

**Washington
County News**

P.O. Box 609
Bristol, VA 24203

The Washington County News is a BH Media Group newspaper. Periodicals postage paid at Bristol, Va./Tenn. Member Virginia Press and National Newspaper Associations. Copyright 2017, Washington County News. All rights reserved. Washington County News' content cannot be disseminated without permission.

DEPARTMENTS

Main switchboard

276-669-2181

Administration

276-645-2552

Jim Maxwell, publisher

jmaxwell@bristolnews.com

Advertising

276-645-2521

David Lombardo,

regional advertising

dlombardo@bristolnews.com

Circulation

276-645-2548

John Gagliano,

circulation director

kgagliano@bristolnews.com

Editorial 276-645-2513

Rob Walters, managing editor

rwalters@bristolnews.com

Features 276-645-2515

features@bristolnews.com

Layout 276-645-2533

Chelsea Gillenwater,

assistant city editor

cgillenwater@bristolnews.com

Local news 276-645-2514

Susan Cameron, city editor

scameron@bristolnews.com

Local sports 276-645-2543

Brian Woodson, sports editor

sports@bristolnews.com

Photo 276-645-2535

David Crigger,

chief photographer

dcrigger@bristolnews.com

DELIVERY

To subscribe, report tardy delivery or ask for a vacation hold

276-645-2530

Business hours

Monday through Friday: 6 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Weekends, holidays: 6 a.m. to noon

Customer service 276-645-2555

Outside Bristol, Abingdon 888-228-2098

Fax a message 276-645-2555

Subscriptions

\$49 per year in Washington/contiguous counties

\$61 per year in Virginia, out of county

\$68 per year outside Virginia.

Subscriptions are nonrefundable.

Send address changes to P.O.

Box 399, Abingdon, Va 24212. USPS 667-340.

ADVERTISING

Business hours:

Classified ad department, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.; display ad department, 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Local display ads: 276-669-2181

Classified ads: 276-645-2525



MILT PRIGGEE/OAK HARBOR, WASHINGTON

County supervisors made the right move to allow voters to decide courthouse issue

The Washington County Board of Supervisors made the right choice when it voted Aug. 5 to allow the county's voters to decide whether to move court operations and courtrooms from the 150-year-old downtown Abingdon courthouse to a new location in the old Kmart building off Interstate 81's Exit 17.

With this action, a question will be put on the Nov. 5 ballot asking for approval to buy the abandoned Kmart building for use as a new courthouse, with a cost of up to \$30 million, allowing the county to alleviate the serious overcrowding at the current courthouse.

If the voters approve, then the county would buy the former Kmart building for \$5.25 million and renovate it to accommodate the courts.

But if the voters say "no," the courts would remain where they are for now, and the courthouse most likely would be renovated and expanded.

Although there seems to be plenty of opposition to moving court operations, much of that also seems to come from people who have a vested interest in keeping the courts where they are.

That includes the lawyers of the Washington County Bar Association, who recently voted unanimously to oppose moving the courts. Many of those lawyers have established their offices in the downtown area within walking distance of the historic courthouse, so a move to the new location would be inconvenient for them.

Some downtown Abingdon property owners have also expressed opposition to the move, suggesting that downtown property values would fall should the courts move to the old Kmart.

There are credible arguments for and against moving the courts, and they should all be taken into account by voters when they make their own decisions on how to mark their ballots — "yes" for the move, or "no" to keep the courts where they are.

One thing is clear, however: Taking no action on improving the crowded conditions at the

current courthouse most likely would result in the state Supreme Court forcing the county to act — and perhaps even making the decision as to what must be done,

The courts have just 47,000 square feet of space in the current courthouse but need about 88,000 square feet. The renovated Kmart building would provide 89,000 square feet of interior space for the courts and would also provide ample parking for court employees and visitors. Parking is severely limited now in downtown Abingdon.

Another concern of opponents of the move is that the historic courthouse — built just after the Civil War — might be abandoned and allowed to fall into disrepair or, gasp, even be demolished.

