

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.

Focusing on outcomes rather than inputs in NC education

Your Turn
Mitch Kokai
Guest columnist

Amid the hoopla surrounding educational inputs in North Carolina, it's nice to hear some state lawmakers focusing attention on educational outcomes. A couple of outcome-focused bills caught this observer's attention last week. Those bills attracted far less scrutiny from reporters and pundits than the May 1 teacher walkout and march through downtown Raleigh. That walkout focused almost exclusively on inputs. Teachers demanded higher pay, more benefits, and more funding for support staff. (They also called for Medicaid expansion. Given that the expansion population consists primarily of working-age, able-bodied, childless adults, it's not clear whether the Medicaid demand even counts as an education input.)

Lawmakers also devoted time and attention to inputs. N.C. House leaders unveiled their proposal to raise pay by an average of 4.6 percent for teachers and 10 percent for principals. Legislators highlighted education-related spending increases in their two-year budget. Some of those increases addressed teachers' goals.

Left largely unstated by both the lawmakers and the rallying teachers? They operate under the theory that more spending on inputs inevitably leads to better outcomes for students and families. It's possible. Years of academic research suggest the prospects are far from certain.

Of more interest for those interested in better outcomes were two bills discussed one day before the teacher walkout. The state House's education committee spent less than 15 minutes on the bills. But if implemented, they could have significant long-term impacts on public education in the state.

House Bill 895 would create a new Opportunity Gap Task Force. The 14-member group would study the "significant disparity in the academic performance and postsecondary readiness" of students based on "races, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, genders, English-language proficiencies, and urban, rural, or suburban" settings.

Among the dozen items the group would consider: teachers' professional development, parental involvement, rigorous coursework, and disciplinary disparities. The group would start work no later than September. It would produce a report by December 2020. That report would include a plan for reducing opportunity gaps by 2030.

For some, the answer lies in alleviating poverty, especially in rural eastern North Carolina. Others dispute the notion that poverty trumps other factors.

The bill's chief sponsor echoed Brockman's statement. "Research seems to support the idea that because a child comes out of poverty, that does not mean that they cannot be taught successfully," said Rep. Hugh Blackwell, R-Burke.

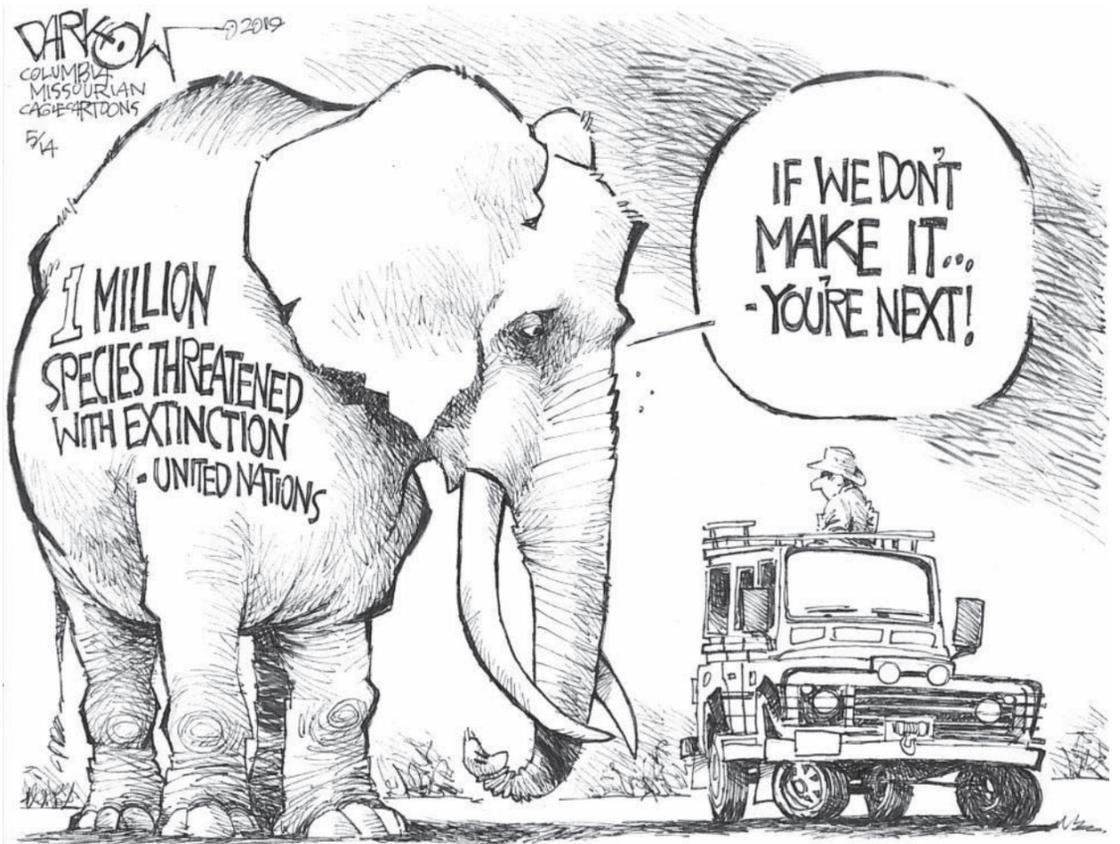
H.B. 895 cleared the House's K-12 Education Committee on April 30. So did House Bill 714. That legislation could lead to an even larger shakeup of the state's educational practices.

