts, they must resist calls to balance this year’s budget by slashing human service programs that need more investment, not less.

North Carolina’s early-childhood programs for at-risk kids have received national recognition, but what happens to at-risk kids when they leave early childhood and enter middle school? Their risk often remains.

There are plenty of reasons kids give up and dropout and many must be addressed one on one. Linda Harrill of Communities in Schools has seen kids too embarrassed by their rotting teeth to speak up or even look up in class; she’s also seen a student who didn’t come to school because he didn’t have any shoes.

Those stories cry out for more counselors, more school nurses, more programs like Communities in Schools and, maybe most importantly, more investments in child care, health care, affordable housing and other basic services that help families lift themselves out of poverty and come up with the money to take their child to a dentist.

That’s the underlying message of Hackney’s timely call for a recommitment to raising the graduation rate and invest in our schools, our students and our families.

*Chris Fitzsimon is the director of NC*

Balanced effort needed

BY ROB THOMPSON

North Carolina’s children are in a tough spot.

With a massive budget shortfall this year and an even larger shortfall projected for the next fiscal year, all public programs are on the chopping block — including vital public programs that ensure our children grow up safe, healthy and well educated.

Child advocates tend to criticize those in power for not doing enough to ensure the well-being of our children, and I think we’re usually right. However, North Carolina has made positive investments in families and children over past decades — public schools, early childhood care, abuse prevention, children’s health care and many others. In short, we have been at our best when we’ve pulled together to build for the common good. We have created and protected these assets over many years, because they are the programs that provide all children with the opportunity to thrive now and in the future.

We must bring that community spirit to bear once again. North Carolina is currently faced with new economic pressures from the global economy, which, coupled with an outdated state revenue system, threaten our past progress. Absent assertive action to build upon our investments in children and families, North Carolina risks losing much of what it has gained.

Unfortunately, the rhetoric of many of our state’s leaders suggests that we simply need to “trim the fat” off of supposedly bloated state programs to solve the budget crisis we confront. If we pursue that course of action in the face of a potential \$3 billion budget shortfall, we’ll tear apart the fabric that supports all of North Carolina’s children and families.

We need a balanced solution. While we must make wise, cost-saving budget choices, the fundamental root of North Carolina’s fiscal troubles lies in how it collects revenue. For instance, large, multi-state corporations often pay little or no taxes on their income by taking advantage of loopholes in our tax code (these loopholes also put small businesses at a competitive disadvantage). Furthermore, we don’t collect revenues on services, even though they account for the majority of our state’s consumption.

The state’s antiquated, inefficient and volatile revenue system plays an enormous role in the current fiscal crisis and, in turn, our ability to maintain the continuum of public systems and infrastructure that support our communities.

In the end, we must find a way to preserve permanently the collective investments we’ve made in our families and children. By combining wise choices on the spending side with a modernized revenue system, we can build upon the programs that make North Carolina a great place to raise a family. It is our responsibility to make wise decisions now, so that our next generation has the opportunity to grow to enjoy shared prosperity in the future.

*Rob Thompson is the executive director of the Covenant with North Carolina’s Children.*

LETTERS

Coleman right on roads

Dan Coleman’s comments on the connector road policy are very much on target. It is reassuring to see that the board of aldermen is beginning to recognize that the policy cannot achieve objectives that are intrinsically conflicting. You cannot preserve or enhance “connectivity” of adjacent neighborhoods if you destroy their quiet residential character by opening them to a large volume of vehicular traffic. It is unfortunate that the policy that has been in place for so long does not take into account the idiosyncrasies of each situation, and poses a threat to the quality of life in affected neighborhoods. This has put the board in the position of appearing insensitive to the concerns of the people directly affected by their decisions. Perhaps, with Coleman’s scholarly recognition of the complexities of the problem, the Board can revise its longstanding rigid policy and take the time to examine the unique conditions in each situation where the issue arises.

FRANK STALLONE  
*Carrboro*