

**Washington
County News**

P.O. Box 609
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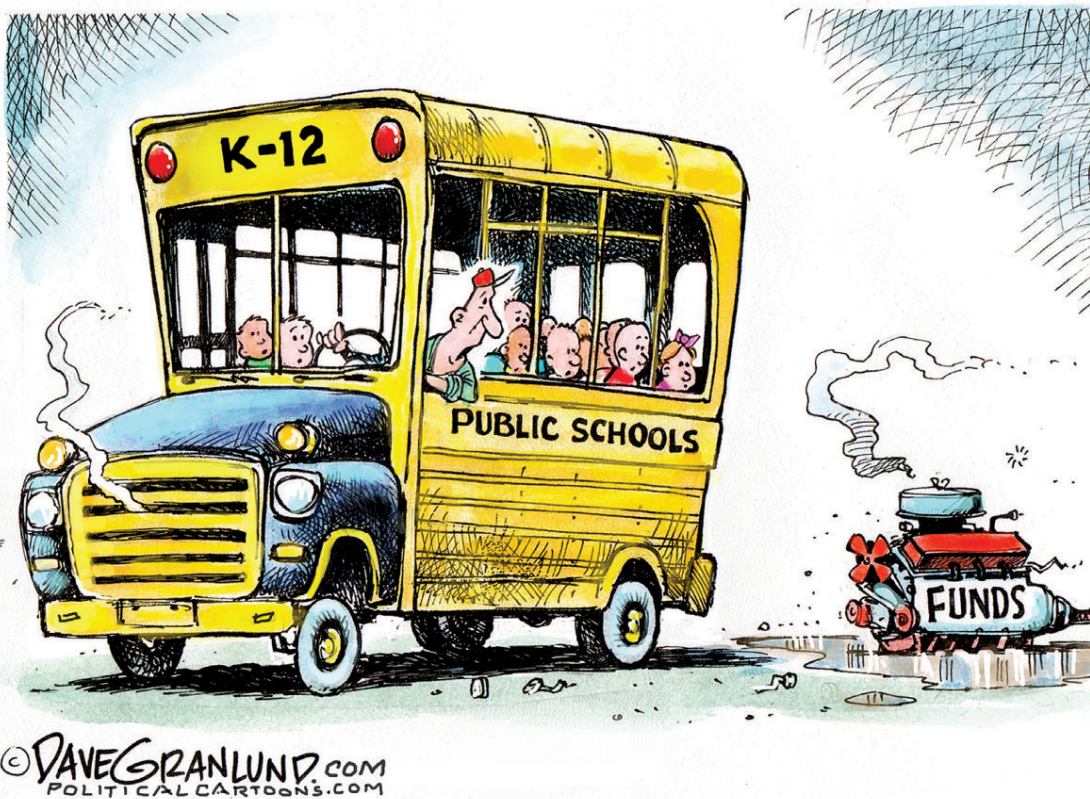
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DAVE GRANLUND/POLITICALCARTOONS.COM

On old dogs and stagnant water

“Rancid butter,” she said. “Open the jar and sniff.” It seemed an odd task for a chemistry teacher to present to her sophomores and juniors. My ever-trusted friend and lab partner, Sean — who I am proud to say went on to become a physician and colonel in the U.S. Army — bravely opened the suspicious brown jar. The stink that hit us has never left my nostrils.

In that same instant, I flashed to a vivid memory of our full-blooded Boxer. As the runt of the litter with an elongated snout, he was not intended for great things. My aunt could not stand the idea of the dog being put down — thus, the Boxer found his path to a loving family.

Dusty was many things: playmate, stink-bomb (any Boxer owner can explain), loyal companion and protector of his humans. Dusty went with us when we rode bikes. Dusty tromped the Great Woods with us. Dusty curled up with us when we watched TV and read books. That dog looked fierce, but all he would do was lick you to death. That is, unless you were the UPS man or Mr. Gregory.

We lived on a pretty steep hill. Originally, Dusty’s doghouse stood on the same level as the house on the edge of the driveway, overlooking the hill down toward the road. Seldom was he ever chained to the doghouse, but it happened from time to time.