Neither of those scenarios is likely, as there have already been some good suggestions put forth about new uses for the old courthouse, including as a museum. No one is seriously considering allowing the courthouse to be abandoned or torn down.

The key takeaway from the Board of Supervisors' decision to put the courthouse question on the Nov. 5 ballot is that this will allow the people of Washington County to decide the issue — not just our elected officials or those who have their own interests at heart. This is exactly how it should be.

"The people will decide this, not the Board of Supervisors," Supervisor Mike Rush said during the Aug. 5 meeting.

The county plans to send out mailers to the 36,000-plus registered voters in advance of the referendum to explain the options.

Let's hope that Washington County's voters will inform themselves on the issue and vote the way they see fit on Nov. 5. This is the fairest and most reasonable way to decide this important issue.

It's also important that the voters show enough interest to turn out at the polls and choose whichever option they believe is best for the future of Washington County.

Our View

Legislature should vote on gun laws

Richmond Times-Dispatch

Back in July, Virginia lawmakers came to Richmond for a special session called by Gov. Ralph Northam on gun safety proposals.

In a heated election year, the state Capitol grounds were loaded with theatrics, from gun control advocates chanting into bullhorns, to gun rights enthusiasts with rifles across their chests. Inside, the scene was more subdued, but not without drama.

After 90 minutes, the Republican majority pulled the plug on floor debate and deferred to the Virginia State Crime Commission for a more detailed report. They set the next meeting of the assembly for Nov. 18 — two weeks after Election Day.

On Monday and Tuesday, the commission met for nearly 16 hours to begin its work. The body's purpose is to "study, report, and make recommendations on all areas of public safety and protection." As a unit, it looks "to ascertain the causes of crime and recommend ways to reduce and prevent it," and we hope the proceedings will bring clarity.

"The speed which the governor called the session, the partisan demands for floor votes, the roadshow all demonstrate to me how the whole thing is just an election-year stunt," House Speaker Kirk Cox, R-Colonial Heights, said at a news conference after the July adjournment. "We all share the goal of reducing gun violence in Virginia."

Cox had a point. Northam announced the

special session four days after a public utilities employee shot 12 people at the Virginia Beach Municipal Center. A police investigation had not taken place. A thorough assessment, which we expect the commission to complete, was missing.

But since July 9, major shootings at a garlic festival in Gilroy, California, (four dead), a Walmart in El Paso, Texas, (22 dead) and a street outside a bar in Dayton, Ohio, (10 dead) have shaken the hearts and minds of the public. The speed with which the General Assembly is addressing gun issues is inexcusable.

"By not allowing for a single vote on legislation or a single word of debate on commonsense gun control bills, they dishonored the victims of gun violence across Virginia," Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney said in July.

Stoney had a point. Virginia legislators could have set a national example by standing up for their values and voting — yes, voting — on the solutions they stand behind. That's their job. But they didn't.

The fear of campaign ads and losing an election seem to have outweighed the fear of constituents — those who demand gun safety measures and those who worry their right to bear arms is being taken away.

Every day without action is not only contemptuous of the Americans who died from gun violence this year. It's also a refusal by elected officials to go on the record and let voters know where they stand.

The lost art of smiling

Hurriedly, I pushed the small buggy through the front of the store. "Carrots, onions, milk, creamer, cards. Carrots, onions, milk, creamer, cards." Repeating my list

Breathing Room

C.A. Rollins

like a mantra, I knew I was at risk of forgetting two of the items, as I had failed to make a list.

"Carrots, onions ..."

Looking up, I saw a woman a little older than I. She smiled. It surprised me.

It surprised me that a human being smiled at me in the grocery store. What has happened that I am surprised by a smile? This is Southern Appalachia. Without generalizing, we Appalachians smile. Don't we?

I am not the shopper in my household. My husband doesn't mind the task and is far swifter in his efforts than I am. Still, anytime I've run into a store — pharmacy, general, grocery — I have been hard pressed to find someone, anyone, to smile at me. Sadly, it has been so long since I've been greeted by a smile that a friendly woman jarred me with her grin.

