

Opinion

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Our view

State health officials should heed own experts on water safety

Between the time area well owners were warned about the safety of their water and the time they were told their water was OK, nothing seems to have changed except the paperwork. State leaders need to listen to their own experts and correct this problem now.

Hundreds of well owners near Duke Energy coal ash pits received letters last spring from state health officials warning them not to drink their own well water or use it for cooking. But recently, a letter signed by Randall Williams, the director of the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services, and Tom Reeder, the assistant state secretary for the N.C. Department of Environmental Quality, lifted the warning, the Journal's Bertrand M. Gutierrez reported in investigative stories last week.

But these wells still contain hexavalent chromium, a carcinogen, and standards for measuring its threat are in question.

"Nothing has changed," Bonita Queen, a Salisbury resident who lives near Duke's Buck power plant, told the Journal. "There has not been any proof showing what has changed from it being not safe to drink 10 months ago to it being safe to drink now."

"The coal ash pond is still there. My well is still here. Tell me what has changed — just numbers on a piece of paper."

While there is no overwhelming evidence that directly connects Duke Energy to the hexavalent chromium, the carcinogen is in the well water in question. And big questions remain about it.

According to standards pushed by the DEQ and DHHS, well owners' water puts them within a lifetime cancer risk of 1 in 7,000 at best and 1 in 700 at worst. But state experts in epidemiology and toxicology have recommended using a standard that would put the well owners at a lifetime cancer risk of no more than one in a million.

When the Journal asked the DEQ whether the hexavalent chromium level should be no more than 1 in 1 million, DEQ spokeswoman Crystal Feldman responded: "North Carolina uses the same standard the Obama administration, the city of Winston-Salem and an overwhelming majority of cities across the country use to ensure public drinking water is safe."

But when screening for hexavalent chromium, neither the federal nor the state standard for total chromium should be applied, state experts told the Journal in emails. Not if the goal is to adequately protect the health of people drinking water from wells near coal ash pits.

The spectre of polluted drinking water has been hovering nationwide for quite a few years now, but the massive coal-ash spill at Duke Energy's Dan River Steam Station in Eden in 2014 brought that threat home to North Carolina like never before.

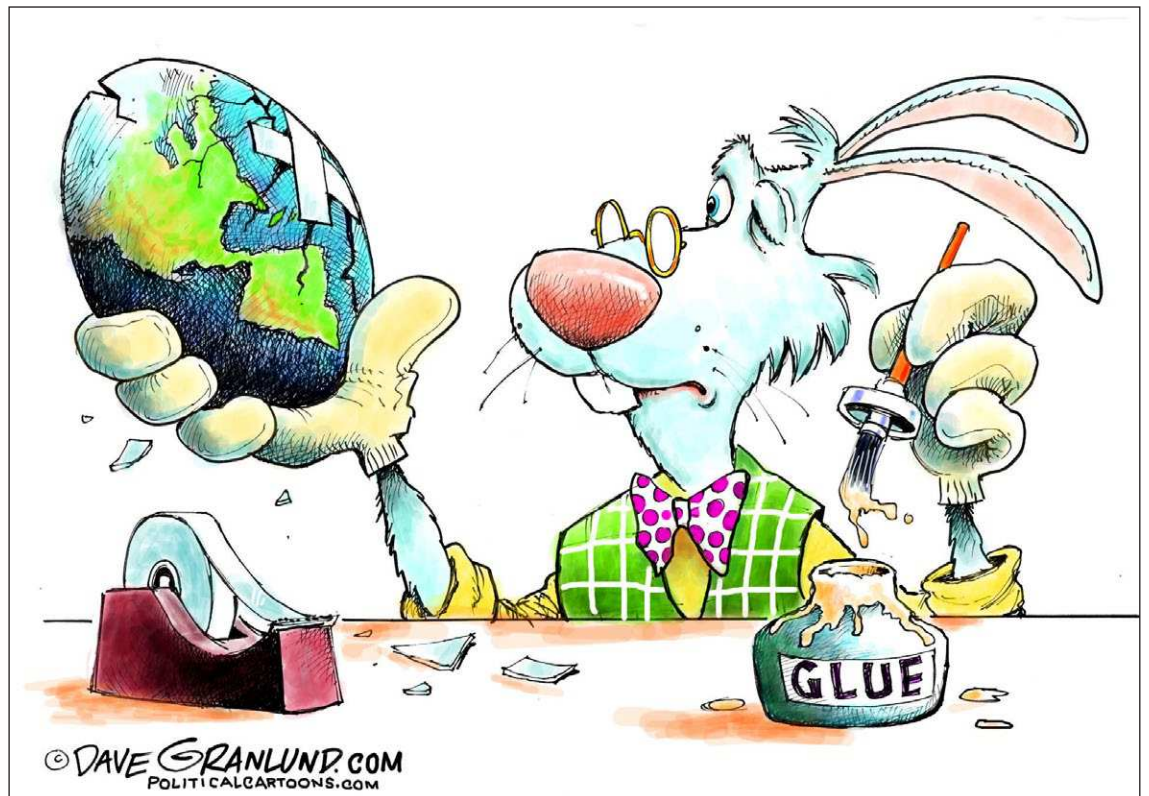
In its wake, state officials should be doing all they can to ensure safe drinking water. In the case at hand, the solution is simple: Heed the experts and raise the standard for the risks associated with hexavalent chromium.

