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# Opinion

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## Our View

# In tetherball, it keeps coming back around

## Charlotte-Panthers deal better than nothing, but unsatisfying

The deal Charlotte's City Council approved with the Carolina Panthers Monday night will not make the Plays of the Week. It was more like a one-yard pick up on 3rd and 1 from your own 20. Enough to keep possession and move the chains, but nothing more.

Better than punting the ball away to Los Angeles, to be sure, but the city didn't have to be stuck in this cloud of dust.

The City Council voted overwhelmingly Monday night to give the Panthers \$87.5 million. In exchange, the NFL team commits to playing the next six seasons here, or pay the city back a chunk of that money.

This so-called "tether" is not worth much. The Panthers have no intention of moving anytime soon. Owner Jerry Richardson, 76, says he would never move the team from Charlotte. Taking him at his word, the Panthers become a flight risk only after Richardson's death. His will stipulates that the team be sold within two years of that, and new owners could move the franchise to Los Angeles or another city.

We're not actuaries, but the fact is that the team very well might be here in six years in any case. And the tether the City Council agreed to Monday is so weak in the out years that a new owner could easily cut that ankle bracelet off and flee. (By the way, council members, because the Panthers are definitely playing in Charlotte this year, isn't it really a five-year tether, not six?)

Helping a wealthy NFL owner with taxpayer dollars is controversial from the start. But if you're going to do so, you need something meaty in return — like the 15-year tether the Panthers had agreed to if the city gave them \$144 million.



DAVID T. FOSTER III - dtfoster@charlotteobserver.com

## The deal to renovate Bank of America Stadium promises the need for another.

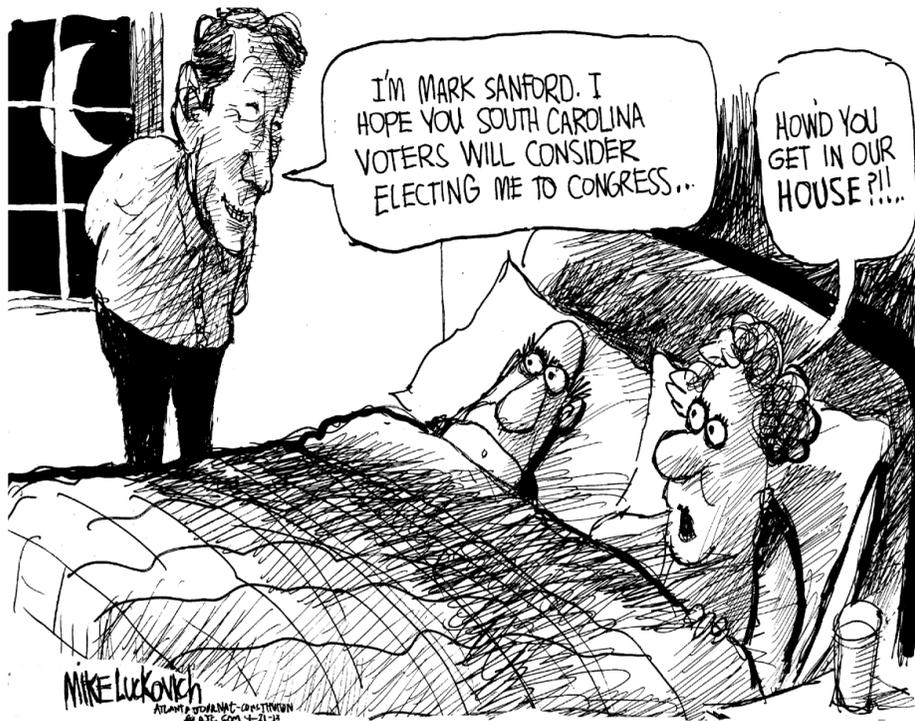
That's a deal the city might have had if it hadn't misplayed its hand so badly. In need of \$56 million (since it already has \$87.5 million available for the Panthers), the City Council went to a conservative, anti-tax legislature with a proposal to raise a local tax by about \$1 billion over 30 years. That's almost 20 times more than needed to give the Panthers all they sought from the city. You'll be shocked to learn that the legislature did not allow that.

If the city had gone to the legislature with a proposed tax hike one-twentieth the size it did, who knows what would have happened? Alternatively, there were a number of ways to raise the money locally without the legislature's approval. Some of those have been discussed, incidentally, for a proposed streetcar extension.

What's lost is the tether for years 7 through 15, which are the years in which a Panthers departure is a significant threat.

We've said all along that the Panthers are valuable to Charlotte, and the city should be prepared to make a reasonable public investment. Call Richardson a bully if you like, but it's the reality of being an NFL city. In fact, Charlotte's public investment over the past 20 years has been minuscule compared with almost every other city in the league.