In the early 1980s, UPS deliveries were rare. Dusty hated that big, brown, rumbling truck. The first time he expressed his hatred, he dragged his doghouse by the chain and his collar all the way down the driveway to the road before we could catch up to him.

After that, Dad moved the doghouse up the hill in the backyard. Dad even secured it to the ground. The UPS man came back, and down went the doghouse, following after barking Dusty. At least it slowed him down.

One other time, the front door was open, but the storm door was latched shut. That poor UPS man came rumbling along, and Dusty burst through the glass. After that, Dad replaced it with plexiglass.

This takes us to Mr. Gregory. Mr. Gregory had borrowed my father’s vehicle. Returning it, he walked up to the door. Again, the storm door was latched. Dusty launched into a barking tirade so fierce that Mom feared the sturdiness of the latch and the plexiglass. She went from holding onto Dusty’s collar to wrapping herself

— arms and legs — around the big brown-and-white behemoth. My sister and I held on, too. She shouted, “Drop the keys and leave!”

Perhaps I paint a picture of an aggressive dog. He never acted like that toward anyone other than the UPS guy and Mr. Gregory. Instead, he was affectionate to all in the neighborhood, save, perhaps, the dog from the far end of the street who sometimes attempted to mark his territory in overlapping circles with Dusty.

Dusty visited our grandparents’ farms with us. He kept my grandfather company after my grandmother died of cancer when I was 8. One time, Dusty found his way into the cattails that stood on the other side of the road from the farmhouse. A little trickle of water gathered there, enough to keep it wet all year round, but not wet enough to keep it fresh. That water stank simply as one moved past it. I tried to steer clear.

If we lost sight of Dusty for too long, a good bet was that he had meandered his way into that stagnant pond of water. Sure enough, his short hair was coated in the brackish film. We had to give him a bath out by the spring house before we could even get in the car to go home that day. He still stank the whole way home, even with the windows open. He was pretty satisfied with himself.

Round about late February and early March, I find myself settling into a sense of stagnancy. I am really not ready for spring and pollen and yard work, but I cannot stand another minute of winter and flu and colds. I have heard it from you, too.

I think there is a spiritual lesson in here, too. In the stagnancy — seasons of stagnancy, or brackish pools of it — we can garner some spiritual growth. Maybe we need to roll in it like Dusty did. Really claim the ick of it. Then, wash it off in the days of spring with a bottle of Palmolive and a scrub brush.

I do not mean to embrace brokenness and to sin more boldly. Rather, attend to the stagnancy. Look at it. Where are you stagnant in your relationships, your stories, your work, your health, your personal development, your service to the world around you? Embrace it for the moment. Where do you need a bath and fresh air?

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.

YOUR VIEW

Virginia needs boundaries, lawmakers that function for us

When we vote to elect our representatives, we assume our vote counts as much as the next person’s. Unfortunately, the politicians in power (this has been true for both parties) in Virginia have drawn the districts to reduce the power of voters who vote “the other way.” In some years the districts are so distorted that the party in power need only win about 40 percent of the votes to hold a majority of the seats in the Legislature. Gerrymandering,

as it is called, is now against the law in about 21 other states. Those states (Missouri is the most recent) have their district boundaries drawn by nonpartisan or bipartisan commissions.

No politicians should have that much power over the citizens — the power to diminish our electoral influence. Such is the condition, however, in our beloved commonwealth. Bills have been brought before the Legislature many times, and the party in power has been so afraid of facing a nonbiased electoral system that they quietly kill those bills.

But this year we finally have

Republicans and Democrats agreeing on a compromise: The current proposal is to have a commission made of both politicians and citizens, with a process that is transparent to all. It prohibits the drawing of districts to advantage or disadvantage any elected official or political party.

Please stand with me in pressing our representatives to respect the will of the people and support this proposal. We need a government that functions for us, not particular parties.

Ed Davis
Emory, Virginia

OUR VIEW

Career programs offer alternative to four-year degrees

There is no shame in working with your hands. And there also could be lifelong benefits to it for those who learn to use their hands along with their minds to develop marketable skills in today’s challenging work environment.

That’s a message that the nation’s community and technical/vocational colleges are trying to get across to young people, particularly those who are still in secondary schools and contemplating what to do with their lives after high school graduation, if a four-year college education isn’t their goal.