As I processed my surprise, I reached the fruit. I stopped, turned around, went back to her and said, "I know this is weird for a perfect stranger to say, but ... thank you. Your smile caught me off guard. I appreciate it so much." She commented that it had been quite some time since someone smiled at her, too. "Have a great day," I replied. "You, too!" I heard her call out. Moments later, a younger man of a different ethnic group smiled widely at me as I located the carrots!

Louis Armstrong's voice rings in my ears: "Keep on smiling, and the whole world smiles with you."

A friend of mine who lives in an urban area has a little different take. Purposefully, people avoid smiling, much less eye contact, because it likely invites unwelcome attention. I remember living in a major metro area. Fear of the other was prevalent. Gated communities, limited transit systems and racially divided communities were a reality then and now. That separation and sadness spills outward to more rural communities and even to our soulful Appalachia.

Our bodies are made to create a positive feedback loop by the act of smiling. When exercised in the shape of a smile — even if merely held in place by a pencil — the zygomatic major and orbicularis oculi muscles fire off signals to the brain that create the sensation of reward. This continues a loop of happiness from a rush of endorphins.

Some folks complain about fake smiles. Being false is a plague upon us. But the goodness of a smile is that, even when it is forced, it creates the perception of happiness.

When I smile at you, it signals to your brain a response of more happy endorphins. Together, we create a loop of happy hormones for each other. Smiling is healthy — for our community, for neighbors, for co-workers, for strangers, for our very selves. Smiling reduces anxiety, blood pressure and heart rate. Smiling enhances a sense of well-being.

Surprise someone! Smile!

Longing to breathe deeply and to walk with others as they seek to meet their longings, C.A. Rollins writes and invites you to reflect with her at carollinswrites@gmail.com.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To submit a letter to the editor: » Letters must be original works; 300 words or less. » Letters will be edited, and the publisher reserves the right to reject any submission. » Writers will be limited to one letter a month. » Submissions must include the writer's name, full address and telephone number. » Send letters to: Letters to the Editor, Washington County News: c/o Bristol Herald Courier, P.O. Box 609, Bristol VA 24203; fax to 276-669-3696; or email to letters@bristolnews.com.

**Washington
County News**

P.O. Box 609
Bristol, VA 24203

The Washington County News is a BH Media Group newspaper. Periodicals postage paid at Bristol, Va./Tenn. Member Virginia Press and National Newspaper Associations. Copyright 2017, Washington County News. All rights reserved. Washington County News' content cannot be disseminated without permission.

DEPARTMENTS

Main switchboard

276-669-2181

Administration

276-645-2552

Jim Maxwell, publisher

jmaxwell@bristolnews.com

Advertising

276-645-2521

Scott Maxwell,

regional advertising

smaxwell@bristolnews.com

Circulation

276-645-2548

John Gagliano,

circulation director

kgagliano@bristolnews.com

Editorial

276-645-2513

Rob Walters, managing editor

rwalters@bristolnews.com

Features

276-645-2515

features@bristolnews.com

Layout

276-645-2533

Chelsea Gillenwater,

assistant city editor

cgillenwater@bristolnews.com

Local news

276-645-2514

Susan Cameron, city editor

scameron@bristolnews.com

Local sports

276-645-2543

Brian Woodson, sports editor

sports@bristolnews.com

Photo

276-645-2535

David Crigger,

chief photographer

dcrigger@bristolnews.com

DELIVERY

To subscribe, report tardy delivery or ask for a vacation hold

276-645-2530

Business hours

Monday through Friday: 6 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Weekends, holidays: 6 a.m. to noon

Customer service 276-645-2555

Outside Bristol, Abingdon 888-228-2098

Fax a message 276-645-2555

Subscriptions

\$49 per year in Washington/contiguous counties

\$61 per year in Virginia, out of county

\$68 per year outside Virginia. Subscriptions are nonrefundable.

Send address changes to P.O.

Box 399, Abingdon, Va 24212. USPS

667-340.

