

**PRESIDENT AND PUBLISHER**  
Ann Caulkins

**NEWS SECTIONS**  
Editor, Rick Thames  
Managing Editor, Cheryl Carpenter

# Opinion

**EDITORIAL PAGES** Editor of the Editorial Pages, Taylor Batten  
Associate Editors, Fannie Flono and Peter St. Onge  
Cartoonist, Kevin Siers

## Our View

# Panthers deliver hit, but city should listen

Welcome to the NFL, kid. Council should explore idea – in public

The Carolina Panthers' request for \$125 million from Charlotte taxpayers feels like a kick to the gut. It's a huge amount of money. It's tone-deaf to the times. It suggests that overpriced athletes have more value than underpaid police officers.

And it's something, unfortunately, the city needs to seriously consider doing.

Consider doing, not sprint to like a 10-year-old with Super Bowl tickets. Not without asking a lot of questions about what the right amount would be, where the money would come from and what ground rules could be put on it.

But it looks like we're too late making that suggestion. With police barring reporters and the public from getting anywhere near, the Charlotte City Council voted 7-2 Monday night to support the request, sources tell the Observer's Steve Harrison. That's a vote to hand over \$125 million in taxes to an NFL team for stadium renovations without giving the public a moment to make even a peep. Panthers owner Jerry Richardson needed one of those big red Staples push-buttons: "That was easy."

Sure, the council is expected to take a public vote for show, and the proposal is contingent on the legislature's approval. But the City Council let the Panthers march it inside the 20 before the public even knew we had kicked off.

Harrison reports that the City Council backs doubling the prepared foods and beverage tax, from 1 percent to 2 percent. That would push the total sales tax on a restaurant meal to 9.25 percent.

That gives us indigestion, for a few reasons:

- Richardson and the Panthers could likely afford to pay for stadium improvements themselves. Forbes values the franchise at over \$1 billion.

- Little is known about how the Panthers would use the money, because they haven't spelled it out. But escalators and fancier video boards are among the perks the Panthers want. That's not exactly repairing a crumbling foundation.

- Charlotte taxpayers are under a bit of strain already. They've been hammered by a stubbornly bad economy, a botched property revaluation and a 2 percent pay cut from a higher federal payroll tax, and they're staring at probable higher city property taxes to pay for a capital improvement program that could exceed



CHUCK BURTON - AP

**Carolina Panthers owner Jerry Richardson wants taxpayer help.**

\$900 million.

Given all that, you'd think \$125 million would at least buy a conversation with the public footing the bill. But Richardson and team president Danny Morrison weren't talking Monday night, and at a Tuesday news conference to introduce the new general manager, the team said it would answer no questions about the deal. City Council member Beth Pickering, a Democrat, said a public debate could have led to "mis-impressions." In other words: Trust us, dear public, but we don't trust you.

So why consider it? Well, \$125 million is not a lot compared with other NFL stadium renovations. Also, two words: Los Angeles. Or any other city looking to entice an NFL team. Richardson, a heart transplant recipient, is aging and has no publicly known succession plan after firing his two sons. Play chicken with the Panthers and they could pack their bags – and that's no bluff.

Some residents would say let them go. But that underestimates how much the Panthers mean to Charlotte and the region. They bring national cachet, and some amount of direct economic impact. Their departure would leave a giant hole in our city and its psyche.

Some may consider it blackmail, but this kind of partnership was one of the perks that Charlotte knew came with joining the NFL fraternity. It's an appropriate use of government money to protect or enhance the overall public good, and preventing a Panthers move would do that.

The city should be asking a lot of questions before diving in. Is \$125 million as low as we can go and still dissuade a move? Could the tax hike be smaller and still raise enough? Could we get a legal commitment from the Panthers that they'll stay put for some number of years?

It's not a fun conversation, but it's one the city needs to have. With the Panthers – and with the public.



## The Observer Forum

■ In response to "New challenges have changed how health care is delivered" (Jan. 14 Opinion):

**Massive salaries hospital execs make a part of the picture too**

First, do no harm?

My wife and I have had direct experience with Geoffrey Rose's Sanger Clinic and I have one question for him. How much does Sanger have to charge to pay the \$16.5 million a year that the top nine executives make at Carolinas HealthCare System?

The fig leaf of what you do is getting smaller and no longer covers up the real business of your bosses. Please do what you have pledged and stand up to them for us.

GERALD MOOSE  
Richfield, N.C.