While there are many well-paying occupations that require four-year or even postgraduate degrees, that route isn’t for everyone. The good news is that there are many careers in the various trades that offer good earnings and satisfying work without going the full college route.

But many of today’s youth see or have been led to believe that those careers are somehow inferior, and that attitude has created a shortage of candidates for many worthwhile vocations.

The truth is that there is a dire need for more machinists, plumbers, electricians, welders, carpenters, mechanics and other tradespeople. And in today’s economy, these jobs often bring the kind of job security, living wage and work enjoyment that some graduates of traditional college-degree programs are finding elusive.

Even in today’s high-tech advanced-manufacturing environment, many of these skills provide well-trained candidates a path to good jobs with decent pay and employment security.

It’s with that in mind that programs such as the precision machinist classes at Virginia Highlands Community College should be praised, promoted and supported. Vocational training in these careers is a focus of our community and technical schools now, and in many of those programs, a high percentage of students already have jobs lined up well before they graduate.

Costs of the programs are also normally way lower than what students pay for four-year college degrees, and these vocational students can come out of school with no huge student loan debt.

There’s even help available in some cases to get graduates of these programs started in their new careers, as evidenced by a report last week in this newspaper about precision machinist students at Virginia Highlands receiving work boots and fully stocked rolling toolboxes through a grant from the Virginia Department of Education.

According to the Washington County News story by Carolyn R. Wilson, seven students who had demonstrated career readiness were the recipients of the boots and tools, which our story noted were made available through the Mount Rogers Regional Adult Education Program. Each of the students was given a \$1,500 voucher to purchase the boots and tools.

Such opportunities “are typically developed through partnerships between regional adult education programs and community colleges across the commonwealth,” the story noted.

The Mount Rogers program received a \$20,000 grant from the state, and reached out to the community college about developing a dual-enrollment program — then provided the boots and tools to the students.

“This is one of several partnerships our office has had over the last five years,” Shirley Carlson, regional program manager for Mount Rogers Regional Adult Education, told the Washington County News. The office serves six counties in the area, as well as the cities of Bristol and Galax.

In the dual-enrollment program, the students receive classroom instruction at the community college while also preparing to earn Career Readiness Certificates through the adult education program. The report noted that those certificates are now often required by employers. To get the certificates, students must pass tests in applied math, workplace documents and graphic literacy.

It’s a good program that brings long-term results to the students and the community, and our education system needs to develop more of these programs and attract more young people to take advantage of them.

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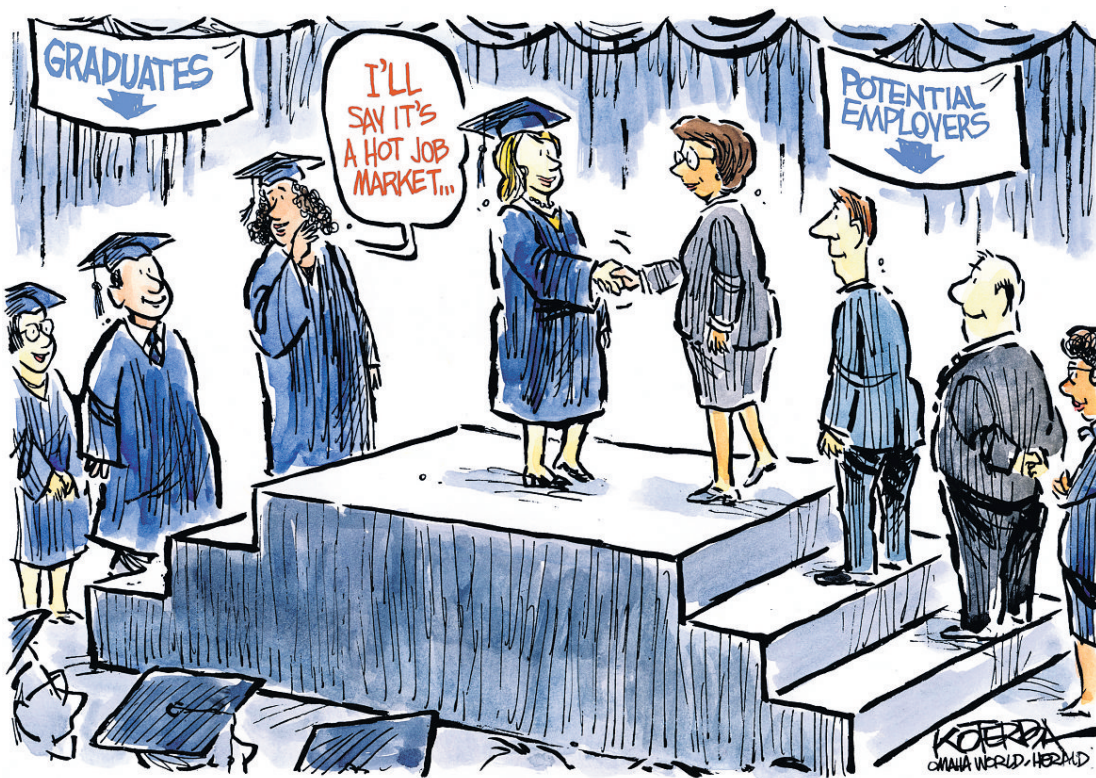
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JEFF KOTERBA/OMAHA WORLD HERALD, NEBRASKA

