

Opinions

The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

EDITORIAL

Dogwood board transparency still lacking

In setting up the entity that will manage proceeds from its sale to HCA Healthcare, Mission Health is creeping toward diversity – but not transparency.

When Mission announced – with no visible public input – the first nine appointments to the Dogwood Health Trust, there was noticeable concern in the community. By any measure of diversity, the process failed. Eight of the nine were white and one was a Cherokee Indian. Only two were women. Six lived in Buncombe County.

The community noticed. So did we.

The quality of Mission’s reaction to the outcry from some of the area’s most trusted voices on inclusion and the social determinants of health remains in the eye of the beholder.

Two seemingly well qualified new members have been appointed, again with no visible public outreach. One is an African-American woman from Buncombe County. The other is a Latina from Henderson County. One could read this as a natural progression to build a stronger board. One could also wonder if Mission asked itself, “What is the least we can do to get these people off our back?” then acted.

Either way, it will take more.

The Dogwood board still is too close to Mission Health – eight members are current or former Mission directors – and too close to Buncombe County, though the trust is also supposed to serve 17 other counties.

There seems to be a feeling that only people with

experience running Mission Health are qualified to run Dogwood. “Simply put, there is no better group to serve in this early period,” the Mission Health Board Foundation Planning Committee said in regard to the first six appointees, all former Mission board chairs.

We disagree. The trust’s mandate is not to provide health care but to work on the social determinants of health, such as poverty, housing, transportation and safety. If anything, experience in social services would be more helpful than experience in running a hospital.

There is so much at stake. HCA is expected to pay \$1.5 billion for Mission – maybe more, depending upon state Atty Gen. Josh Stein’s review. The trust would be expected to spend 5 percent of the proceeds a year. That’s \$75 million, a lot of money that can do a lot of good is used wisely.

The great danger is that the money could be used to take over unprofitable services now provided by Mission, thus enhancing HCA’s bottom line rather than addressing broader health issues. Mission was built through community efforts and proceeds must go back to the community.

Also, how will a board with minimal minority representation, and only slightly better female representation, handle issues that affect these communities disproportionately? This issue was addressed by Carmen Ramos-Kennedy on these pages:

“Educational inequity, low wages, food insecurity and a lack of affordable housing, for example, are fac-

tors that disproportionately affect women, people of color, and people in poverty, and they create the health disparities that this foundation will be tasked with addressing.”

And what of the smaller, rural hospitals that are part of the Mission network? Will a board dominated by Buncombe County people be sufficiently concerned with health issues in the hinterlands?

“It pretty much is Mission people in Buncombe County,” said Franklin Mayor Bob Scott. “I really don’t think that as the Dogwood Health Trust is constituted right now it is representative of Western North Carolina, of the people that work and live and raise families here.”

Stein had wide-ranging powers. Three issues he has cited are safeguards against loss of services or hospitals, diversity on the Dogwood board and the adequacy of the \$1.5 billion price tag.

“We want to do everything in our power to make sure that the people of Western North Carolina get the quality of health care that they deserve,” Stein said.

Among other things, that means making sure proceeds are handled by people who operate in the open and represent the community who built Mission – not the hospital.

This is the opinion of the Asheville Citizen Times Editorial Board, which operates independently from the ACT news team. Want to share your take? Learn more here:

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Marijuana is a danger to the public

I am disappointed that two of our representatives are now in support of legalizing marijuana in our state. We all know the results of alcohol and drug abuse; the lives that are destroyed and the homes that are wrecked.

Already many are denied jobs because of drugs being in their system. Making something legal does not make it right or beneficial to society. Also to compromise one’s moral or ethical values in order to get votes has forfeited their right to lead. I ask you to reconsider your decision.

Roy Kilby, Candler

The border wall is for immigrants’ safety

Seven-year-old Jakelin Caal Maquin would still be alive if the Border Wall had been built under the 1986 law. Her father would not have taken her 2,000 miles and across the desert if there was a Border Wall standing in his way.

We must call our legislators and the President and tell them to Build the Border Wall Now.

Margaret Shea Smetana, Pinehurst

What would Jesus say? This

“The limit of my distaste over Christmas being minimized as a wonderful Christian celebration has been reached. Unbelievers have filtered” Merry Christmas” into happy holidays mainly because of the love of money. If anyone cannot accept our Christian celebration of the birth of Jesus, which leads to salvation by His death, burial and resurrection; then humbly I ask, please don’t diminish our reason for the season” - Jesus Christ.

