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Let cities' health be priority

Let cities' health be priority

By S. ELLIS HANKINS, Special to the News & Observer

North Carolina's strength depends in large part on the vitality of our cities and towns, and the authority to annex adjacent urbanizing areas makes our cities and towns stronger and is in the public interest.

Our cities and towns are regional economic hubs -- the location of jobs and people. Seven out of every 10 North Carolinians live in a metropolitan area, and more than half live in a city or town.

Annexation allows officials to plan the growth of their municipalities. As the area around a city or town develops, careful planning for extension of services and orderly annexation allows the best use of public dollars. Over time the tax base may grow, allowing tax rates to remain stable or drop.

Annexation allows a city council to include in its corporate limits more of the people who actually are served by the city or town. Many of the services a city or town provides -- from streets to cultural facilities to parks to economic development efforts -- either are used by or benefit people who live outside the corporate limits.

Annexation avoids the proliferation of municipalities and the duplication of services. Some states have thousands of local governments and special districts with taxing authority. North Carolina generally has two forms of general purpose local governments -- municipalities and counties -- along with a few fire districts. Imagine paying taxes to five or six different special districts. Imagine what your area might look like if there were different planning standards for every subdivision, each set up as a separate town.

In many states where annexation is not possible, cities and their suburbs become increasingly segregated over time, with minorities, poverty and blighted areas concentrated in the city cores. Separate political jurisdictions make resolving those problems even more difficult. Prudent annexation keeps our cities strong financially, economically, socially and politically. It gives everyone in the urban area a stake in the city.

When businesses seek locations for new facilities, they look at what cultural, recreational and other amenities an area has

Dwindling breed

Volunteer firefighters give way to paid ones as small towns turn to suburbs.

Haiti's leader OKs plan

But armed rebels and political opponents don't like the U.S.-backed power-sharing proposal.

Edwards makes bold jobs pledge

John Edwards and John Kerry would both chart a course on U.S. trade policy that differs from President Bush's.

Cooper rebuked in Gell case

AG handled retrial badly, law pros say.

Powwow aims to lure brains

Six middle-schoolers huddled together on the top bleacher in the N.C. School of Science and Mathematics gym, nudging and teasing each other the way teens often do.

Drivers may see more green

Raleigh intends to update its traffic signals to reduce congestion and time spent at red lights.

Four die in collision

Girl, 12, loses parents, sisters.

He wins friends and influences land deals

Sig Hutchinson stands behind the podium, speaking softly to the group before him.

Heels hold off Noles

UNC returns to .500 in ACC as FSU comeback

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comes up short.

Succeeding quietly

You won't see these coaches on ESPN - they aren't flashy and they aren't in trouble. But they are having an impact on local athletes.

UCLA victim No. 23

No. 1 Stanford stays unbeaten.

Randolph shows 'drive' to succeed

Versatile Duke big man making strides.

Wolfpack faces Husky non-conference test

The offer was first extended in May, Washington coach Lorenzo Romar said, but also was open-ended. Fox Sports Net said it would line the Huskies up against an ACC team and put the game on national television, on its Sunday night package. The catch: the Fox people couldn't tell Romar whom the Huskies would play.

Canes, Francis tie it up

In a draw with the Bruins, Canes captain Ron Francis scores to tie for 20th in career goals.

Tire wear wears on Cup teams

The Rock chews up rubber at a rapid rate.

Fat refunds?

Fat chance, for most people. The bulk of the savings will go to a narrow slice of people, mainly the wealthy.

Many fail to claim valuable tax credit

Thousands of low-income taxpayers across North Carolina fail to claim a credit that can lower their tax bills or increase their refunds.

Jobless also must pay taxes

Few job seekers realize that unemployment benefits are taxable

to offer. Municipalities provide the amenities and services that attract new jobs, strengthening the regional and the state economies.





But what about those who say involuntary annexation is taxation without representation and who say a vote should be required?

Who should vote? Only the people in the area to be annexed? The fact is that few, if any, would vote to increase their own taxes.

Or should everyone already in the city subsidizing nonresidents' use of municipal facilities get a vote on annexation? Maybe the question should be: Should Area X be a part of the city and, if not, should residents of Area X be excluded from using municipal services that you as a municipal taxpayer pay for?

Annexation is an important factor in the success of so many North Carolina cities and towns -- success measured by growth in personal income and strong job growth. Let's not fool with something that has worked so well.

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