

DEDICATED TO THE PROMOTION OF TOWNS COUNTY

OPINIONS & COMMENTARY

Letters to The Editor

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Whereas the charter school amendment sounds like a good idea when you read the ballot question, in fact it is a wolf in sheep's clothing. First, it creates a parallel school system controlled by the state. That means the creation of another state agency to dictate school policy. We, at least, elect the present State School Superintendent but we would have absolutely no say in this new state agency. Second, how do you think it will be paid for? There is no way the state could pay for this parallel school system without raising taxes. Consider that they have been cutting school funding for years now, allegedly because of a lack of revenue. So where are they going to get the funds for these new schools? Us, that's who. We have a clear choice in this state election; use your choice wisely.

Jim Fitzgerald

Editor:

During my 40+ years as an attorney, I've often been confounded trying to reconcile logically the various interpretations of the U. S. Constitution by federal judges (who are essentially merely attorneys in robes). Here's an example: The First Amendment, in part, provides: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibit the free exercise thereof; or abridge the freedom of speech...; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble..."

Let's break down the essential components of this First Amendment: 1) Congress can't establish any one (or more) specific religions(s) to be observed by all - good; 2) Congress can't prohibit the free exercise of any religion - again, good; 3) Congress can't tell people what to say or not to say - good, this definitely is one of our most essential freedoms, although there are rightly some exceptions; and 4) Congress can't keep people from assembling peaceably - good.

So, logically, if you and/or I and/or others assemble peaceably at a town hall meeting, ball game, school function, etc., wish to speak (i.e. pray for, among other good things, the wisdom of our leaders, the safety of the players, the progress of the children, etc.) out loud (otherwise we're not truly speaking), isn't our freedom of speech, in fact, being judicially and governmentally disestablished? If nude dancing is Constitutionally protected (almost all federal judges have so ruled) as an exercise of free speech, should not prayer be? What's wrong with this picture?

Claudio G. Spears

The Middle Path

by Don Perry

October is a fine time to live here in the North Georgia Mountains. The relentless heat of summer gives way to cool nights and brisk mornings. The air is almost crystalline on those blue sky sunny days when the wildflowers of fall celebrate honeybees and leaves hint at colors yet to come. Even misty gray days like today are welcome, inviting us to pull up the blanket, clean out the chimney and simmer that pot of chili to warm the bones and put a little fire in the belly.

October requires that I forego all obligations for a little while and spend some time in the woods. Indeed every month inspires the same compulsion, but the need is particularly strong when temperature and humidity are so perfect for long hikes in the high country, mindful of the resident rattlesnakes drawing the last bit of heat out of a sun bathed rock or truly unreasonable yellow jackets resentful of the fact that the changing season will bring an end to their nefarious schemes.

October this year brings an added impetus to the call of the wild. I've spent too much time rolling on asphalt; too much time staring at phantom numbers of virtual economies on boxes of sand and wires. But the biggest inspiration of all was several days spent on top of a giant earth moving machine doing maintenance around the farm.

Longtime readers of this column might be surprised to know of my familiarity with tractors, bulldozers and trackhoes. I have maintained for many years that my middle path is often a footpath leading away from the highway and we have made a conscious effort to err, if we must, on the side of the environment. During the years of uncontrolled and often unplanned development endured by our area, this column has been steadfast in its defense of clean water, plant and animal habitats and unspoiled wilderness. So when a friend familiar with what he considers to be the environmental bias of the articles saw me digging up a stump that was inconveniently placed in next year's bean patch, I had an opportunity to clarify that position.

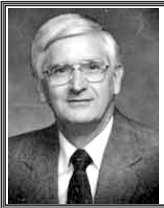
My defense of the environment has never targeted hard-working, honest people who spend hours in uncomfortable seats breathing diesel exhaust and listening to the loud roar of engines. We have never had issue with the men

and women who maintain roads, build dams or grade earth for homes to be built. Our problem has been and continues to be with those who move much more earth with the stroke of the pen or the tap of the mouse than any one person could ever hope to move with a machine. Our problem is with those who, motivated by greed and the lust for power, are willing to let the environment "absorb" all of the destructive and toxic effects of their need.