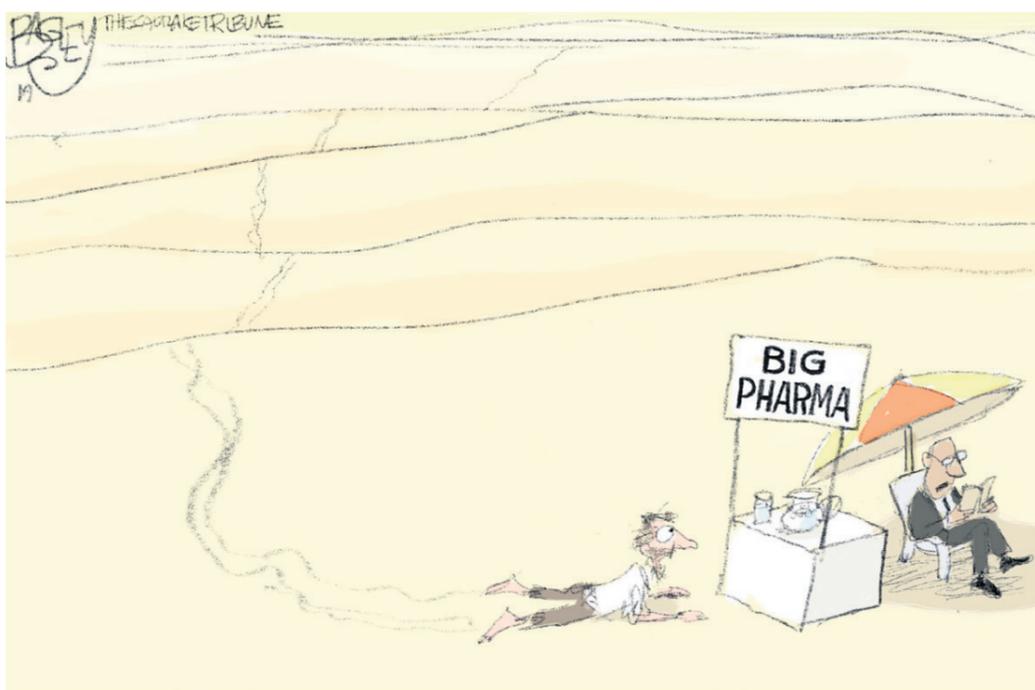
ADVERTISING

Business hours:

Classified ad department, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.; display ad department, 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Local display ads: 276-669-2181

Classified ads: 276-645-2525



"TEN THOUSAND DOLLARS."

PAT BAGLEY/THE SALT LAKE TRIBUNE, UTAH

Giving entertainment complex tax to developer could be a good move

Now that the Washington County Board of Supervisors has decided to pass on all proceeds of an authorized 10% admissions tax to the developers of the planned Pinnacle entertainment complex, perhaps we'll see some forward movement on the project.

The board approved the move by a unanimous vote July 9. Prior to the supervisors' vote, developer Steve Johnson told them, "I think this is a historic moment. I think that Washington County is on the cusp of something extraordinary happening."

While the idea of giving all collections of a government-imposed tax to a private developer could well be a debatable issue and even a dubious precedent, the motives behind the supervisors' decision might justify the move, at least in this case.

If this does help Johnson get the estimated \$200 million project underway, bringing what he has said could be up to 1,000 jobs, then the supervisors' decision would seem to be just another way to provide public incentives to a private economic development.

In this case, there would be no direct payments of general government funds to the project, as any of the tax money coming to the entertainment complex, planned for Exit 1 off Interstate 81, would be generated by the complex itself.

The tax would come entirely from tickets purchased at the proposed attractions. That's similar in concept to the standard practice of providing tax abatements to private job-creating economic developments. In those cases, the tax dollars being abated wouldn't have been created without

the project that gets the breaks.

There's another potential benefit to the county: Johnson told the supervisors that with their decision to pass the admissions tax along to the development, he would not be asking the county to pay for the estimated \$10 million access road to the complex off Gate City Highway (U.S. 58).

"I don't intend, moving forward, asking you for anything, other than the admissions tax," Johnson told the supervisors. "I'm not asking you

for \$10 million."

If they wanted the project to move forward, the supervisors likely had no choice but to approve dedicating the admissions tax to the developer.