Supervisors should tread lightly on defunding fire department

Rural communities nearly everywhere often struggle to get even close to the high levels of fire and emergency medical services that residents of metropolitan areas sometimes take for granted.

There are lots of reasons for the disparities between metropolitan and rural emergency services, not the least of which is geography — including barriers such as waterways and mountains — along with the way rural residences and businesses are spread out over wide areas.

It's also usually a challenge to get sufficient water to firefighting scenes, not to mention scarcities of manpower and equipment resulting from reliance on volunteers and tight budgets that in many cases rely heavily on local fundraising activities.

With that in mind, we certainly empathize with the residents of the mountainous eastern side of Washington County, Virginia, who are facing the potential demise of their closest fire and EMS services in nearby Whitetop, over the proposed defunding of the services by the Washington County Board of Supervisors.

Although the affected agency, the Mount Rogers Volunteer Fire Department and Rescue Squad, is actually across the line in Grayson County, it provides primary emergency services to the Konnarock-Green Cove-Laurel Valley communities in Washington County. For those services, the department has been receiving \$28,000 a year from the Washington County government's budget.

Officials in Washington County have recently criticized the efficiency of the Mount Rogers department and have proposed cutting the annual appropriation that helps pay for the service to cover the Washington County communities.

There's even been a petition drive seeking to persuade the Washington County supervisors to continue funding the Mount Rogers department, and leaders in the communities served by the department are rightly concerned that their area might be left without these potentially lifesaving services.

"Since we've got a good fire and rescue service, why mess it up, you know?" Anne Pennington, president of the Konnarock-Green Cove-Laurel Valley Community Association, said during a recent Board of Supervisors meeting in Abingdon.

"They've been in our area for a long time, and they've done a lot of good service for us," Pen-

nington said. "We have a good thing going."

As is often the case with rural emergency services, there have been problems with missed or delayed response to EMS calls. But the department says it's addressing those problems.

"There's been a lot of issues in the past," Mount Rogers Fire Chief P.J. Stamper said during the meeting. "We've struggled. But we're working hard to correct those issues." The department has blamed some of the delays on the spotty cellular telephone coverage in the mountainous area.

"We're not perfect, but we're the best that they have," Cheryl

Carter, secretary of the Mount Rogers department, told the supervisors. "And I think that there's going to be regrets. People are possibly going to be hurt or lose property if you continue on with this decision."

There are other options the county is considering, including having the Damascus fire and rescue operation run calls into the communities, or even establishing a Washington County-funded fire and EMS substation in the area.

But there are no solutions in place yet to take up the slack should the Mount Rogers department be shut out. Just the purchase of a single firetruck could cost as much as \$450,000, the supervisors were told. Ambulances are quite expensive, as well.

"I think it might be better in the county's interest," said Stamper, "and probably [would] come out a whole lot easier — or a less financial burden, if you would — if they could look at providing some resources to Mount Rogers, who's already in place and providing those services, helping us maybe recruit some members within the community or bring some resources in, rather than to try to spend this huge amount of money to put that in place when there's already something there that just needs a little help along."

