

# OPINION

## NEWS-JOURNAL EDITORIAL

### Volunteer Week offers deserved recognition

National Volunteer Week is April 7-13 and provides an opportunity to celebrate the effect of volunteer service and the power of volunteers to tackle society's most significant challenges, to build stronger communities and be a force that transforms the world. Each year, National Volunteer Week shines a light on the people and causes that inspire us to serve, recognizing and thanking volunteers who lend their time, talent and voice to make a difference in their communities.

National Volunteer Week was established in 1974 and has grown each year exponentially, with thousands of volunteer projects and special events scheduled throughout the week. Today, as people strive to lead lives that reflect their values, the expression of civic life has evolved. Whether online, at the office or the local food bank; whether with a vote, a voice, or a wallet – doing good comes in many forms, and we should recognize and celebrate them all.

Pointsoflight.org offers some statistics about volunteerism, such as 1 out of 4 Americans volunteer and 2 out of 3 Americans help their neighbor, according to a study performed by The Corporation for National and Community Service.

Individuals between the ages of 35 and 54 are the most likely to volunteer their time and volunteers under the age of 24 accounts for 22.6 percent of all volunteers, according to The Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Volunteers are worth on average \$24.14 an hour, according to an Independent Sector Study, and volunteerism has an overall value of more \$184 billion while improving health by strengthening the body, enhancing mood and lessening stress in participants.

Benjamin Franklin started The Union Fire Company, in 1736, the first volunteer-run firehouse worldwide.

Aristotle once said: "the essence of life is to serve others and do good," and volunteers, on average, spend 50 hours per year donating their time to the greater good with more than 71 percent of volunteers working almost exclusively with one organization.

There are more than 1.8 million active nonprofits in the United States alone, so the ability to volunteer is endless, and women currently volunteer more than men by about 6 percent, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Food preparation and distribution was the most reported volunteer activity, representing 11.3 percent.



## GUEST COLUMN

### It's time: Let's close the coverage gap

Last week, 684 rural advocates from 89 North Carolina counties traveled to Raleigh to let our state leaders hear their voices.

It was the Rural Center's third-annual Rural Day, and it was the most significant event in our 32-year history working



Patrick WOODIE

on behalf of rural North Carolina. The rural champions who joined us heard from national thought leaders about policy initiatives working in other

states that may be replicated here to help more rural North Carolinians access affordable high-speed internet, build their businesses, and nurture healthier communities.

They also heard visions for the future of rural North Carolina from state leaders such as Gov. Roy Cooper, Lt. Governor Dan Forest, Sen. Phil Berger and Attorney General Josh Stein.

But the voice that resonated the loudest was former Ohio Gov. John Kasich, who shared the story of how the Buckeye state came together, working across political differences and party lines, to pass Medicaid expansion and get more hard-working families connected to

the healthcare they so desperately need.

"When we get to heaven, St. Peter isn't going to ask what we did to balance the budget. He's going to ask what we did for the least of these." Kasich told the crowd at Rural Day.

"Medicaid expansion is a human issue. This is about your mother, your father or your neighbor," Kasich said.

It is estimated more than 400,000 North Carolinians fall into our state's health insurance coverage gap, meaning they do not qualify for Medicaid but ironically earn too little to be eligible for subsidies on the national marketplace.

Covering the uninsured is undoubtedly a human issue; it is also an economic imperative. These are men and women working every day – some in more than one job – to build a better life for their families, but who cannot afford health insurance.

Those who fall into our coverage gap may be one hospital visit or health crisis away from economic catastrophe.

Closing the coverage gap would mean healthier families, and healthier families mean a more robust economy. It would mean more jobs and a more reliable workforce in our rural communities.

Closing the gap would give our state an estimated \$21.5 billion economic boost and create more than 43,000 jobs over four years.

It also would mean more secure healthcare systems in our most economically distressed areas.

A vibrant health sector is an economic catalyst for rural communities, bringing good jobs, a higher quality of life and a more competitive landscape for recruiting other industries. Without financially stable hospitals, rural communities struggle to keep the businesses they have and are at an immediate disadvantage in attracting new ones.

It is estimated, however, seven of our state's rural hospitals are financially vulnerable and at risk of closing, which would mean a loss of an estimated 2,360 healthcare jobs and a decline of \$2.7 billion in our state's GDP.

Closing the coverage gap is not the answer to all of our rural health challenges, but it is a vital first step.

It is time we acted. Several plans have been put forward – some to expand Medicaid, others to create a North Carolina-specific solution.

Whatever the exact policy, it is time to work together, as Republicans and Democrats, as rural and urban communities, to close our state's health insurance coverage gap.

The health of our rural people and our rural economy depend on it.