"Without it, there is no project," Johnson told them. "I'm basically spending all the money. I'm taking all the risks."

Still, there has been no firm timetable given for work to begin on the development. With the admissions tax money now dedicated to the project, perhaps funding for the complex could be finalized and construction plans could be announced soon.

This project ostensibly would provide important economic benefits to the county, in addition to the jobs it would create. It could generate more than \$1 million a year in sales taxes and more than \$1 million annually in real estate tax, according to Johnson, who developed The Pinnacle retail/restaurant complex adjacent to the property in Bristol, Tennessee.

If all of these projected benefits come to fruition, then the supervisors' decision on the admissions tax will have been a good one.

Let's hope that it all works as planned.

Should UVA trade UVA-Wise to Virginia Tech?

The Roanoke Times

Trades are such a routine part of sports that sports pages reduce them to agate type. Other fields don't trade people or things back and forth like that. Our job, though, is to prompt people to think, and here's what we'd like people — especially state policymakers — to think about: The University of Virginia should trade its College at Wise to Virginia Tech. We're not sure what Tech would give UVA in return: Draft picks? Cash considerations? Or maybe forgiveness for UVA luring away the executive director and 37 research faculty from Virginia Tech's Biocomplexity Institute? Maybe the University of Virginia's College at Wise is the proverbial "player to be named later"? This solution may be facetious, but the problems it attempts to address are quite real, so bear with us.

A few days ago, we got an email from a reader to our west who asked: Why doesn't Virginia Tech build an "innovation campus" in Southwest Virginia? Tech, of course, is planning a \$1 billion "innovation campus" in Alexandria. This was a key part of Virginia's winning bid for the new Amazon headquarters that will be next door. Indeed, a columnist for the Seattle Times — Amazon's current hometown — believes that the campus was a bigger incentive than any of the tax breaks that Virginia offered. Stephanie Landrum, director of economic development in Alexandria, says it's possible that someday we'll look back and the Tech campus will be regarded as a bigger deal than Amazon itself. U.S. Rep. Don Beyer, D-Alexandria, says he expects the new campus to someday rival the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. That's great for Northern Virginia, and thus for Virginia, which collects more tax revenues from that part of the state than any other. But our reader poses an

excellent question. The Tech campus in Alexandria, and the growth it's expected to bring, is a case of the rich getting richer. What about parts of the state that aren't so economically fortunate?

People in the coalfields are rightfully proud of the school's UVA connection. There's also the political reality: How much attention would an eastern-dominated state government give to UVA-Wise if it were an independent school? Unfortunately, we all know the answer to that. But would a Virginia Tech connection be better?

Here's why we ask: During his campaign for governor in 2017, then-candidate Ralph Northam mused about starting a new university in Southwest Virginia — or at least greatly expanding UVA-Wise. His quite-sound rationale: Universities are economic engines. Southwest Virginia needs a new economy. Northam talked boldly about making either UVA-Wise — or that mythical new school — a center for research into renewable energy. Since his election as governor, we've seen absolutely no action from his Northam's office on this campaign proposal — but we have seen some from Republican legislators in the coalfields. Del. Terry Kilgore of Scott County and state Sen. Ben Chafin of Russell County sponsored a bill to create an "energy research center" somewhere in the coalfields. The logical place would be UVA-Wise. Here's where someone ought to ask some pointed questions: This proposal sounds more like the type of work that a land grant school such as Tech specializes in. Maybe UVA-Wise ought to be VT-Wise. There's your innovation campus.

And then there's this: UVA-Wise has struggled to attract students. Virginia Tech has too many. In a more logical world, instead of encouraging some of its freshmen to take a "gap year," it would offer them a place at Wise instead.

True love can be finding your own brand of weirdness

Back when bookstores were common, before online sellers began to take over the world like big-box stores, I stumbled across a bin of books turned spine up at my local bookseller. Either a graduate student, or fresh out of school, I was drawn to the

BreathingRoom

C.A. Rollins

The jacket of this particular copy was scuffed. Otherwise, it was perfection. With the pages cut with that texture of a classic, forever to be treasured. The title, "True Love," caught my eye. Then, I saw the author's name, Robert Fulghum, and decided it must go home with me. Kind Reader, you likely recognize the author's name from "All I Really Need to Know I Learned in Kindergarten." If you do not, you should hasten a path to your local library and search for a copy. Both — nay, all — of his writings are deep treasures. I have read them over and over and discover fresh, simple beauty each time.