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— The Journal Editorial Board



The Readers' Forum

JUDITH DANCY, WINSTON-SALEM

Consistent with Jesus' teachings

According to the Journal's account of Darryl Hunt's memorial service ("Hunt mourners urged to carry on struggle," March 20), the Rev. Carlton Eversley remarked that even though Hunt converted to Islam, he had "more Jesus in him — than most Christians I know."

Somehow belief has become the standard that defines Jesus' followers, yet belief is divisive. Even among those who claim Christian faith, beliefs differ, and the verbal violence that often results is shameful.

Why don't Christians stop arguing about belief, and start increasing the amount of Jesus in ourselves? We insist on right belief, perhaps, because right behavior is too difficult. Releasing greed, resentment, deceit, bigotry, selfishness and judgment is hard. Recognizing and working to right wrongs we ourselves may benefit from is hard. Aligning our behavior to be consistent with Jesus' teachings is harder than hard, so we stop trying. And so we argue about belief.

Eversley's comment summarizes a life lived according to a central truth of all religions: How we treat others matters more than how others treat us. Darryl Hunt was wronged both by individuals and by systemic injustice, yet remained unburdened by bitterness. He remained compassionate and gentle, devoted to ensuring justice for others. Simplicity in the midst of all the complexities he experienced. Not easy, but simple: he just did the right thing.

You may not call it having "more Jesus," as Eversley did, but I bet you know what it means.

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PHIL RONALD TURNER, WINSTON-SALEM

Historic day

After reading "Bill to curb local authority gets OK" (March 24), I realized that this is history in the making.

Let's all mark March 23, 2016, as the day the N.C. Republican Party abandoned the pretense of being the party of small government.

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SCOTT RHODES, CLEMMONS

Absolutely fitting

I was astounded by the writer of the March 23 letter "The cult of Trump" who questioned "is it fitting that this demographic (blue collar and under-educated) might determine who is the next president?" and then strongly suggested that he might be more qualified because he has two college degrees. How arrogant and misguided can one be? It is absolutely fitting that every citizen has an equal voice in electing our public officials, regardless of their educational credentials.

Is a citizen with a high-school diploma im-

Correspondent of the week

MEG DENBO, WINSTON-SALEM

Nature's call

With the passage and adoption of the so-called "bathroom bill," transgender people and people who prefer to cross-dress (wear clothing of the opposite sex with whom they identify) are no more likely to target children in public restrooms than anyone else. They will simply be entering the restroom to heed "nature's call." That would be the same "nature" that made them who they are today.

A pedophile is a person who targets children for sexual purposes. Those people will have just as much access to children in public restrooms with or without the passage of this bill.

Let's not fuel the flames of hatred by throwing out arbitrary objections to changes that promote individuality and humanity.

pected less by an election than those with a college degree? Does the "under-educated" (whatever that means) citizen have a less developed sense of what's good for him than the educated? Do college grads have stronger personal character than those of us with college degrees? I think the answer to those questions is no.