But if you're going to do it, do it right. This deal guarantees only one thing: That the city will be back at the negotiating table all too soon.



## The Observer Forum

■ In response to "City aims its anger at airport board" (April 21):

### Troubled by city's behavior toward airport advisory board

The way the City Council is behaving toward every opinion expressed by individual members of the current airport advisory board is the best reason I can think of to have the authority removed from their supervision and become a separate and independent regional authority. One with only one focus — making the airport the best anywhere — removed from unnecessary political influence and divided loyalties.



Van Meerten

JIM VAN MEERTEN  
Charlotte

■ In response to "Constitution should reflect changes in society, gun power" (April 19 Forum):

### Second Amendment's intent is for common, useful weapons

Forum writer Janis Denney showed an understanding of the purpose of the Second Amendment in 1776, but lost the plot for 2013. Yes, the citizenry is to answer a call to arms with a weapon which is common and useful in a military application. In 1776, that was a single shot musket; in 2013, it is a semi automatic rifle with a large capacity magazine. That the call to the citizenry is highly unlikely does not change the intent of the amendment, nor does it change how hideous the carnage these powerful weapons being used in an unintended manner can inflict.

TONY CAPRANICA  
Stanley

■ In response to "Tougher hospital rules proposed" (April 18):

### Republican and Democrat working together? Let's cheer

Go Roy and Bob! Attorney

### 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.

General Roy Cooper and state Sen. Bob Rucho are trying to do something for all of us. Fairness in hospital billing, including transparency and price listings for common procedures, would be a huge step forward for North Carolina. Wow! A Democrat and a Republican working together for the common good. That is a breath of fresh air.

Also, two big thumbs up to the Observer and The News & Observer of Raleigh. Please keep this front and center. You are doing a huge service for the people of North Carolina.

BARRY DUCKWORTH  
Sherrills Ford

■ In response to "Panthers, city reach \$87.5M deal" (April 19):

### Six years doesn't sound like a real commitment to me

The Panthers' agreement to leave the team in Charlotte for at least six years brings back Hornet nightmares. So the owners want us to love this team and spend our hard-earned money and time supporting them. It's like saying to your bride, I'll stick around for at least 6 years, then if something better comes along, I'm outta here. How enthusiastic can you be about that?

Just go now; save us the money and heartache. We can always cheer for Atlanta and Washington again.

PATRICK A. WALTERS  
Charlotte

■ In response to "UNC's Tom Ross might yearn for Davidson" (April 20 Viewpoint):

### Budget director Pope misrepresents N.C. issues

Gov. McCrory's budget director Art Pope, is quoted: "The state has to fund other needs, too, such as the growth in Medicaid spending." Mr. Pope once again sets up a false competition for resources between education and the health care needs of low income North Carolinians. Before we start to buy that

argument, let's recall that Gov. McCrory and the General Assembly recently turned down \$10 billion-plus in no-strings-attached federal dollars intended for Medicaid expansion. Our federal tax dollars will flow to more enlightened states whose elected officials did not reject the Medicaid expansion while we cut services and education.

MARY F. ENGLEBERT  
Statesville

### Boston bombers didn't give America's possibilities a chance

America is like a giant Cuisinart blender; you go in as a carrot, head of lettuce or a cucumber and you come out a chopped salad. Tamerlan Tsarnaev, the 26-year-old Boston bomber, said that he had no American friends because he didn't understand them. The younger brother Dzhokhar probably just went along with his older brother's beliefs.

I am not really sure the reasons for the brothers' nefarious action, except that they didn't give the great America blender a fair chance to make them a part of our colorful salad.

BARRY MARSHALL  
Charlotte

■ In response to "Money Rock: A Cocaine dealer's redemption" (Observer multi-part report):

### Money Rock a reminder of devastating drug culture

Belton Platt is just one of the many young men caught up in the drug culture of the '80s and '90s. I thank him for his willingness to expose this story, which so clearly describes that culture, and for doing what he can at this point to make amends.

Cocaine and its cousin crack destroyed so many lives in those years, and was the trigger that sent some of today's homeless men to the streets, survivors but never to be the same.

JANE BURTS  
Charlotte

## U.S. Opinions: New York

# The Boston terrorism case

From an editorial published in the New York Times on Monday:

Sen. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina apparently has a thermal-imaging device for detecting the motivation of the man arrested on suspicion of bombing the Boston Marathon. He and three other Republican lawmakers declared — without the benefit of evidence — that Dzhokhar Tsarnaev should be considered an enemy combatant, not a criminal, and should be held by the military without access to a lawyer or the fundamental rights that distinguish this country from authoritarian regimes.