It's hard to argue with his logic. It seems that not only should Washington County continue to fund the Mount Rogers department, it might be worthwhile for the supervisors to increase the department's annual appropriation.

At the very least, nothing should be done to put the current Mount Rogers service to Washington County in jeopardy until there is another option already in place that is at least equal to — if not better than — what's already available.

Lives and property are at stake.

Our View

Creative thinking in Southwest Virginia

The Roanoke Times

This will be an unfashionable statement in some quarters, we realize, but it is the truth: Some of the most creative thinking about building a new economy in rural Virginia is coming from the Republican state legislators who represent far Southwest Virginia.

You can argue that they're not doing enough, if you want, but when we look at how little some localities and their representatives are doing to prepare for the future — or even the present — these guys look like rock stars.

Del. Todd Pillion, R-Washington County, and state Sen. Ben Chafin, R-Russell County, sponsored a bill that would allow localities to designate abandoned schools as "opportunity zones" eligible for tax breaks. Southwest Virginia has a lot of schools that have closed as the population declines; the idea here is that those could be converted into incubators for startups. That alone won't draw high-tech entrepreneurs to rural areas, but, as we said before, no one thing will, so

we better start doing lots of little things.

This year, Del. Israel O'Quinn, R-Washington County, sponsored a little-noticed bill that could be a potential game-changer for getting broadband internet into rural areas. Virginia's two big utilities — Dominion Energy and Appalachian Power — are getting ready to run lots of high-fiber as part of their upgrade to "smart grid" technology that lets them better manage their electric loads. If the utilities are running new fiber anyway, why not add a little bit more to get broadband to previously-unserved areas? No other state has done this; O'Quinn's bill instantly drops the cost of extending broadband into rural areas and makes Virginia a national leader.

It's not hard to imagine an energy research center in Southwest Virginia becoming an important place for developing both of those things into marketable applications. The key development for now is that we're seeing some imagination from what some cynics might think is the unlikely source of all — politicians.

'Tell me what you think'

Hold your tongue. Children keep silent while a grown-up speaks. These were familiar notions in my childhood and adolescence.

Likewise, I learned that boys and men held greater importance than women and girls.

They spoke first, went first, filled their plates

Breathing Room

C.A. Rollins

first, ate first and rested first while the women and girls cleaned up after them.

In 1971, Jim Henson produced a version of "The Frog Prince." The role of the prince was played by Kermit the Frog's nephew, Robin. Of course, Robin knew he needed a kiss from a princess to break the curse and to free him from his amphibian state so that he might assume his rightful role.

Meanwhile, in that very land, there was a bumbling king duped by his sorceress sister who sought control of the kingdom. That same sorceress enchanted the king's daughter with a spell that confused the princess's speech. Because of the spell, the princess appeared unable to take authority and to assume the throne. Undergirded by so many layers of society drumming constantly the beat of female insufficiency, I deeply internalized the message that girls' voices are confused and twisted. This fed into my introversion and my experience around males in leadership roles.

In the story, it turns out that Princess Melora, who speaks mainly in spoonerisms, was the only one who truly knew what was happening. She knew that her Aunt Taminella was a witch. She also knew how to defeat her magic. No one could comprehend what the poor princess communicated. "Bake the hall in the candle of her brane," she cried! Seeking to understand, Sir Robin the Brave solved the puzzle: "Break the ball in the handle of her cane."

It took me years to unlearn the lesson of keeping quiet. Writing, drawing and painting allowed me to share both the pain and the peace I found. Poetry — the medium of many angsty teenagers — became a vehicle. Prayers became the method of connection and communication between me and the Holy One.

Over time, I sensed God taking my hand, telling me to come and run with God. "Come see! Let's go. Tell me what you think!" Eventually, I came to see this as the Friend, the Comforter, the Advocate, the Holy Spirit of which Jesus speaks.

As Jesus prepared his disciples for his death and departure, he foreshadowed what would transpire. Saddened, they wondered where he was going and why. He told them, "It's better for you that I leave. If I don't leave, the Friend won't come. But if I go, I'll send him to you." (John 16: 7, The Message)

Those simple words came to mean something deeper in my life. I heard Jesus saying, "I will not leave you alone. The Friend, the Spirit, will remain with you." Eventually, Jesus' message became part of me claiming my own voice to the world. This is a work of persistent overcoming. God granted me an experience and a voice by which to share it.