The last category includes all of us, to a certain degree. Every passing year technology and affluence brings another degree of separation between us and the earth that sustains us. Every time we flip a light switch or crank the automobile, we give our tacit approval to polluted air and water. Every time we drive to a mountaintop we accept a permanent loss of habitat. Everything has a cost; every choice has multiple consequences, many unintended.

These thoughts all ran through my head while I was digging out stumps and widening the driveway for a place to park my tractor. Modern earth moving equipment feels very much like playing a video game: "Joysticks" control movement and the slightest touch is leveraged thousands of times to accomplish in a moment what a man with a shovel might do in days - or the changing of the seasons in a hundred years.

A few days in the forest was a good balance for a few hours on a trackhoe. The quiet vitality of birds and breezes, the smell of wet leaves and the calm of clear running water was invigorating. I was reminded of a sad fact of our existence, that for many of us habituated to our climate and remote controlled comfort, Nature is too "messy" to be experienced directly. It is too chaotic, from our limited perspective. Nature must be controlled so that it does not interfere with our comfort. Most of us will not have an opportunity to move Nature out of our way with a giant earth moving machine, but each of us, in so many of the ways that we live our daily lives, have the same kind of leverage on our environment as a "joystick" on a trackhoe. We are, ultimately, the real earth movers.



"IT'S ON MY MIND.." Danny H. Parris

Doors of opportunity

I read a story some time ago about a young man who had fallen in love with a farmer's beautiful daughter. He wanted to marry her so he confidently approached the farmer to ask for her hand in marriage. The farmer sized him up and down and said, "Son, you go stand out in the pasture and I am going to turn three bulls loose, one at a time. If you can catch the tail of any one of the three, I will permit you to marry my daughter." The young man positioned himself out in the pasture and waited for the first bull. When that barn door opened the biggest, orneriest looking bull this young man had ever seen came snorting toward him. He made a decision very quickly that one of the next bulls would be a better choice so he moved over and let the bull run through the back gate. All of a sudden the barn door swung open again revealing a "bullmongus", muscular beast, slinging slobber and pawing holes in the earth. He had never seen a bull that looked so dangerous. Whatever that third bull would be, he knew it could never be more intimidating than this second bull so he let it run through the back gate. The door opened for the third time and sure enough there stood the puniest, weakest, scrawniest and meekest bull ever. He just couldn't believe it. Boldly, he planted his feet as the

bull rushed toward him. At just the right moment he lunged and grabbed - but he came up empty handed. The third bull had no tail. What a life lesson. God opens many doors of opportunity for us in this life, but sometimes like the young man we are looking for safe and unchallenging situations. As Ann Landers said, "Opportunities are often disguised as hard work, so most people fail to recognize them." Earl Nightingale probably defined opportunity more correctly than anyone when he said, "Wherever there is danger, there lurks opportunity; wherever there is opportunity, there lurks danger. The two are inseparable; they go together." John F. Kennedy said, "The word 'crisis', when written in Chinese is composed of two characters: One represents danger and the other represents opportunity."

Perhaps our world is in a great crisis today because too many of us have been looking and waiting for the easiest, safest and least challenging opportunities in life. We had better be careful waiting to grab that third opportunity it may not have a tail. I have often been told that if God closes one door of opportunity He opens another. Alexander Graham Bell said, "When one door closes, another opens; but we often look so long and regretfully upon the closed door that we do not see the one which has opened." God help us to be ready to grab hold of life's toughest, roughest and most challenging opportunities that He opens to us. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Phil. 4:13).



RARE KIDS; WELL DONE By Don Jacobsen

If your kids drink a lot of "sugary beverages," that is, soda, pop, etc., they are very likely overweight. That's no surprise, but it's not as simple as it seems.

I am writing this from San Antonio, Texas, which recently hosted a major obesity conference showcasing research that has been in process for decades. The details are online in The New England Journal of Medicine. We need to talk about the findings; here is part of the Associated Press report:

"A huge, decades-long study involving more than 33,000 Americans has yielded the first clear proof that drinking sugary beverages interacts with genes that affect weight, amplifying a person's risk of obesity beyond what it would be from heredity alone."

