

Raleigh N&O flounders in celebrity blogs

The old faithful N&O has discovered yet another way to get their political views in the paper. They turned a Clay Aiken "blog" into a condemnation of a large majority of Wake County voters who dared to trifle with the N&O's school bussing policy.

In other words, Wake's anti-bussing, sensible voters thrashed the daylights out of the N&O's slate.

The editors' story was Aiken wrote a blog about the crisis. I have no regards for blogs, things tossed out there in the electronic sky for anyone to read. I saw the very first blog in a Texaco station men's room in Tarboro in 1936. It read. "Flush the commode Greenville needs the water."

The N&O was so taken by the blog they ran it on the front page. Gee, that was important. I was shocked. I write them a blog every day and they don't run my blog on the front page or the back page or the middle page.

The newspaper presented Aiken as more intelligent than a majority of the voters. I know very little about Clay Aiken. He is in the music business. I think he sings. Are singers that smart? Was he the one who had a son but was not married?

This recent episode had a real stench about it. As usual the N&O considers celebrities the bed rock of American intelligence. To them a teenager who just made a zillion buck posing in a bikini with a dying polar bear is a celebrity and smarter than a housewife with three children trying to figure out a way to get them a good school.

As a matter of fact, I don't see how they keep up with all those celebrates who are arrested, are in rehab or owe the government 6 million bucks in back taxes. They all come and go mighty quick.

Yet if the truth gets in the N&O's way, they will dig up and drag out a celebrity.

My first reaction to the Aiken blog was to ignore it because normal people don't care what Clay Aiken thinks about anything. But darned if the N&O didn't continue to ram it down their reader's throats.

Where ARE those ABC circulation figures due out in October? It is a given that newspapers that gain circulation brag about it. It is hard to get one to admit more and more customers disagree with it.

I found them! Figuring 3.2 readers for each subscription, that's down about 50,000 readers since last year.

R.L. Taylor is a regular contributor to Chatham County Line. He has been a newspaperman for more than 50 years, working as a reporter, editor and publisher. He worked as Director of Special Project for the Durham Herald Company from 1982 to 1991

Media Meditations

by R.L. Taylor



Shame on you, Ma Blue

By Bill Sommers

Recently, unsuspecting NC residents have found their mail boxes awash with BlueCross BlueShield mailings that shed manufactured crocodile tears on the "horror" of a relatively small public program included in the Obama Health Plan proposal, calling it a "vast expansion in the government's role" while praising its own righteous stance for "health care that works."

This mail order crusade was predicted back in May when Paul Krugman's New York Times column, "Blue Double Cross", noted that after private insurers had a cooperative photo-op with the President, BC/BS of North Carolina, among others, began "gearing up for a major smear campaign." And so it has come to pass.

Their insulting insertion of the postcard mailing trick underlines BC/BS's reckless fear that any kind of competition is an attack on its profit margin; it also symbolizes the inability of most private health insurers to contribute to the country's greater good against the morass of increasingly botched private health care providers and rising insurance premiums. BC/BS's constant misrepresentation of the true goal of a public health insurance sector has made the United States the negative model for health care when compared to so many developed – and developing – countries. Despite its protestations, BC/BS wants to keep that negative model alive and well for as long as it can.

In fact, most of the private insurers like BC/BS of North



A digital rendering of BlueCross BlueShield of North Carolina's new office space in Chapel Hill.

Carolina, began raising their rates as Congress started the process of implementing a major overhaul of our failing system. The major reason is the fact that the insurance industry is under pressure from Wall Street to get ahead of any legislative changes that might reduce their profits. Small businesses suffer most from the insurance industry's greed – of which BS/BC is a significant part. One small businessman in Columbia, PA, for example, was told by his current insurance carrier that his work force was becoming "too old and very expensive" after demanding a 160 percent increase in the company's coverage.