■ In response to "City to consider major improvements for I-277" (Jan. 15):

**First finish work on eyesore known as Independence Blvd.**

I can't help but wonder where Independence Boulevard redevelopment from Sharon Amity to Conference Drive fits into this plan? There are businesses torn down, everything is gone, then about year ago the work suddenly stopped for another useless "study"!

This area looks like a war zone. It's another extreme example of the city and state neglecting the east side.

JENNIFER DIOR  
Charlotte

■ In response to "Panthers seeking \$125M from city" (Jan. 15):

**Richardson asking too much of taxpayers at a difficult time**

I have a counter-proposal for Panthers owner Jerry Richardson. Add a surcharge to refreshment sales at the stadium, then send me the extra proceeds so I can renovate my house.

I find it objectionable that the public would be asked to finance stadium improvements during these difficult economic times.

ARNIE GRIEVES  
Charlotte

**If Richardson wants to renovate, let him foot the tab**

So taxpayers got a "good deal" when Bank of America Stadium was built? The taxpayers appreciate that, but it doesn't entitle team owner Jerry Richardson to \$125M of taxpayers' money for stadium improvements.

The Panthers haven't had a winning season since 2008 and haven't won a playoff game since the 2005 season. Yet the franchise Richardson paid \$206 million for is now worth over \$1 billion, according to Forbes.

It's time the City Council said "NO" to more taxes for another uptown pet project. Let Mr. Richardson use some of his own money for these renovations.

TRIPP CHERRY  
Charlotte

■ In response to "City eases union dues collection" (Jan. 15):

**City Council decision on unions a mistake; they bankrupt cities**

The writer is executive director of the Center for Union Facts.

News that the Charlotte City Council will allow payroll deduction for public sector union dues is cause for concern.

The city has elected to become the union's own collection service, and will be enabling union political activity. Instead of taking a neutral stance, the city is now automatically siphoning taxpayer dollars into the union's political machine.

At a time when public sector unions have bankrupted many cities and brought others to the financial brink, Charlotte's decision to assist them is ill-advised.

RICHARD BERMAN  
Washington, D.C.

■ In response to "Higher taxes = smaller checks. You didn't see this coming?" (Jan. 15 Forum):

**Can't pin blame for payroll tax cuts solely on the president**

For approximately 99 percent of the paycheck-receiving public, the smaller paychecks are due to expiration of the payroll tax cut which was part of the stimulus program, and not a Bush tax cut.

I wonder, however, did Forum writer John Marszalek's "uninformed" and "uneducated" voters choose President Obama – whose tax plan did support an end to the payroll tax cut?

Or did they vote for Mitt Romney, whose tax plan also proposed an end to the payroll tax cut? Or did they vote for tea party candidates who sought an end to this tax cut in Feb. 2012?

JON R. MOORE  
Charlotte

■ In response to "Powell defends Obama's pick for defense secretary" (Jan. 14) and related articles:

**Hagel isn't afraid to question dogma; we need more like him**

I am skeptical of the extremism of Sen. Chuck Hagel's neo-conservative opposition. No one in this group has acknowledged their rash rush to invade Iraq based on weapons of mass destruction that did not exist. I want folks in political power who are willing to change their minds if new information arises.

While an early backer of the Iraq War, Sen. Hagel changed his mind on the war earning rebukes from his Republican party.

Hagel's record as a soldier, senator and businessman is very solid. This country needs more men and women who use Socratic questioning instead of being slave to any dogma.

JOHN H. DIVINE SR.  
Charlotte

■ In response to "Pantsless commute" (Jan. 14):

**Skip the exhibitionism when donating to worthy causes**

Useful agencies and foundations exist already, and one's efforts can be added to theirs as a force-multiplier. These groups will gladly take help, and they don't waste time being wedded to whimsy or to advancing the Cause of Weird-ism.

Life is weird and daunting enough without self-proclaimed disciples of dopiness desperately seeking attention.

STEVE CRAIG  
Charlotte

## U.S. Opinions: Los Angeles

# A warrant to draw blood?

From a Jan. 11 editorial in the Los Angeles Times:

The Supreme Court was asked last week to rule that police never need to obtain a search warrant before drawing blood from a motorist stopped for drunk driving. The court should reject that claim.

In 2010, Tyler G. McNeely was stopped by a Missouri highway patrolman for speeding. After McNeely refused to undergo a breath test, the patrolman drove him to a hospital and, over McNeely's objections, directed a phlebotomist to take a sample of McNeely's blood.