Ron Duyck, Asheville

Unoffended by Mission nativity

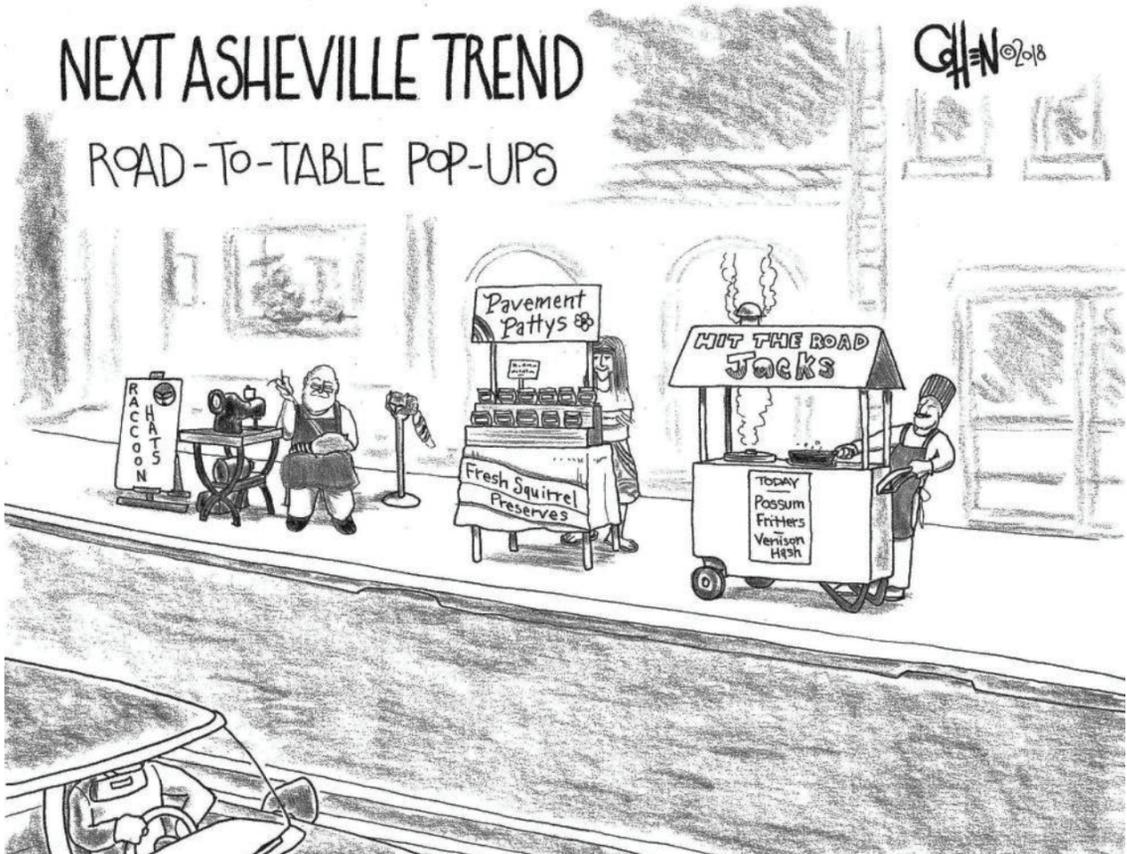
In reference to “Do unto others” in today’s paper:

As a person brought up in the Jewish faith, I have never felt the least bit distressed, underserved or pressured to conform by the nativity scene on the St Joseph’s campus of Mission Hospital. Let’s we forget, St Joseph’s was founded by the Sisters of Mercy, who continue to support this community, including many people who are struggling, without any requirement to be Catholic.

I worked at Mission for 25 years including frequent rotations to St Joseph’s after their merger. I also had surgery at St Joseph’s and I can tell you that I only experienced the utmost kindness from everyone I encountered, and was quite moved when Sister Carmen asked if she could pray with me before surgery.

Do we really want to eliminate everything that makes us different?

In the midst of all the commercial bombardment of the Christmas season, I believe that the nativity is a



welcome reminder of the true meaning of Christmas and that we should embrace those who celebrate.

Vicki Marder, Bolivia, NC

Andrew H. Gwynn, Black Mountain

Study history to make it

On December 18, a letter writer seeks to equate highway historical markers with confederate monuments, arguing that if we got rid of one, logic would demand that we should get rid of the other. Surely the writer can understand the difference between highway markers, which are meant to put history in context, and imposing, marble monuments, which are meant to celebrate and advance a particular historical cause.

One needs only to read Julian Carr’s despicable comments in his dedication speech to the “Silent Sam” statue to understand what this particular monument truly stands for. Please google “Julian Carr Silent Sam dedication speech” and educate yourself.

Closer to home, I am in favor of keeping the Vance monument, with the caveat that there should be added to the base several paragraphs summing up both the good and bad points of Vance’s life. In other words, as the writer quotes Wilma Dykeman, so that we might “...study history so that we can make history...and to learn from our roots to build tomorrow.”

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