What that means is, drinking a lot of sugary sodas is likely to make you fat, but it is more likely to make you fat if you have some of the so-called "obesity genes," those genes that predispose some to gain weight. Unfortunately, nearly all of us have some amount of obesity genes. Sugary drinks contribute to overweight in a high percentage of all who drink them. Now we know that for some, diet and genetics gang up to make sodas especially harmful.

We have known for years that sugary drinks are the

single biggest source of calories in the American diet, and they are increasingly blamed for the fact that a third of U.S. children and teens and more than two-thirds of adults in America are obese or overweight. Alarming, childhood obesity increased in America by 10 percent in 2011 alone.

In one phase of the study, 224 high school students in Boston were provided with soft drinks and another similar group was provided with non-sugar drinks including water. At the end of one year the soda-drinkers had gained an average of four pounds more than the non-soda drinkers. "I know of no other single food product," says Dr. David Ludwig, of Boston Children's Hospital and the Harvard School of Public Health, "whose elimination can produce this degree of weight change."

Because obesity is linked to several very serious health problems (such as increased propensity for heart disease, stroke, diabetes and cancer) many experts now believe that this generation of kids will be the first in America to live shorter lives than their parents did. Kids often live like they think they are immortal; it's up to us, mom and dad, to help them learn to make smart choices.

Send your parenting questions to: DrDon@RareKids.net.

GUEST COLUMNS

From time to time, people in the community have a grand slant on an issue that would make a great guest editorial. Those who feel they have an issue of great importance should call our editor and talk with him about the idea. Others have a strong opinion after reading one of the many columns that appear throughout the paper. If so, please write. Please remember that publication of submitted editorials is not guaranteed.

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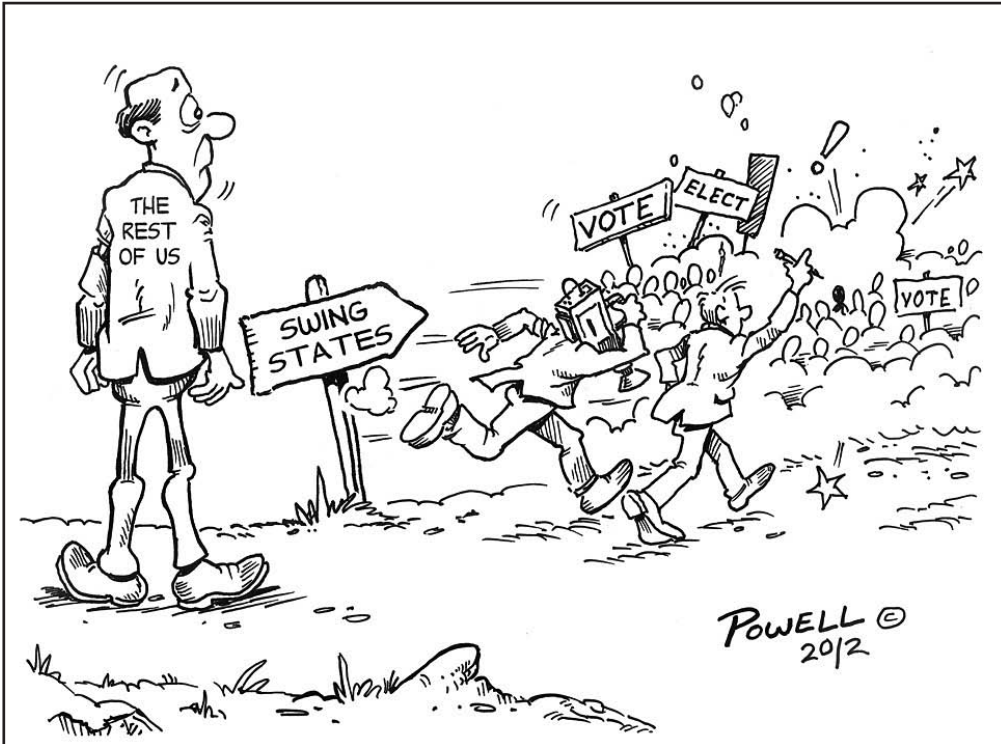
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