Our world has so many voices claiming soundspace. Sometimes, they rattle for the sake of rattling, to fill the silence as their producers whisper: "Stretch."

Yes, the world has many voices. Mine is as important as any other. Kind reader, so is yours. Speak.

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.

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We must support summer food programs

Let's start with this premise: In 2019 America, there should be no children going hungry because their families can't afford to feed them.

Now here's the reality: Hunger is still a problem, even here in Southwest Virginia, despite how prosperous our society is, how low unemployment is and how abundant our food supply is.

It's particularly a problem in our area — and just about everywhere else, for that matter — when kids are out of school for the summer.

That's because free and reduced-price breakfast and lunch programs operate in our schools when they're in session, helping keep hunger at bay for children and teens, who can get at least one or two nutritious meals on most school days. When school is out, those meals aren't available.

Many children are fed breakfast and lunch throughout the school year, and when summer comes, they may not receive nutritious meals at all," Valerie Cupp, director of child nutrition for Washington County Public Schools, said in a recent story by Carolyn R. Wilson in the Washington County News.

There were 3,217 Washington County students eligible for free meals, and 399 eligible for reduced-price meals, during April, she said, adding: "That's 51% of the student population."

To help prevent summer break from becoming a food gap in the lives of these kids, Cupp is overseeing a local Summer Food Service Program through the Washington County school system.

This program, which gets money from the U.S. Agriculture Department and is administered by the state of Virginia, provides payments to operators at the local level that serve healthy meals and snacks for free to children and teens at specific locations.

For this year, the program starts on Monday to provide free nutritious lunches — on-site only — that are prepared in local high school cafeterias. To ensure balanced nutrition to the participating kids, the meals include milk and foods with grains, vegetables, fruits and proteins, using federal school lunch program guidelines.

That lunch could "consist of a chicken sandwich, salad, apple and milk," Cupp said.

For this program, there are no income guidelines or documentation required for children and teens 18 and younger to participate, but any adults who want to eat along with their children will be expected to pay \$3 for their own meals.

"If we can reach children and provide them with meals when school is out, we are answering a desperate need in our community," Cupp said.

There are some challenges to achieving that goal, including not only getting the word out that these free meals are available, but also finding transportation for kids who don't have any way to get to the centers where the meals are being served. Unlike programs such as the senior citizens' Meals on Wheels, operators of these summer children's meal programs are not allowed to deliver the food to the kids.

Many, if not most, of the 230 kids who were served by the Washington County program last year were those who were already at the designated meal sites to participate in other activities, such as summer school and camps, rather than children just walking in off the street, Cupp said. This year she believes about 450 children might be served.

Each site's operating days and times vary. Sites providing meals for this summer's program, which ends Aug. 2, include Patrick Henry High School, 31437 Hillman Highway, Glade Spring, Virginia; Hayters Gap Library, 7720 Hayters Gap Road, Abingdon; John Battle High School, 21264 Battle Hill Drive, Bristol, Virginia; Living Faith Television, 14095 Lee Highway, Bristol, Virginia; and Emmanuel Baptist Church (includes breakfast and lunch), 19383 Lee Highway, Abingdon.

Similar programs operate in other areas, including Smyth County, Virginia, which has announced six participating sites already for its program. That program also begins Monday.

These are worthy programs that could use additional support, including help to spread the word and make sure children who need the meals are able to get to the sites and not have to go hungry.

Summer vacation should be a fun time for kids — not a time spent worrying about where their next meals might come from.

This summer, when it comes to nutrition, let's help make sure no child is left behind.

No good answers in photo controversy

The long-awaited results of investigations into Gov. Ralph Northam's college yearbook scandal dropped this week with a thud.

Investigations — one initiated by the school — answered no questions about whether Mr. Northam was pictured in the racist photo that showed up on his Eastern Virginia Medical School page. They answered no questions about who else might have been in the photo.

Assuming that Mr. Northam was not depicted, the investigations answered no questions about how the photo might have made it onto his page. An honest mistake? Deliberate interference?

