

# Mental health providers, consumers, advocates urge legislators to close gap

"The cost of doing nothing is not nothing," John Owen, mental health consumer, told Department of Health and Human Services Secretary Mandy Cohen, M.D., at a roundtable to discuss the impact of untreated behavioral health on communities and the challenges of accessing care for those who need it. He called on legislators to follow the lead of 37 other states and expand Medicaid.

One in 20 people in North Carolina lives with a serious mental illness, and more than half the adults with mental illness do not receive needed treatment. In addition to impacting the quality of life of individuals and their families, untreated mental illness or substance use disorder imposes hidden costs on North Carolina's economy, justice system, healthcare providers and county divisions of social services.

"When participants don't have insurance, the safety net is the emergency room and often the jails. So much money is going to treat individuals at the moment of crisis," said Robin

Huffman, Executive Director, North Carolina Psychiatric Association.

The group, which included mental health providers, consumers and advocacy leaders from across the state, called on legislators to close the health insurance coverage gap. Expanding Medicaid would provide an estimated 500,000 North Carolinians with access to affordable health care, including 144,000 North Carolinians with behavioral health needs, including substance use disorder. States that have expanded Medicaid have seen substantial improvements in mental health and access to care among low-income adults with chronic conditions.

"When we focus on keeping those with mental illness healthy and prevent them from going into crisis, it is better for people and reduces costs," said Secretary Cohen. "Legislation has been introduced by Democrats and Republicans alike to close the coverage gap and help North Carolinians access affordable, quality health insurance to keep them well. What are we waiting for?"

"We spend a lot of resources on moments of crisis and not nearly enough on prevention or supporting people in living full and productive lives," said Kody H. Kinsley, DHHS Deputy Secretary for Behavioral Health & Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities. "Medicaid expansion would go a long way toward our goal of providing the right care, at the right time, in the right setting."

Under Secretary Cohen's leadership, DHHS has prioritized integrating behavioral health and physical health and ensuring timely access to high quality services. In October 2018, NCDHHS received federal approval to implement the transition to Medicaid managed care and integrate physical health, behavioral health and pharmacy benefits.

Discussion focused on the impact of untreated behavioral health on communities and the challenges of accessing care for those who need it, the state's transition to Medicaid managed care, and the value that Medicaid expansion could bring to the state in its efforts to improve access to care.

## What are you scared of? Don't be afraid to try

Can you remember what the commencement speaker said at your graduation? We are in commencement "season" and platitudes aplenty will be spoken to graduates across our state. Most will be forgotten as soon as tassels are turned, but this year's graduates of the UNC School of the Arts heard an address worth remembering.



*My Spin*  
By Tom Campbell

Mary Mitchell Campbell, a Wilson native and School of the Arts high school graduate, was the speaker. Campbell is an acclaimed Broadway Music Director with a long list of credits. She also directs solo artists, like Kristen Chenoweth, and sometimes directs symphony orchestras.

But there's another side. Campbell frequently contributes time to charitable events and is the founder of ASTEP, an international charitable organization that brings artists and young people together for education, the arts and financial help. Highly motivated, laser focused and always moving, Mary Mitchell likes to remain behind the scenes, but people in the theatre and music world know and respect this accomplished woman. And did I mention she is my niece? Our family is proud of her.

Before her address, the School of the Arts presented Mary Mitchell an honorary Doctor of Fine Arts degree and

Dr. Campbell (as she wants us to address her henceforth) remembered that going to the School of the Arts was terrifying at first, but she quickly found herself with "my people." While in college Mary Mitchell determined to pursue a career in theatre music, but nobody in her life thought it was a good idea. In fact, they thought it was a terrible idea.

