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# Opinion

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## Our View

# Overreach on Panthers comes back to bite city

**Legislature has better approach: Help team without raising taxes**

The math never did add up. Now, a bipartisan group of state legislators is bringing some sense back into the debate over how and whether the public should help the Carolina Panthers renovate their NFL stadium.

Two Republicans and two Democrats — Reps. Ruth Samuelson and Bill Brawley, and Becky Carney and Beverly Earle — filed legislation Thursday that would kill the city of Charlotte's initial plan. The bill would give the city flexibility on how it can spend hotel/motel taxes and restaurant taxes, freeing up existing money to help the Panthers. It would not, however, give the city permission to raise taxes.

Faced with a Panthers request of \$125 million to upgrade Bank of America Stadium, the city sought the state's blessing to double the prepared food and beverage tax for 30 years. The City Council and Mayor Anthony Foxx appeared to be the only ones who didn't appreciate the massive flaw in that proposal — that the new tax would bring in about \$1 billion, or \$875 million more than the Panthers' request.

We pointed out that gorge in editorials in January. Weeks went by with no explanation from the city, and even today city officials, in explaining their desire for that extra money, offer only headlines about amateur sports ambitions.

Predictably and appropriately, the city's overreach on the tax hike is coming back to bite it. The Samuelson & Co. bill would put an end to the city's cash grab — while clearing the way for Charlotte to give the Panthers \$110 million from existing taxes. That would grant the team 88 percent of what it sought from the city, all but \$15 million. (An additional \$19 million for maintenance and traffic control would come from other city sources).



CHUCK BURTON - AP

**The city could give the Panthers most of what they want without a tax hike.**

The city argues that \$110 million is not enough to cover the Panthers, pay for unspecified convention center upgrades and build an array of amateur sports complexes. The city is right. This is called a trade-off, and it's something that most of the city's taxpayers recognize, in this day and age, from their own budgets.

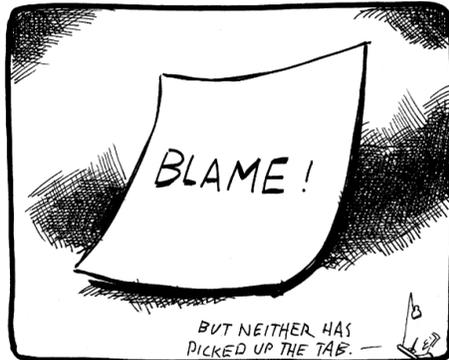
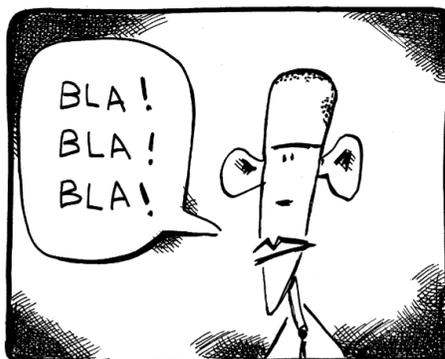
Whether taxpayers should help an NFL team renovate its stadium is a good topic to debate. The City Council, legislative leaders and the business community are mostly on the same side on that question. A topic not even worth debating: Which is better — helping the Panthers by raising taxes, or helping the Panthers with existing tax money not earmarked for anything specific? The City Council is considering shrinking its tax request. But any new proposal will still likely bring in much more than the remaining \$15 million the Panthers seek. Ironically, if the council had asked for a much smaller amount in the first place, it might have sailed through.

Meanwhile, legislators seem to be cooking up a deal to give \$62.5 million or so in state money for the stadium renovations. Taxpayers should demand transparency on that front, and not just in the hours before a proposal comes up for a vote.

The Panthers are an asset to Charlotte and the Carolinas. The city has not handled the team's request well. It's good to see legislators bringing common sense to the debate — something we can't frequently say.



Samuelson



## The Observer Forum

■ In response to "Duke won't be repaid from DNC" (March 1):

**Rogers' DNC 'gift' was slap in the face to Duke shareholders**

I'm so glad to see that Duke Energy CEO Jim Rogers decided to give a gift of \$10 million to his beloved DNC for their party.

The problem I have is that in typical Democrat fashion he gave away someone else's money!

