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STOCKS >>

TRAFFIC >>

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COMMUNITIES >>

MULTIMEDIA >>

DAILY DIGEST

Sunday, January 11, 2004 12:00AM EST

Sunday forum

Letters to the editor of the editorial page

Mall's undoing sealed

The Raleigh City Council on Thursday settled on a new design for Raleigh's traditional main street that will open it to cars.

Woman dies in train accident

The incident happened near the N.C. State Fairgrounds in Raleigh early this morning.

Business inventories rise

America's businesses -- keeping a close eye on economy's pulse - boosted their stockpiles by a modest 0.3 percent in November, a sign that companies are betting the rebound will be lasting.

Polls show Iowa race getting tight

Sen. John Edwards has clawed his way into a fight that is now a dead heat, two new polls suggested Thursday.

For now, state bailout keeps kids in day care

Counties enrolled more children in the program than they could afford.

'Beacon' lights Pack's way

Tumors dim young NCSU fan's sight, but the game shines brightly in his eyes.

Pack outgunned

N.C. State is no match for J.J. Redick, Daniel Ewing and the Blue Devils.

Canes lose ugly

Lightning strikes with 5 quick goals.

Raleigh's Velvet Cloak Inn to be sold

Annexation is good for N.C.? That's debatable Too many minuses

In his Jan. 4 column Rob Christensen suggested that North Carolina's annexation rules, which afford municipalities considerable latitude to grow via annexation, constitute good policy.

First, Christensen contends that North Carolina's policy alleviates urban decline. It's difficult to envision a rapidly expanding city, which, by definition, has a rapidly increasing supply of urban land, having property values increasing at a faster pace than a comparable city that expands at a slower rate, which has a more modest increase in its supply of urban land. For example, downtown property values in relatively slow-growing Chapel Hill are higher than those in fast-growing Cary.

Second, Christensen says the policy is beneficial because it facilitates population growth. Population growth is certainly not beneficial for all North Carolina municipalities. Indeed, I would like to see a poll that asks Raleigh residents for their preferred population size for Raleigh. I'd expect a minority of residents advocating the high growth rate of the past decade.

Third, Christensen says the policy helps taxpayers. As typically administered, costs of infrastructure necessary for urban expansion (sewer, water, schools, roads), are heavily borne by taxpayers, which, in effect, subsidizes private development. In fact, Cary and Durham, in spite of lobbying by developers, increased builder impact fees to reduce this subsidy.

Fourth, Christensen says the policy is good for Republicans. Overall, I agree.

Finally, North Carolina's annexation policy is lamentable on environmental and constitutional (areas forcibly annexed then pay city taxes) grounds. Perhaps its only redeeming quality is that it increases the supply of more affordable housing, a point omitted by Christensen.

Garrick T. Skalski

Swift Creek



Last fall, homeowners in a portion of County -- this new house was under Fearrington Road -- feared possible : Cary. Town officials subsequently sa annexation plans for the area.

Staff File Photo by Robert Willett

advertisement

Developers speculate it could be turned into condos or a mixed-use project.

Kohl's stores sales shrink

Discount chain struggles for a year, sees holiday revenue decrease.

Terrible policy

Regarding Rob Christensen's Jan. 4 column "Power to annex is healthy":

In trying to paint a contrast between North Carolina's annexation law and an interpretation of "white flight" in Detroit and Newark, Christensen asserted that, among other things:

- "North Carolina's annexation law is also good for the GOP. Raleigh would never have elected Republicans Tom Fetzner or Paul Coble as mayor if the new, GOP-leaning suburbs had not been annexed into the city."

Whether or not it helps the GOP, "white flight" and North Carolina's 1959 annexation laws have combined to continue the time-tested Southern tradition of class separation. Just look at the reality.

- "There are several reasons why Raleigh, Greensboro and Charlotte are not blighted cities filled with boarded-up houses and drug-infested neighborhoods and in constant need of taxpayer bailouts."

This ignores the fact that all this can be found in the impoverished rural areas of this state.