Reflecting on lessons I learned in "True Love," I went in search of my copy, which I have evidently loaned to someone I love. Two quotes stand out in my memory. Here is the first: "We're all a little weird. And life is a little weird. And when we find someone whose weirdness is compatible with ours, we join up with them and fall into mutually satisfying weirdness — and call it love — true love."

This is true not only of romantic partners but also for true friends who truly "get" one another in their mutual weirdness. It is true of a stranger on a corner with whom one connects for a few brief moments. Love — true love — can be discovered in the weirdest of instances.

A few years ago, I began a practice of list-keeping signs of "true love" I witness in my life. Here are a few over the course of the last decade:

» Sharing flowers from one's garden with a lonely person that she may, too, enjoy a bit of beauty.

» Making many batches of cupcakes, trying to get them just right prior to a wedding party.

» Massaging your spouse's feet even though you do not like feet.

» Taking the baby to another room so at least someone gets a few hours of rest.

» Making mad dashes for bags of cough drops for the sick grown-up so a baby will sleep.

» Sheltering a friend whose adult children have been committing financial abuse against her.

» Working on home and garden projects in July heat on one's aching knees with knee pads.

» Staying up well past bedtime to take a 4 year-old to her first fireworks.

» Arranging to have a broken windshield repaired on a day off.

» Allowing your kids to move many miles and hours away so they can spread their wings and learn.

» Doing a walk-through of a new home with a family member to ensure all is well.

» Taking meaningful photos to record family gatherings because time and memories are precious.

» Bringing home raspberries because you know your beloved enjoys them.

» Playing endless rounds of "Little Pig, Little Pig, Let Me In!"

Fulghum writes: "Love is the grand prize and the garbage heap. Love is a spiritual root canal and the only thing that makes life worth living. Love is a little taste of always and a big bite of nothing. And love is everything between these extremes."

What have you learned about true love?

Longing to breathe deeply and to walk with others as they seek to meet their longings, C.A. Rollins writes and invites you to reflect with her at carolrollinswrites@gmail.com.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To submit a letter to the editor: » Letters must be original works; 300 words or less. » Letters will be edited, and the publisher reserves the right to reject any submission. » Writers will be limited to one letter a month. » Submissions must include the writer's name, full address and telephone number. » Send letters to: Letters to the Editor, Washington County News: c/o Bristol Herald Courier, P.O. Box 609, Bristol VA 24203; fax to 276-669-3696; or email to letters@bristolnews.com.

Washington County News

P.O. Box 609
Bristol, VA 24203

The Washington County News is a BH Media Group newspaper. Periodicals postage paid at Bristol, Va./Tenn. Member Virginia Press and National Newspaper Associations. Copyright 2017, Washington County News. All rights reserved. Washington County News' content cannot be disseminated without permission.

DEPARTMENTS

Main switchboard

276-669-2181

Administration

276-645-2552

Jim Maxwell, publisher

jmaxwell@bristolnews.com

Advertising

276-645-2521

David Lombardo,

regional advertising

dlombardo@bristolnews.com

Circulation

276-645-2548

John Gagliano,

circulation director

ggagliano@bristolnews.com

Editorial 276-645-2513

Rob Walters, managing editor

rwalters@bristolnews.com

Features 276-645-2515

features@bristolnews.com

Layout 276-645-2533

Chelsea Gillenwater,

assistant city editor

cgillenwater@bristolnews.com

Local news 276-645-2514

Susan Cameron, city editor

scameron@bristolnews.com

Local sports 276-645-2543

Brian Woodson, sports editor

sports@bristolnews.com

Photo 276-645-2535

David Crigger,

chief photographer

dcrigger@bristolnews.com

DELIVERY

To subscribe, report tardy delivery or ask for a vacation hold

276-645-2530

Business hours

Monday through Friday: 6 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Weekends, holidays: 6 a.m. to noon

Customer service 276-645-2555

Outside Bristol, Abingdon 888-228-2098

Fax a message 276-645-2555

Subscriptions

\$49 per year in Washington/contiguous counties

\$61 per year in Virginia, out of county

\$68 per year outside Virginia.