**Patrick Woodie is President of the NC Rural Center.**

## GUEST COLUMN

### College students help make over Habitat ReStore

Do you remember what you did during spring break when you were in school? Mitchell-Yancey Habitat for Humanity, or MYHFH, recently had nine college students and their leader from the Wesley Center at the University of Central Florida spend their spring break working with us. They split their time working at our construction site and the Habitat ReStore.

What is it like to be a volunteer at MYHFH? Here are what some of those students said:

• Julia: "Learning how to put siding on a house and to use a drill was so empowering."

• Jessica: "Volunteering here the past two spring breaks has been such a re-



Alyse SFERLAZZA

warding experience. I value all of the lessons I've learned here about service, love and hard work."

• Josh: "This week was a great experience where I got to do meaningful work and learn valuable construction skills."

• Richie: "The staff and volunteers are some of the nicest people we've ever met. They embraced our team with unrivaled hospitality, and they made sure to teach us anything we needed to know with unending patience."

• Meghan: "Thank you for such an amazing week. I really hope I can come back and do it again!"

What a difference it makes when there are many hands at work. MYHFH is blessed when people and groups wanting to volunteer call us. Are you part of an organization, youth group, church or an individual looking for a service opportunity? Call 828-766-9000 or send an email to myhfhvolcord@yahoo.com for more information about volunteering.

Visit the Habitat ReStore at 563 Oak Ave. in Spruce Pine and see what the students and dedicated volunteers accomplished during our recent renovation. When you come, remember to bring us your unwanted items or call us to schedule a pick up on a Tuesday or Thursday.

**Alyse P. Sferlazza is Volunteer Coordinator Mitchell-Yancey County Habitat For Humanity.**

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### Details of 'Green New Deal' misunderstood by many

To the editor:

A lot has been said about the "Green New Deal." Some of it true and some of it not so accurate. It envisions a federal program similar to the Works Progress Administration of the 1930s, providing funds to nonprofits, local and state governments, and other agencies serving the public to employ anyone who wants a job at \$15 an hour. One main difference is that it would be a permanent program.

It will not exclude anyone, as there will be special provisions made to employ veterans, at-risk youth, ex-convicts, people with disabilities and others with special needs. It will fit jobs to people, providing employment that is appropriate to their level of education, skill and experience. It will also offer part-time and flex-time work arrangements.

It will help transition out of the present fossil-based economy (and lifestyles) into a safe, sustainable, fossil-free economy that will entail millions of jobs that do not require a high skill level and are not limited by gender.

Jobs requiring minimal experience or on-the-job training include weatherization and energy efficiency improvements, waste removal and recycling, and tree-planting and wetland restoration. As these skills are acquired and workers who want to learn more and move up in pay scale can lean energy auditing, building electrification, solar, wind, and thermal installation and mass-transit electrification.

Workers can move into permanent public and private climate jobs.

This climate proposal will not reach fruition on legislation alone; there must be a context of public demand for change. Polling from Civis Analytics reports more than half the respondents approve of a jobs guarantee program in their inquiry and this increases to two-thirds when linked with climate issues. The youth climate group Sunrise wrote an article titled "It's Time for the Climate Movement to Embrace a Federal Jobs Guarantee." In the article, they argue the meshing of climate and jobs can quickly marshal public support and resources behind the movement.

How will we pay for this? The estimated cost of providing jobs for all ranges from 1.3 percent to 2.4 percent of the Gross Domestic Product. This is pocket change compared to what we spend on defense each year. If we eliminated one aircraft carrier or a few stealth bombers from the budget, we could easily cover the cost.

It is helpful and inspiring for me to remind myself that every other species (besides humans), as well as all other life on this planet, are by nature (and desire) moving in the direction of healing and wholeness for the common good. What wonderful companions to have along on the journey. Won't you join us?

The next Mitchell-Yancey Climate Action Coalition meeting is 4:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 10, at the Fox and the Fig in Spruce Pine. See you there.

**Jim Plato**  
Penland

## MITCHELL NEWS-JOURNAL

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We believe strong newspapers build strong communities – "Newspapers get things done!" Our primary goal is to publish distinguished and profitable community-oriented newspapers.

This mission will be accomplished through the teamwork of professionals dedicated to truth, integrity, loyalty, quality and hard work.

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## LETTERS POLICY

The Mitchell News-Journal welcomes letters to the editor about issues of local importance. Deadline to submit a letter for publication in the coming week's edition is 5 p.m. Friday. All writers are expected to abide by our letters policy:

- Letters must be exclusive to the Mitchell News-Journal;
- Letters must include the writer's full name, address and phone number for verification. The writer's name and city of residence will be published;
- Letters must be original – no photocopies;
- Letters should be 500 words or fewer;
- We do not publish poems, excerpts from other publications, lengthy submissions of scripture or letters signed by groups or multiple individuals;
- Letters endorsing or criticizing a business will not be published;
- We reserve the right to edit letters for brevity, style and libel. Publication of any letter is at the sole discretion of the Mitchell News-Journal.