She says, "One of my favorite professors sat me down—he was very much a father figure for me, and we were very close. He knew I had no money, and that there wasn't going to be someone to fall back on financially, and he very simply and clearly told me he was worried about me. I had some amazing job opportunities in front of me, and it didn't make sense to chase a dream where the success rate is so low. He said, and I will never forget this moment, 'I know you are talented, but I have watched so many talented people try to do this,

and it always ends badly. I think you will fail, and you will have passed up these other sure things and regret it. I think you need to reconsider this decision."

That was a turning point. In what Campbell terms a rare glimpse of clarity, "Call it God, call it your inner voice, whatever. I said to him: I know you care, and you want to look out for me, and I believe you 100 percent. I think you are right that I will probably fail. But the thing I'm realizing in this moment is that I'm not scared of failing. I am scared of not trying."

With graduation speakers, "You get a before picture, and an after picture, and you literally skip the middle part and it all looks like it just went really well. I'm here to tell you...that middle part...that part was good sometimes, but a lot of the time it just sucked. Success is not a straight line. Don't get fooled into thinking it is."

The life lesson for graduates and all of us is that you can't just sit on the sidelines, afraid to fail. You can never succeed if you don't try. Don't be scared to try.

*Tom Campbell is former assistant NC State Treasurer and is creator/host of NC SPIN, a weekly statewide television discussion of state issues that airs on UNC-TV Fridays at 7:30 p.m., Sundays 12:30 p.m.*

## Greensboro News and Record - Our Opinion:

### That Terry Johnson? And Medicaid Expansion

It was Nixon who went to China. And now the forces for Medicaid expansion in North Carolina have their own unlikely champion.

Alamance County Sheriff Terry Johnson, a conservative firebrand best known for his controversial views on immigration, has lent his support to a bill, sponsored by Rep. Donny Lambeth, a Forsyth County Republican, which pairs Medicaid expansion with a work requirement and premium payments.

"In law enforcement, we're dealing with people in our detention centers and in our communities who need that coverage," Johnson said in endorsement of House Bill 655. "We could be helping some of these people get back in society and make their own way."

Johnson appeared at an April news conference with business-

man and former GOP gubernatorial candidate George Little; former N.C. Rep. Chris Malone, R-Wake; Rep. Holly Grange, R-New Hanover; and the Rev. Gilbert Parker, president of the N.C. Faith Fellowship Foundation.

"Hard-working families in North Carolina are being left behind by a broken health care system," said Grange, one of the bill's co-sponsors. "These families earn too much to qualify for Medicaid, but not enough to afford private health insurance."

Grange then noted the impact on veterans: "One in four veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan in North Carolina have no health care coverage and no access to the Veterans Administration. I'm honored to be part of four generations of Army veterans myself. If we don't take care of our veterans, it's a travesty."

"This issue is monumental to us," Chris Lumsden, CEO of Northern Hospital of Surry County, said during an April roundtable discussion among CEOs of rural hospitals in North Carolina. "(Medicaid expansion) is something we can do today that will impact patient care and economic development down the road."

Six rural hospitals have closed in North Carolina since 2010, affecting not only access to health care but the well-being of rural economies. "Rural hospitals are anchor institutions in their communities," Greg Tung, a University of Colorado health economist, told NC Health News. "They are kind of a pillar of the local community and the local economy, they provide a lot of skilled, well-paying jobs for that area. So, when a rural hospital closes, it has a disproportionately large impact on that community, especially in comparison to an urban hospital closure."

Finally, Medicaid expansion would help to address the state's spiraling opioid crisis by providing greater access to treatment. And, of course, this increased coverage would be almost completely funded by the federal government — using taxes North Carolinians already pay.

Beyond politics, there is no practical reason not to expand Medicaid in North Carolina. And some Republicans obviously agree. Their voices are helpful and important. And deeply appreciated.

# READERS' FORUM

## Reasoning doesn't ring true for abolishing Electoral College

Last month, Iowa Secretary of State, Paul Pate, in the Capitol Report printed in the Vinton Eagle newspaper in Iowa, opined that abolishing the Electoral College would be devastating to Iowa. However, his reasoning doesn't ring true.