Graham's reckless statement makes a mockery of the superb civilian police work that led to the suspect's capture, starting with a skillful analysis of video recordings of the marathon. The law enforcement system solved the case swiftly and efficiently, led by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and local police, and as shocking as the attack was, there is no reason civilian prosecutors, defense lawyers and courts cannot continue to do their work. They have proved themselves far better at it than the military.

Tsarnaev is a naturalized U.S. citizen, an inconvenient fact for the pressure-him-at-Gitmo crowd. He cannot be tried in a military commission, a legal system reserved for aliens. Even to be held by the military

without trial would require a showing that he is associated with a declared enemy of the United States, such as al-Qaida or the Taliban.

Fortunately the Obama administration has ignored the posturing and declared that Tsarnaev, like all citizens and even alien terrorists captured on American soil, will be tried in the federal courts. He will be charged with terrorism under federal statutes, and will be represented by the federal public defender's office.

Federal and local officials intend to take their time, however, in giving a Miranda warning to the suspect, advising him of his right to remain silent. There is a public safety exception to the Miranda requirement, allowing investigators to question suspects about imminent threats, like bombs or specific terror conspiracies, before the warning is given and then use that information in court. In 2010, unfortunately, the administration improperly told agents that they could expand that exception for terror suspects even when threats were not imminent.

It is not clear whether that expansion, which has yet to be tested in court, is being employed in this case. But the Obama administration, no less than Republicans, should not allow the raw emotions associated with a terrorism case to trample on the American system of justice.

The views in U.S. Opinions are not necessarily those of the Observer's editorial board.

# Newtown deserved a more effective president

NATIONAL COLUMNIST  
MAUREEN DOWD

WASHINGTON — The graying man flashing fury in the Rose Garden on behalf of the Newtown families, the grieving man wiping away tears after speaking at the Boston memorial service, is not the same man who glided into office four years ago.

President Barack Obama has watched the blood-dimmed tide drowning the ceremony of innocence, as Yeats wrote, and he has learned how to emotionally connect with Americans in searing moments, as he did from the White House late Friday night after the second bombing suspect was apprehended in Boston.

Unfortunately, he still has not learned how to govern.

How is it that the president won the argument on gun safety with the public and lost the vote in the Senate? It's because he doesn't know how to work the system. And it's clear now that he doesn't want to learn, or even to hire some clever

people who can tell him how to do it or do it for him.

It's unbelievable that with 90 percent of Americans on his side, he could get only 54 votes in the Senate. It was a glaring example of his weakness in using leverage to get what he wants. No one on Capitol Hill is scared of him.

Even House Republicans who had no intention of voting for the gun bill marveled privately that the president could not muster 60 votes in a Senate that his party controls.

Obama thinks he can use emotion to bring pressure on Congress. But that's not how adults with power respond to things. He chooses not to get down in the weeds and pretend he values the stroking and other little things that matter to lawmakers.

After the Newtown massacre, he and his aides hashed it out and decided he would look cold and unsympathetic if he didn't push for some new regulations. To thunderous applause at the State of the Union, the president said, "The families of Newtown deserve a vote." Then, as usual, he took his foot off the gas, lost momentum and

confided his pessimism to journalists.

The president once more delegated to the vice president. Couldn't he have come to the Hill himself to lobby with the families and Joe Biden?

The White House should have created a war room of charts with the names of pols they had to capture, like they had in "The American President." Soaring speeches have their place, but this was about blocking and tackling.

Instead of the pit-bull legislative aides in Aaron Sorkin's movie, Obama has Miguel Rodriguez, an arm-twister so genteel that The Washington Post's Philip Rucker wrote that no one in Congress even knows who he is.

Sometimes you must leave the high road and fetch your brass knuckles. Obama should have called Sen. Heidi Heitkamp of North Dakota over to the Oval Office and put on the squeeze: "Heidi, you're brand new and you're going to have a long career. You work with us, we'll work with you. Public opinion is moving fast on this issue. The reason you get a six-year term is so you can have the guts to make tough votes. This is a totally defensible bill back home."

Obama had to persuade some Republican senators in states that he won in 2012. He should have gone out to Ohio, New Hampshire and Nevada and had big rallies to get the public riled up to put pressure on Rob Portman, Kelly Ayotte and Dean Heller, giving notice that they would pay a price if they spurned him on this.

Couldn't the president have given his Rose Garden speech about the "shameful" actions in Washington before the vote rather than after?

There were ways to get to 60 votes. The White House just had to scratch it out with a real strategy and a never-let-go attitude.

Obama hates selling. He thinks people should just accept the right thing to do. But as Joe Manchin, D-W.Va., noted, senators have tough selling to do back home. "In the end you can really believe in something," he told The Times' Jennifer Steinhauer, "but you have to go sell it."

The president said the Newtown families deserved a vote. But he was setting his sights too low. They deserved a law.

Dowd is a columnist for the New York Times.