Horn's H.B. 714 would require the State Board of Education to determine how N.C. schools can transition to a "competency-based assessment and teaching model for all elementary and secondary students." The board would deliver a report by May 2020.

Some districts and some states already pursue this goal, Horn said. "It's time for us to look at kids themselves, at the delivery of education to a child in a way that works for each and every child."

Both Horn's bill and the proposed Opportunity Gap Task Force cleared the full House Thursday with little debate. It's refreshing that lawmakers are willing to "look at kids themselves," not just at educational inputs.

Mitch Kokai is senior political analyst for the conservative John Locke Foundation. This article originally appeared in Carolina Journal, www.carolina-journal.com.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

An unbreakable spell

Simple question: What would Trump have to do to lose the support of McConnell, Meadows, etc., or any of the MAGA minions? Stated more clearly, is there anything Trump could do to lose their support?

Shoot someone on Fifth Avenue? Expose himself as a tax cheat? A compulsive liar? Be revealed as someone whose entire foreign policy is based on making huge personal financial gains. Going to war with Iran or Venezuela to divert attention from his impeachable offenses? Ignore Congress and the rule of law in regard to subpoenas of his cabinet members? Kill immigrants seeking asylum? Order the murder of Ruth Bader Ginsburg to put another lackey on the Supreme Court?

The sad reality is that he could do all of these things and more and it wouldn't change the minds of McConnell, Meadows, etc. Nothing would prompt any moral or responsible action. This isn't a political party – it's a cult. The Rev. Jim Jones of Guyana infamy would be envious. Trump's Kool-Aid is much more intoxicating.

Nelson Sartoris, Biltmore Lake

Food for thought

I got to thinking today about some things. Although I no longer do it, every time I ate beef or a beef product, including drinking milk; every time I ate chicken, including eggs, or a chicken product; every time I ate pork or a pork product; every time I ate lamb or a lamb product; every time I ate fish or a fish product; every time I ate any animal or animal product, every time I did any of these things, I contributed to damaging the Earth, damaging life on Earth and damaging my health.

In good conscience, I could no longer do these things. There are choices. Industry has dictated our traditional unhealthy American diet. They have manipulated, conditioned and controlled us to the detriment of our health and the health of the Earth. Finally, a light came on. I made my choice. This is my story. What is your story?

Ben Trotter, Asheville

Who is actually on the streets

Please stop judging the homeless only as drunks and druggies. It's time to get educated. Many on the streets are homeless veterans who are unable to handle their never ending memories of the horrific pain and destruction of war. They deserve our respect and prayers not four letter words thrown at them as you pass them by. Many young teens become homeless because of family break-up caused by unfaithful and/or abusive parents. They run away to search in all the wrong places for acceptance and end up being used and abused with no way of escape. Teens run to the street when their mothers bring a lover into the home who usually sexually and emotionally abuses them. The street is also full of the mentally ill who have no

other place to go. Sadly, women who are in the fight for their lives with breast and/or gynecological cancer must choose between paying their mortgage, rent, utilities, buy food or decide to receive life saving treatment that could save their life. Hope Chest for Women is a local charity who raises funds to actually help them with everyday needs as they travel the path of fear and unknowing. Call 708-3017 for information about a local non profit organization that does much that nobody else does.

Denise Goodson, Asheville

GOP math doesn't add up

There are many humane and moral reasons to expand Medicaid in North Carolina. However, it is the Republican opposition's refusal to acknowledge the financial benefits of expansion that is completely confusing. The Republicans in the North Carolina legislature argued that our state Medicaid budget was too unpredictable, so we needed to reform Medicaid. That legislation was passed and Medicaid is now transforming into a managed-care system. Why then, is the current Republican leadership ignoring the billions of dollars, the thousands of jobs that would come to North Carolina if we were to expand Medicaid? Why are they ignoring that new enrollees under expansion would be covered at a 90% Federal dollar reimbursement rate as opposed to the current enrollee reimbursement of 67%? Why is the leadership ignoring the fact that North Carolinians' tax dollars are used to pay for Medicaid Expansion in the 37 states that decided the working poor deserve health insurance? It makes zero sense. Beg your Republican legislators to Expand Medicaid. The time is now.

Marlene Jacoby, Asheville

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