As long as there is a U.S. Senate, all states will be represented equally, in that body. Iowa's voice in the primary process will always be secure as a sphere of influence by having first nod at the candidates. To say differently, is to compare pigs to pears. One does not influence the other.

But here is the real misconception of his piece: The framers of the Constitution did not weigh in on whether "a pure form of democracy could be dangerous." They had no say in whether or not to have an Electoral College, as least not at the time the Constitution, or even the Bill of Rights, was created and adopted. They had not a clue to the future.

There weren't even organized political parties at that time. There was a concern, however, that our fledgling nation would be unable to inform and educate white males for the purpose of voting across such a vast territory, in the 1780s. There was something to that, then. Now, the populace is well informed and well educated, and the voters much more diverse.

The Electoral College was not created until after the turn of the century, proposed in 1803 and ratified a year later. It was the 12<sup>th</sup> Amendment Electoral College system that is in place today. By that time, however, the parties were organized to disseminate information to their voter bases. Thus, the machinations of the system should have been set aside, but it was not. That was because slavery got in the way.

Although direct national election was proposed by James Wilson of Pennsylvania, a northerner, James Madison of Virginia, a southerner, spoke against it. Why? Because the south had half-a-million slaves.

## Change of heart, we need the wall right here

Surprise! I changed my mind. We do need the Border Wall after all. Until this week I thought the Border Wall was a total waste, discriminatory, a political stunt, and useless. But now I know better. After reading the Yancey Times-Journal last week I now see the Border Wall is necessary for the safety and security of residents of Yancey County.

I have seen the need personally, having, so far, experienced only minor property damage.

Of course, it was unthinkable to give slaves the vote! Even that idea would not be bandied about until the time of the Civil War and Reconstruction, more than 50 years later. But had they done so, maybe that would have been a possible solution to the problem.

Instead, any direct election system would have meant the northern states, which had more voters, would have an advantage. So, the compromise they worked out allowed for counting slaves as three-fifths of a full voter.

This gave Virginia the edge, even though Free State Pennsylvania had more people voting. As a result of this compromise, for 32 of the first 36 years the Constitution was in existence, "a white slaveholding Virginian occupied the presidency!" (Taken from *The Troubling Reason the Electoral College Exists*, by Akhil Reed Amar, November 26, 2018.)

The slavery-skew of the Electoral College gave the south the decisive margin of victory needed to elect Jefferson with a majority.

I love Vinton, where I spend summers with my grandparents. I love Iowa. I love America and democracy where there should

be one person/one vote. The candidate who accrues a majority of the popular vote should win. The people have spoken. How legitimate can a presidency be when the will of the plurality of voters is ignored and equal protection is denied? To do otherwise amounts to use of the Electoral College as a means of Voter Suppression!

Candidates will go wherever they can to influence voters and vice versa. That's part of the process, too. And if that doesn't happen, then that says something about that candidate, as well. With all of our modern communication accoutrements, have no fear that a crumb of opinion or truth will fall from the lips of a candidate in any of our states and be missed by the media to serve up to the hoypoly across the nation. Now, that's influence!

I am proud of Iowa's skill at being the "sorting hat" for our presidential candidates. So, Iowa, do your job for the nation, and may the best candidate win, Fairly, Democratically, and Legitimately!

The time has come to abolish the Electoral College.

Susan Wilson, Leicester

## Sometimes I can only throw up!

In my local paper, a writer writes, leftists always resort to name calling and slurs when they have nothing intelligent to add. Oh boy! How about, Crazy Bernie, Goofy Beto, Lightweight K. Gillibrand, Last in his class John McCain, Pocahontas Elizabeth Warren, Little Marco (Rubio), Sleepy Joe Biden, Lying Ted Cruz, Crooked Hillary, Eats like a dog John Kasich, and Slow Jeb Bush.

Even you, must get my point. You overlook everything this moron has done. Now don't scold me for calling him a moron - several people in his cabinet have.