After receiving the first of the BC/BS's mailings, I wrote to their Durham Office, complaining about the mailings and their gross inaccuracies included therein. I shortly received a reassuringly bland letter from the Project Manager of "Member Experience and Customer Satisfaction." GEE! Among a litany of well-practiced positively-stated negative pronouncements, one sentence seemed a summation of attitude and status:

"We think it's critical that North

Carolinians understand how a government-run health plan and increased taxes could impact health coverage costs and choice. That's why we're working to educate North Carolinians to do that." GEE. Here's Mother Blue Cross sitting on her Blue Shield telling all her North Carolina children to be quiet and go out and play while Mother Blue takes care of the problem." GEE WHIZ!

But Mother Blue is a bit of

a scoundrel. She forgets to tell us that BC/BS has for many years been – and currently is – a full participant in the Federal Employees Health Benefits program (FEHB), a government-run health plan that is a model of the plan BC/BS decries with such moral fervor. In it the US Government pays between 60 and 70 percent of premium cost to the participating insurers – BC/BS included – through the budget of the US Office of Personnel Management. Under FEHB, BC/BS offers "fee-for-services" plans in eight states while in a slightly different mode offers HMO health participation in six states. Well, Mother Blue, how do you justify this immorality to your poor children? On the one hand you tell us that these awful government-run health plans are serious threats to the country while with the other hand – unseen to your trusting children – you are taking funds from the US government hand-over-fist?

PLEASE!

Bill Sommers, a Ferrington Village resident, is a regular contributor to Chatham County Line.

Durham, stop poisoning Jordan Lake

By Julian Sereno

Something is rotten in Durham, and much of the rot seems to be ending up in Jordan Lake. It's time to put a stop to it.

It began way back in the early 90's, when Wal-Mart wanted to build a store near the intersection of I-40 and U.S. 15-501, a few miles from Chapel Hill and smack-dab next to New Hope Creek. The Durham City Council had consistently protected the watershed and thwarted Wal-Mart. But when it came to a vote in 1992, Virginia Englehart, a Durham City Council member and avowed environmentalist, mistakenly voted for it rather than against it. She claimed she was tired and just pushed the wrong button. It sounded fishy to me at the time, but the powers-that-were in the Herald-Sun newsroom, where I was employed, took her at her word.

New Hope Commons was built as a result of that vote. It features not only a Wal-Mart but a Best

Buy, Old Navy, Office Max and more. And it paved the way for another mall on the other side of Mt. Moriah Church Road and a goliath mall across U.S. 15-501 featuring scores of big box stores.

All this commercial development led to a vigorous revenue stream pouring into Durham's tax coffers. I remember the business editor in the mid 90's chortling about the many Volvos he saw parked at New Hope Commons, which he surmised belonged to wealthy Chapel Hill residents leaving their sales tax dollars in Durham.

All this commercial development's hundreds of acres of parking lots have also led to a toxic stream pouring into New Hope Creek and on into Jordan Lake. When the State Legislature enacted rules to protect Jordan Lake last year, the tab for Durham to curb its pollution was way higher than anywhere else — \$570 million. Durham was granted compliance wavers because of the staggering expense. But Durham allowed that pavement to

be laid, profited mightily, and now needs to pony up to keep their poisonous run off out of New Hope Creek and Jordan Lake.

The rotten business continues. In October, the Durham Board of County Commissioners voted 3-2 to allow construction of large subdivision, 751 South, inside the Jordan Lake watershed, after being threatened with a massive lawsuit by the developers. But a petition representing 24 nearby landowners opposing the development was ruled valid. If that ruling stands, the development would be stopped. The vote to allow it would need a supermajority, or a 4-1 vote in favor, which it won't get.

The petition will have its day in court – probably many of them. Durham taxpayers ultimately might be the big losers, which is too bad. But Durham has to stop pouring filth into our drinking water, and it needs to stop now.

Julian Sereno is editor and publisher of Chatham County Line. He was Neighborhood Editor for the Durham Sun and then the Herald-Sun from 1985 to 1997.