Perhaps the writer of the letter should think about the Rev. Martin Luther King's meaning when he said "The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character — that is the goal of true education."

After thinking on this quote a while, perhaps the writer might soften his views on "the under-educated" and his relative value in the electoral process versus those folks.

By the way, if the writer of the letter referenced in my opinion cares, I have three college degrees.

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FRED TERRY, WINSTON-SALEM

Pass a law

For years I heard Republicans cry about Washington being on the neck of the states. I guess because Republicans can't get anything done in Washington, they will let the state legislatures do it. If a municipality passes something they don't like, just pass a law at the state level.

Do citizens have to ask permission from Raleigh before taking action on issues that affect where they live? The slope just became more slippery.

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Springtime swindles

Seniors should watch out for these con artists

BY VANCE PARKER
Guest columnist

As an attorney who frequently works with seniors in preparing wills and estate plans, I too often hear of cases in which my clients have been swindled in some way.

While spring brings out the welcome return of robins and daffodils, it also, unfortunately, brings out unwelcome human spring visitors. As the weather gets warmer, con artists targeting homeowners — particularly seniors — become more active, according to local law enforcement.

The Forsyth County Sheriff's Office warns that seniors and others should watch out for these top 5 con artists:

1. The fake tree trimmer: Law enforcement officials report that most legitimate tree services have enough work to make selling door-to-door unnecessary. Be particularly aware of someone purporting to be from a tree service who knocks at the door without any vehicle parked in front of your house. Or, if there is a pickup truck parked outside, beware if it does not have any tree service signage on it, or

if it is not carrying any chain saws or tree equipment. Fake tree trimmers will frequently try to get part of the money for a tree job up front, then will run off with your money, never to be seen again. Or they will use the conversation with you to case both you and your house for later robbery.

2. The rancid meat seller: Believe it or not, one of the most successful cons is to sell meat from an ice chest door-to-door. After the purchase, the buyer will find out that the meat he purchased is rancid, and the seller is long gone.

3. The fake roof-repair guy: The fake roof repair con artist will knock at your door, then explain that there is something wrong with your roof that he will be happy to fix. He usually asks for some money up front, will crawl up on the roof, lie around for awhile, then get off and leave with your money. Or he will use the opportunity to case your house, which he will burglarize later.

4. The vacuum-cleaner salesman: This con is pretty old, but remains popular among con artists. Most of us over 50 can remember Lucille Ball selling vacuum cleaners on "I Love Lucy." A vacuum

cleaner salesman will come to your home, demonstrate a good working vacuum cleaner to you, then offer to sell you a model just like he is using if you will pay in advance. The con artist then leaves with your money, and you never receive that vacuum cleaner that you ordered.

5. Young children selling magazines: Have you ever seen those young children with ID cards around their necks knocking at your door selling magazines? They always have a compelling story about why they are selling the magazines, and the fact that they are kids makes seniors more likely to buy from them.

But the ID cards are usually fake (almost anyone with a computer can fake ID cards) and the stories are normally false as well. Law enforcement officials report that most of these children do not even live in our area — many are driven in from the Midwest in vans by crooked adults. Seniors and others who buy magazines from them find out later that their money is gone and that they will never receive those magazines.

Tips for protecting yourself from con artists:

Don't open your door to strangers.

If you do open the door, do not leave it open or allow the stranger to look inside. A crook who knocks at your door is often using the occasion to evaluate your valuables inside so he can steal them later.

Do not tell a stranger at your door any personal information whatsoever. Crooks target older people because they are more vulnerable, so if you are a widow and tell a crooked stranger that you have lost your husband, that may lead the crook to see you as an easy target for a robbery.

Watch out for visitors between 5 p.m. and 7 p.m. This is a popular time for con artists, because they know that you are likely to be home and likely to be preparing dinner. If a crook can reach you when you are more distracted, it makes his job easier.

And finally, if you see con artists in your neighborhood, make sure that you call local law enforcement. It may take everyone working together to put a stop to these crooks.

Vance Parker is an elder-law and estate-planning attorney in Winston-Salem.