Mr. Rogers thinks this is OK because Duke can write it off. The problem, sir, is that you gave away money that belongs to shareholders, some of whom do not support the DNC.

To read this days after your request for a 9.7 percent rate hike and your oath of loyalty to the board and shareholders, was "priceless."

RICHARD A. BOBAY JR.  
Charlotte

■ In response to "Dozens protest new driver's license" (March 1):

**Pink license plan discriminates; makes me wonder who's next**

I was born in another country, I'm a woman, and (gasp) I'm a registered Democrat. Wonder what my next driver's license will look like?

CAM LUCAS WESTER  
Charlotte

**Despicable to compare pink license with Star of David**

There were three references in Friday's Observer comparing the proposed pink driver's license for immigrants to Jews made to wear Stars of David. This is deplorable.

Native to their countries, Jews forced to wear this badge were subject to forced removal from their professions and commercial life, a strict curfew, food rationing, and forced to relinquish property and valuables.

They were prohibited from using public transportation, forced to live in designated areas, removed entirely from the protection of law, and faced horrible



Levin

physical atrocities and death.

This analogy printed three times is wrong, ignorant and disgusting.

ROSS LEVIN  
Charlotte

**On sequestration, Obama reminds me of Chicken Little**

Rather than deal seriously with deficit reduction as recommended by the Obama-created Simpson-Bowles Commission, the president supported the creation of sequestration.

Now President Obama is condemning sequestration and doing his best imitation of Chicken Little. The administration's attempt to scare the public, including the publicized release of illegal aliens, is irresponsible.

My biggest disappointment in President Obama is that he does not show enough concern for the future of his two daughters in his handling of the debt crisis this country faces.

CRAIG A. REUTLINGER  
Charlotte

■ In response to "Novant renames Presbyterian hospitals" (Feb. 27):

**Presbyterian may regret changing hospital name**

The Presbyterian Healthcare system just went from a respected hometown heritage brand to merely another out-of-town corporation with branch operations in Charlotte.

Now, the other big hospital is the only one that still feels Charlotte-rooted.

I suspect that many families' multi-generational loyalty to the Presbyterian system will gradually slip into neutral.

THOMAS L. BOWERS  
Charlotte

■ In response to "I-77 toll plans defended by DOT officials" (Feb. 28):

**Hit up out-of-state residents to help pay for interstate upgrades**

How long will N.C. DOT and N.C. GovCo continue to target northern Mecklenburg and southern Iredell residents for tax revenue?

If DOT's Jim Trogdon feels the need to tax, perhaps tolls at the state lines would generate revenue from out-of-state travelers who use our highways, cause accidents and delay traffic.

Unfortunately, Charlotte Mayor Anthony Foxx is pushing to spend \$1 billion for a 10-mile light-rail line to a low tax revenue part of the city, rather than one to the Lake Norman area.

Perhaps, like Ballantyne, the lake area residents should consider withdrawing from the Charlotte/Mecklenburg/CMS tax equation.

KIRK BOST  
Cornelius

■ In response to "New American Airlines CEO-to-be says Charlotte hub safe" (Feb. 15) and related articles:

**Sure hope CLT airport doesn't go the way of Pittsburgh's**

US Airways CEO Doug Parker said Charlotte would grow significantly as an airport hub if his company merged with American Airlines.

In 2005, Parker — then CEO of America West — orchestrated the merger with US Airways and closing Pittsburgh as a hub with 10,000 jobs lost and \$800 million in taxpayer debt.

The \$1 billion Pittsburgh International Airport was built in 1992 largely to US Airways' specifications. It is now described as a ghost town.

The facility, designed to accommodate 32 million passengers per year, handled 8 million in 2012. Sections of two concourses are closed, half the airport gates are closed, and daily non-stop flights have plunged from 610 to 156.

Charlotte could be a future target for another classic Doug Parker dismantling.

Where is Piedmont Airlines management now that we need them?

J. JEROME MILLER  
Charlotte

## U.S. Opinions: Los Angeles

# Voting for women and against domestic violence

**Congress extends protection to a broader group of victims**

The following editorial appeared Friday in the Los Angeles Times:

After more than a year of bitter partisan fighting, Congress on Thursday finally reauthorized the Violence Against Women Act, including new provisions that will extend the law's protections for gay, lesbian, transgender and Native American victims of domestic violence. It's about time.