Subscriptions are nonrefundable.

Send address changes to P.O.

Box 399, Abingdon, Va 24212. USPS

667-340.

ADVERTISING

Business hours:

8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday-Friday

Advertising department

1-276-669-2181 or 1-888-228-8778



JEFF KOTERBA/OMAHA WORLD HERALD, NEBRASKA

Energy Research Authority can help Southwest Virginia recover from coal's decline

With coal on its last legs in Southwest Virginia, the search is on for new ways to make use of old sites — particularly with an eye toward advancing alternative-energy development.

To that end, the Southwest Virginia Energy Research Authority was hatched this fall, and it recently met in Abingdon “to discuss how it can help grow the region’s economy and review ideas for how to accomplish that goal,” according to the Roanoke Times newspaper.

With this region’s rich history in the energy industry — by way of its long association with coal production for electric power plants — it makes sense that we should be exploring ways to continue that legacy with alternative-energy initiatives.

“Southwest Virginia is a prime location for energy research and development activities that leverage our region’s talent and natural resources,” said Sen. Ben Chafin, R-Russell, who promoted the state legislation that led to the authority’s formation, the newspaper reported. “Our legislative delegation is committed to seeing the region build on its long history of energy generation in order to grow our economy.”

According to the story, the 11-member energy research group comprises people appointed by the governor and legislators and has as its chairman Mike Quillen, who also is chairman of the GO Virginia Region One economic development council.

Priorities of the new authority include promoting development of renewable energy generation facilitation on abandoned mine sites, creation of an energy research facility, and development of hydropower pump-storage facilities, like the one the Tennessee Valley Authority operates as the Raccoon Mountain Pumped-Storage Plant near Chattanooga.

The story noted that Dominion Energy is interested in putting a similar facility in Tazewell County. Our Southwest Virginia geography is quite conducive to these facilities, which include a reservoir at the top of a mountain (think former strip-mine sites) into which water from a flowing stream down below is pumped using electricity in off-peak hours.

Then when there is a peak demand for electricity — say, during very hot or cold weather — the reservoir’s water is released into tunnels that channel it back down the mountain and through hydroelectric generators to produce power.

TVA’s Raccoon Mountain facility, in operation since 1978, has enough stored water to run the plant’s four

generators for up to 22 hours, according to the TVA website.

Creation of pumped-storage facilities on Southwest Virginia’s abandoned mine sites would not only help generate energy in times of extreme need but would also help reclaim blighted land and give it new life.

Our View

TVA notes that the area around the Raccoon Mountain site “is a state-

designated Wildlife Observation Area,” and that “The mountaintop is home to whitetail deer, woodchucks, gray foxes and, of course, raccoons. The most compelling wildlife attraction of the area is a large wintering population of bald eagles, which can be sighted from the overlook as they hunt in the woods and waters.”

There are also recreational opportunities. “The adjacent day-use area offers more than 28 miles of mountain biking trails — with names like Live Wire, Megawatt, Switch Yard and High Voltage — for riders of all abilities, as well as a bike-washing station. The trails are open to hikers as well,” the TVA website notes.

Among the other initiatives to be considered by the new energy authority, an energy research facility should be a top priority, as it would help put Southwest Virginia on the map nationwide as a key player in development of alternative energy.

The Roanoke Times reported that Michael Karmis, director of the Virginia Center for Coal and Energy Research, “said the idea of an energy park for the purposes of research has been discussed for years, but he’d like to see a plan for that move forward to advance the energy development priorities. He envisioned testing and doing demonstrations of technology for pumped-storage facilities.”

“The thing that is intriguing about this is that there is not anywhere in America where this exists where you can have energy-type projects tested independently,” Quillen said, according to the story.