The results indicated a blood alcohol level well above the legal limit, but a trial judge and the Missouri Supreme Court held that the evidence was inadmissible because it had been obtained without a warrant.

The state of Missouri, supported by the Obama administration, urged the court to rule that the drawing of blood without a

warrant is always constitutional because evidence of alcohol in the blood dissipates as the minutes pass, which means there's no time to wait for a warrant.

Fortunately, both liberal and conservative justices seemed reluctant to grant police a general dispensation from the warrant requirement for a practice as physically intrusive as drawing blood.

"So how can it be reasonable to forgo the 4th Amendment in a procedure as intrusive as a needle going into someone's body?" Justice Sonia Sotomayor asked during oral arguments.

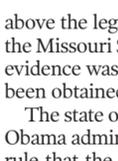
As for the suggestion that obtaining a warrant might take so long that traces of alcohol would dissipate, McNeely's lawyer noted that many jurisdictions allow police to obtain warrants by telephone or electronically.

Knowing that he must obtain a warrant, an officer might take greater pains to ensure that a motorist's behavior isn't caused by a reaction to medication rather than intoxication.

The Supreme Court has no cause to do away with that additional protection.



Sotomayor



Roberts

## For the Record

# Congress forsakes abused women, should renew protection

BY JENNIFER ROBERTS AND CRANDALL BOWLES

Special to the Observer

Just when you thought Congress could not go any lower, it recklessly threatened the safety of women and families in North Carolina by failing to reauthorize the federal Violence Against Women Act.

From its passage in 1994 through 2010, the act helped cut the rate of domestic violence nationwide by 67 percent. It also helped establish a National Domestic Violence hotline, which until last week was responding to over 22,000 calls per month. The act also mandated that victims, no matter their income levels, would not be forced to bear the expense of their own rape exams; strengthened federal

penalties for repeat sex offenders; helped communities develop dedicated law enforcement and prosecution units for domestic violence; and helped train more than 500,000 police officers, prosecutors, attorneys and judges each year in domestic violence law and counseling.

Although the Senate passed a bipartisan version in 2012, it included language for protection of same-sex partners, immigrants regardless of their status and Native Americans. The House objected to the new language, preferring to limit protections to only certain groups of women. In short, Congress seeks to establish a means test to receive treatment for rape.

This action is completely at odds with the many people in our community who work hard to make sure families in turmoil can find a safe haven. From county government to schools and churches, the Charlotte area has made great strides in dealing with domestic violence. Under Commissioner Roberts' leadership, Mecklenburg County made the reduction and preven-

tion of domestic violence a higher priority, bringing it to the same priority level as other public safety programs. This helped remove the stigma of family violence and gave more women the support and resources they need.

Just last month Mecklenburg County celebrated the opening of a new domestic violence shelter, which for the first time since 1979 expands the number of beds and resources available to victims, both women and children. This shelter is operated by Safe Alliance, formerly known as United Family Services, and will provide safe haven, counseling, health care and other services to victims to help restore safety and stability to families fleeing domestic violence. The shelter does not discriminate based on ethnic background, race or sexual orientation. Unfortunately, the new shelter will be full almost immediately, but it will provide support and safety to more victims and education to many who continue to work toward the further reduction and elimination of domestic violence.

Both of us worked with many dedicated and concerned citizens to spearhead the capital campaign for this shelter. We are deeply indebted to the board members, staff, volunteers and abuse survivors who have worked with Safe Alliance on this project and throughout the years to build a safer tomorrow for all families. Unfortunately, while our local communities continue to help N.C. families, our leaders in Washington continue to play politics and put their personal agendas ahead of public safety.

An estimated one in three U.S. women have been the victim of domestic violence. Education, awareness and increased protections for victims are critical for providing a path forward. It is time to put aside personal agendas as we work together to end domestic violence for all victims.

Jennifer Roberts is a former chairman of the Mecklenburg Board of County Commissioners. Crandall Bowles is chairman of The Springs Company.

### WE WELCOME LETTERS

Please include your address and daytime telephone number. We edit for brevity, grammar, clarity and accuracy, and we reject letters published elsewhere. Letters typically do not exceed 150 words. We cannot acknowledge unused letters. All letters become the property of the Observer. Letters are published online and in print.

The Observer Forum  
The Charlotte Observer  
P.O. Box 30308  
Charlotte, NC 28230-0308  
opinion@charlotteobserver.com