There is no rational explanation for why lawmakers took so long to reauthorize this legislation, which was first enacted in 1994 and had been renewed twice with broad bipartisan support. Admittedly, the revised law covers a broader group of victims.

That was apparently too much for some Republicans in the House, who sought to substitute a weaker bill for the one passed by the Senate, arguing that the new protections either went too far or were prone to fraud.

What the newly reauthorized legislation will actually do is provide help to all victims of domestic violence, regardless of their sexual orientation, immigration status or where the assault took place. It will,

for example, expand the authority of tribal courts over non-Native American men who commit assault or rape on reservations.

That's important because Native American women are 2 1/2 times more likely to be raped than those in the general population, yet if they are assaulted on Indian land by a non-Native American, their only recourse is to plead their case to overworked federal prosecutors, who often allow such allegations to fall through the cracks.

The expanded act will provide protections to same-sex couples. It will preserve the protection given to undocumented women, by allowing them to apply for a special permit, known as a U visa, which provides temporary legal status to victims who help police investigate crimes. And it will toughen penalties for sex trafficking.

Whether House Speaker John A. Boehner, R-Ohio, was persuaded to relent and bring the bill to the floor as part of a political strategy to improve the GOP's tarnished image with women voters, or because he actually came to believe that the good in the bill outweighed the bad, isn't important.

In the end, what matters is that the House, for at least a moment, overcame its partisan dysfunction. And that victims of domestic violence and abuse will once again be protected by the law.



Boehner

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## For the Record

# N.C. House's education reform: innovation and flexibility

BY REP. THOM TILLIS  
Special to the Observer

Education is the most important focus of the N.C. House of Representatives, and that was clearly evident in the House Chamber last week. I had the pleasure of welcoming educators to the people's House in Raleigh for "House Education Week."

We hosted discussions in the House Chamber over three days with school superintendents, principals and teachers. Our objective this week was not to legislate, but to listen.

In order to maintain and expand our state's world-class education system, we must listen closely to superintendents, principals and teachers to determine how the General Assembly can enable educators to do their jobs. Far too often, politicians believe they become education experts simply by being elect-

ed. We will not legislate with that mentality; our intention is to work with those closest to the classroom in order to foster a culture of innovation. We will expand our discussions to teachers' assistants, administrative and support staff, parents, students and all individuals involved in educating.

Last year, North Carolina's high school graduation rate surpassed 80 percent — a first in the state's history and a 12-point jump in six years. Teachers, parents, and students should be proud of this achievement, and we should use it as an opportunity for even greater success. The House is focused on taking meaningful steps to transform North Carolina's education system in ways that focus on best practices and better outcomes for K-12 students. Based on our discussions in the past and last week with educators, our efforts will focus on two main themes: innovation and flexibility.

In a difficult budget environment, we need to

encourage innovation in our schools. Mooresville Graded School District, a pioneer in digital learning, earned a 91 percent graduation rate despite being ranked 100th in per pupil spending. They achieved these results through innovation and successful programs based on digital technology, and through the creativity of Dr. Mark Edwards, the National Superintendent of the Year. We will encourage schools to follow this model and use digital learning methods to focus on STEM curriculums, ensuring high school graduates are college- and career-ready. We need to think creatively to continue navigating through a difficult budget period that we inherited from past legislatures.

One consistent theme emerged during our conversations with educators last week: flexibility. Local Education Authorities (LEAs) should not be governed by a one-size-fits-all model. We must ensure flexibility regarding funding allocation and empower LEAs to run their schools as

they see fit, free of burdensome regulations from Raleigh. We should examine North Carolina's tenure law with a goal of allowing district flexibility in personnel decisions, while maintaining due process for teachers. We should discuss giving school districts the authority to implement compensation models based on teacher performance. Lastly, we need to encourage LEAs to drive out inefficiencies — and reward them by allowing them to reinvest savings in their own schools.

North Carolina's education system is the envy of the nation in many ways. But we can do better. We can give superintendents more flexibility. We can empower teachers and assistants with a fairer pay system and fewer regulations. Lastly, and most importantly, we can give our students even more opportunities to grow, prosper and lead our state to a brighter future.

Tillis is the N.C. House Speaker.

### WE WELCOME LETTERS

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