Karmis also stressed the need for workforce development in the region, which he said would be “crucial to the effort” of promoting alternative-energy projects and sites in Southwest Virginia. Those projects would need a ready workforce, he added.

Those who were involved in setting up this initiative to promote development of alternative energy in our region are to be commended for their vision. And those who are now charged with making it happen should work diligently to achieve these goals.

It makes sense for Southwest Virginia — and for our nation, as well.

Don't buy those Christmas shoes

My kid loves shoes. She sees a catalog with shoes and gasps with delight.

We really do not go out much. When I was a kid, we were at the mall often. I was desensitized to the power of a storefront window.

But when my child and I walked in an historic downtown area, her eyes fell over a shoe store. She walked over cautiously, like a mix between a ballerina and a tiger ready to pounce. She stood on her tippy-toes looking

Breathing Room

C.A. Rollins

salivate over pastries. She was beside herself with awe.

Know what would make me immensely happy? Despite my dear one’s love for shoes, if somebody out there — anybody — would obliterate every single copy in every possible format of “The Christmas Shoes” that exists in the Whole. Wide. Universe.

If you are so fortunate as to have missed this song, take a kindly word of warning. Do not look it up. Do not tune into your local station or Spotify or Google Music in hopes of catching just a little of it. It is worse than an earworm eating at your brain like “Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer.” (That song seriously tore up said aforementioned 4-year old, who loves no one better than Jesus and her grandma. Thank you, Pandora.)

After the third time through the song, I quit crying whenever I heard about those Christmas shoes. Then, I started throwing up a little. Now, I have to fight my gag reflex like my niece who cannot stand the smell of bananas. (And I’m fully aware that’s a little intense, too.)

So summarize my humble view on the horrors of this particular song.

One time, in a small church, on a sweet Sunday leading up to Christmas, a dear woman stood to sing a “special.” For you large-church or non-church folks, a “special” is a piece that one or two singers have worked up with the church musician or canned music backup. It’s usually a gift given to God and to the people gathered.

As I heard the first few bars, I thought I might have to run screaming. Instead, self-sacrificially, I stayed to support my sister in faith. I pinched the soft inside part of my hand. When that failed, I went on to pull the hairs on my forearms like my mother told me to do when I was trying to stay awake for my super-sleep-inducing sixth grade English teacher. I decided sleep was preferable. I bit the inside of my jaw. I hung my head and prayed, nodding and rocking as if in the spirit, but really trying not to heave.

So, if you are so #blessed as to come across this song, do something — anything — to get away from it. Complain of a headache, earache, road sickness. Mercy, just open the door of the car and throw yourself out in a tuck-and-roll. Maybe it will be over by the time the driver pulls off the road to check on you.

No, don’t do that. Just be honest.

This time of year can be sad enough, heavy enough, heart-breaking enough. You and I — or anyone — needs further emotional manipulation. The Longest Night approaches on Dec. 21. Some people will be coping with their inner and outer darkness by shopping, eating or imbibing themselves into a humming little oblivion in order to escape their pain. You could go to a therapist, ask a friend to go on a walk, read a book, turn on your favorite music loudly, watch a funny movie or attend a Blue Christmas gathering if you are dealing with a range of losses this time of year.

Check out Charles Dickens’ “A Christmas Carol” instead. It is far more worthy and transformative a story. Its artistry stands the test of generations, formats and adaptations. Never again should we hear about shoes or shoeboxes at this time of year ... unless they are for the little baby Jesus, or the local school drive for students, or for children separated from their parents along our border.

Longing to breathe deeply and to walk with others as they seek to meet their longings. C.A. Rollins writes and invites you to reflect with her at carollinswrites@gmail.com.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To submit a letter to the editor: Letters must be original works; 300 words or less. Letters will be edited, and the publisher reserves the right to reject any submission. Writers will be limited to one letter a month. Submissions must include the writer’s name, full address and telephone number. Send letters to: Letters to the Editor, Washington County News: c/o Bristol Herald Courier, P.O. Box 609, Bristol VA 24203; fax to 276-669-3696; or email to letters@bristolnews.com.