Let's use Christensen's example of cities in Michigan and New Jersey. The rural areas of these states contain farms and factories which, among many things, produce our food, refine our gasoline and build our cars.

You won't find many migrant farm workers living in substandard conditions in these states, especially when the weather gets below freezing for extended periods of time. In these states, unlike North Carolina, rural areas would not be a good place to hide the poor and impoverished.

With recent declines in the tobacco, furniture and textile industries, how many North Carolina cities have rushed to annex these poverty-stricken areas? The answer is none.

Christensen's was correct about why the 1959 law was enacted. It was to go out to the suburbs and lock in the "white" (meaning those who could afford) taxes as people decided to escape the declining metropolitan areas to live in suburbs. The laws accomplished that, and they also chased out and kept out those in or near poverty levels. Those who couldn't afford to live under these cities' taxes and rules had to relocate to the rural areas. In essence, annexation gave cities the luxury to be able to afford to force out the unwanted.

- "Who wouldn't want to live in a metropolitan area without paying municipal taxes, leaving everyone else to pay for amenities?"

The problem with this statement is that first, annexation efforts are used against people who live outside the cities' metropolitan areas, and second, people on the outside never have a say on how the metropolitan amenities were and are to be located.

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In North Carolina, annexation under this "amenity" pretext is used to force the middle-class "white flight" (the ones who can't afford the higher taxes and high-priced legal assistance needed to fight such a hostile takeover) to pay for cities' metropolitan infrastructure expansion. This of course forces some to move farther out to the rural areas and forces the poor even farther away. All this as these same North Carolina cities are being touted as the best places to live.



It's no wonder why those who benefit the most from these undemocratic annexation laws think it would be foolish in the extreme if the legislature tinkered with the nation's worst urban policy

Ron Thoreson

Chairman and Public Relations Director, StopCary.com

Raleigh

Freedom suffers

I am sure that Rob Christensen is sincere in his belief that involuntary annexation is a good thing. I am just as sincerely against this form of rescue afforded to city bureaucrats resulting from their failure to: 1) create a budget that takes care of necessities for citizens before spending on high-profile, high-priced, non-essential projects; 2) recognize trends and plan using real data; and 3) make decisions based on what is good for the majority, not a vocal minority.

Where is it written that geographical growth is vital for cities to survive? Did the urban expert that Christensen cited inform him of this? If he did, ask him how cities whose borders adjoin other cities in every direction manage to survive.

Christensen wrote that "Without North Carolina's annexation law, Raleigh might well be a poor city surrounded by affluent suburban towns named Millbrook, Crabtree and Brentwood -- each with its own police and fire department, city hall and utility system." So? What is he saying here -- save the city at all costs, regardless of the wishes of those taxpaying citizens who would or would not live within its borders? Why? What is more important, the city or the freedom of American citizens to choose where they live?

People move from cities for many reasons. They tire of limited space, traffic, schools, certain rules and regulations they deem excessive, and misuse of their tax money, to list only a few. Are Christensen and the N.C. League of Municipalities telling these people they have no right to leave this oasis of life that is the city? Are they further telling them that if they leave, the city must come to where they are and take them back because, without their money, the city would perish? This is sacrificing the rights of one group to perpetuate another group, with only "the city must survive" as a reason.

One part of the column was classic in its liberal undertone: the part about living in a metropolitan area without paying municipal taxes, leaving everyone else to pay. Yet as a North Carolina resident I pay the following: sales tax and supplemental sales tax, auto tax, taxes on alcohol, gasoline tax, cable TV and phone tax, parks and recreation fees when

I use them, hotel-motel tax, and convention center use fees. Pieces of these money pots are apportioned by state and county governments to cities and towns throughout North Carolina.

I do not pay city property tax, but I do not have city police and fire protection, city water, city sewer and garbage collection, city representation in government, and all the other city agencies and services. Each time I attend a function within the city limits I have to pay just like everyone else.

The legislature should abolish this 1950s annexation legislation if for no other reason than its arrogant infringement on the right of American citizens to choose how and where they want to live.

Edward Sammons

Raleigh

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