He is repulsive, he is a liar, he is a grifter - he is an undicted co-conspirator - but still, you support him! Today a letter

signed by 600 co-signers, all former Department of Justice lawyers, prosecutors and such, all different political persuasions, all agreeing that Trump would be indicted for obstruction of justice if he were not the President. But you still support him. Shame on all of you! You defend the indefensible.

The top 26 wealthiest people on the Planet have more wealth than the bottom 3.8 billion. Do you think they are going to continue their struggle while a fraction of Americans are basking in unimaginable wealth?

The only interest the Gluttonous have is the balance of their 401-K. You best wake up you fools!

Michael Perham  
Clermont, Florida

But the potential exists for far more serious incidents and injury. Some news reports state that the number of marauders has tripled recently.

The Yancey Times-Journal provided many safety tips and guidelines for how to deal with encounters with the invaders. The headline of the lead article sounded the alert: "Black Bears Are On The Move!" Yes they are, and I say, "We have to keep them out. They are not our kind."

So I think we should play it safe and just get rid of them. We should put up The Wall and keep the bears out altogether. That way we will all sleep better at night. The Wall will actually be doing something useful, and our tax dollars will be put to good use.

Of course, we will always make an exception for Smoky Bear. He is the good bear. Smoky is one of us.

Rob Grenell  
Burnsville

*Letters must be signed to be published, with address and phone number included for verification purposes only. Please keep comments civil and refrain from hate speech, name-calling and personally attacking others for their views. Deadline is noon Friday. Send to: Times Journal PO Box 280, Burnsville, NC 28714 or email jody@yanceypaper.com*



## A hornet's nest as a weather predictor?

Not long ago, someone much younger asked me to write down the old-timey weather sayings common to Western North Carolina. I'm still adjusting to being old enough to remember these, but here goes. Dogwood Winter, Catbird Squall, Blackberry Winter, woolly worm fronted/backend color debate, hornets' nests high/low to the ground, heavy August fogs as winter snow predictors and so on.

No, I'm not Methuselah's wife, but my family's first TV didn't sit in our living room until 1957. I appreciate having grown up when TV and TV weatherpersons didn't exist, with all their gismos, pretty charts and screens. I remember when Granddaddy would walk out to the porch, sniff the air and remark, "Yep, rain's comin'," when Granny's arthritic left knee "acted up" prompting her "weather's changin'," and on winter evenings of the Lone Ranger and Tonto's exploits coming over the radio, turning

on the porch light to the surprise of a big winter snow. Next day, most people went about their business because they knew how to cope.

Yes, with technology we've made such beneficial strides from the proverbial A to Z. Certainly, knowing when a devastating storm is to hit can allow for life-saving preparations. Twentieth and twenty-first century medical advances boggle the mind. computers, lasers, space travel—the list goes on ad infinitum.

However, as I sit on our patio, with the sun just behind our west ridge and a mocking bird thrilling my ears with his "noteworthy" impersonations, I look at our lovely, blooming native dogwoods and remark the strawberry aroma of the close-by sweet shrub or "bubby bush,"—a treasured gift from a dear friend now gone, and I think of all those independent, intelligent, self-sufficient, highly observant ancestors who gave

us the knowledge of "Dogwood Winter" and "Catbird Squall."

The observations leading to these now so-called sayings became critical to living: to growing crops for food, cutting timber for shelter and fuel, preparing for hard winters, slaughtering animals for survival. They didn't have today's myriad information channels, but they did have intelligence, common sense, and a necessary penchant for hard work. Yes, their lives were difficult, but through their efforts and meticulous observations of Mother Nature, they managed.

So, as I recall our recent cold snap when the native dogwoods began to blossom and keep handy a sweater for Blackberry Winter, I salute our self-sufficient ancestors who got it right through the necessary skill of constant observations, many of which, to this day, remain accurate. Consequently, I will not set out flower or veggie plants until after May 15.

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