

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 18, 2005

Write your congressman

As you may remember, I wrote a column recently on the lack of reasonably priced quality health insurance not being made available to the thousands of North Carolinians all across our state affected by plant closures and downsizing due to products being manufactured overseas. I ended my column with a question posed to all our North Carolina legislators because they are the only body of people who can lobby for change: since there's a law mandating that prisoners receive quality care while incarcerated, why isn't there a law mandating that all North Carolina residents receive quality care no matter what the circumstances? In my column, I also promised to write to every single legislator.

I didn't forget. For the past week, I've been burning the midnight oil merging a letter using wonderful Microsoft Word to our 117 assemblypersons, 51 state senators, 13 U.S. congressmen and congresswomen, and 2 U.S. senators, for a total of 183 elected officials. Including a copy of my column of Feb 6, I ended my letter with: "I appeal to you as an elected legislator within this great state to do everything possible to ensure that all North Carolinians have the opportunity to secure reasonable and appropriate health



*As I
see it*

Peg DeMarco

coverage for themselves and their families. This letter is being sent to every legislator that represents North Carolina and responses will be gathered by myself and submitted to the newspaper so that the people may be kept informed. Our textile and furniture industries have suffered with closings and downsizings and too many people are now left jobless and without health care not to take quick and dramatic action. Won't you please help us by leading a crusade to make right this terrible wrong within our state and our nation?"

Let's see what kind of responses we get from the 183 legislators from all over the state. I'm hoping I'll have something positive to report back to you.

It was interesting gathering information on all our representatives. The Web site I discovered, www.ncleg.net, listed their names, addresses, party affiliations, terms in office, district numbers, mailing addresses, phone numbers, e-mail addresses and occupations.

There were so many towns and counties that I had never heard of before. Many of us link North Carolina with only Charlotte and Raleigh, and we tend to forget about the rest of this wonderful state, myself ruefully included. But our legislators represent places such as Ahoskie, Mars Hill, Wagram, Spring Lake, Angier, Hampstead, Farmville, Pink Hill, Pinetops and places somewhere in North Carolina that sound so inviting: Spruce Pine and Emerald Isle.

What was even more surprising was the variety of occupations our legislators have or had before they were elected. There is the usual high number of attorneys, but there are also builders, appraisers, small business owners, dentists, doctors, realtors, bankers, and accountants. There's a cattle farmer, retired sheriff, funeral director and a physician's assistant. Educators play a big part, too, since there are many retired teachers and a principal. A radio station owner, newspaper owner, librarian and a few insurance agents round out the list, and there's even a minister or two. Three legislators are homemakers and one described herself as a "stay-at-home mom."

I find this so fascinating since in New York, where I originated, politics was usually left to the financially well off or to the candidate with a cousin named Vito. I remember way back in the 1980's, I was asked to run against an incumbent who was a dashing, distinguished Italian gentleman, a member of the Holy Name Society and the president of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. Needless to say, I gracefully bowed out knowing that not only didn't I have a prayer at being elected, but my mother played bingo in the VFW hall, and I didn't want to do anything to jeopardize her chances at winning the jackpot.

However, it's so refreshing to see such a variety of people serving in our government. At times, it's a thankless job and the old adage "you can't please everyone" certainly must be plastered on a few of those representatives' office walls or at least in their mindsets. But I'm sure it's also rewarding to know that you can help shape the future of where you live and that you have the ability to help people who come to you for assistance.

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That's really what government is all about - not the pomp and circumstance of fancy inaugurations or dress balls, but the rolling up of one's shirtsleeves and digging into a pile of laws currently before the legislature knowing that your vote really does count.

So, please think seriously about joining whatever political party that interests you now and don't wait for election time. It can be very exciting to get involved with what's going on in our town and the towns around us. And remember that no matter what walk of life you come from, you may just find a ballot with your name on it at election time.

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