What they did do was raise questions about EVMS staff who had noticed the photo long before it hit the news as a political scandal — but who chose to say nothing.

You'll remember the controversy: A conservative website revealed that Mr. Northam's 1984 yearbook page contained a photo of one person in blackface and another in a Ku Klux Klan costume — hideous, odious imagery.

Mr. Northam initially took responsibility and apologized for the picture. Then he recanted, saying that, on second thought, he was neither of the people in the photo. He added that he had

worn blackface once — when he was portraying Michael Jackson in a dance contest.

This stumbling approach to damage control became part of the controversy, along with continuing questions about the identities of the people in the picture.

Mr. Northam said he wanted the truth. EVMS said the same.

The school hired McGuireWoods, legal heavy hitters. Alston and Bird, a law firm from Atlanta, looked into allegations on behalf of the governor. Neither could find conclusive evidence that Mr. Northam either did or did not appear in the photo.

EVMS expects to pay \$300,000 to McGuire-Woods for its services. Surely, the college had better use for that money — scholarships, for instance. But public opinion demanded that they make the effort.

Meanwhile, the controversy that inspired all this appears to be subsiding with a whimper instead of going out with a bang. With no conclusive resolution as to the origin of the photo or the identities of those pictured, we are left with little recourse but to accept the resulting ambiguity.

It's an unsatisfying finale — but it might be the best we'll ever get.

Providing food for the hungry

In a nation that throws away a considerable amount of food (30-40% by some estimates), many still struggle with food insecurity. Portion sizes grow at restaurants, with enough food plated to provide at least two full meals at one ever-growing price (to meet profit margins, after all). The harsh reality is such luxuries are far out of reach for many, either due to costs or lack of transportation

even to the closest grocery store

Breathing Room

C.A. Rollins

or corner market.

Years ago, I came across the term "food desert." Media often depicts a food desert located in an urban community, requiring a transit system to reach the corner store. At that rate, the breadwinner of the family can only purchase what she can carry and afford.

Food deserts exist in Appalachia, too. School is now officially out for summer in Washington and Smyth counties and beyond. Schools and communities address food insecurity for kids — many of whom receive free and reduced meals while in school. Backpack programs are partnerships between churches, communities and local schools, for which volunteers pack backpacks full of food so that kids can carry home shelf-stable food to get them through weekends. Summers and long breaks present real problems for our children. Yes, I mean "our children."

The news is overflowing right now with definitions of children: the born, the unborn, migrant children, poor children, hungry children, spoiled children, privileged children, selfish children, brave children, self-sacrificing children, hopeful children and children who find ways to pull themselves up by their bootstraps. The point is that all of them — all of them — are our children! All of them hunger for food and for hope and for love.

Summer feeding programs exist in our communities. Contact Washington County Virginia Schools Child Nutrition Department at 276-739-3074 or 276-739-3030. You can even text "food" to 877-877 for meals near you. In Smyth County, find Loaves and Fishes Food Pantry at 141 S. Pine Street, Chilhowie, VA 24319, 276-646-9939.

Our elders, affected by declining health and reduced resources, are no longer able either to get to a store, to afford food or to grow food as many have done throughout their lives. According to Feeding America, 5 million Americans ages 50 and over endure hunger. Of senior households receiving services from Feeding America, 63% must choose between medical care and food. For many, the energy required to prepare meals is simply exhausting. Elders turn to canned and frozen meals, which often have high salt, sugar and fat, all of which may be detrimental for people with increasing health concerns.

In Washington County, Meals on Wheels is a valuable resource bringing food to homebound senior citizens. Locally, you can learn more by contacting the Community Center of Abingdon at 276-628-3911. The program needs your financial support in order to continue helping our neighbors affected by food insecurity. You can send a contribution to 300 Senior Drive, Abingdon, VA 24210, or you can use the "Donate" button on Facebook.

From a spiritual level, the good Lord Jesus knew that he had to feed a hungry belly in order to reach an aching soul. He took just a few fish and a couple of hunks of bread and made them feed a multitude of thousands. Our contributions of a few dollars can go a long way to reducing food insecurity for so many of our neighbors.

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.