

OUR VIEW

Federal disaster relief: Tossing cash in the ocean in NC

BY THE EDITORIAL BOARD

After a Nor'easter last November, a WECT-TV reporter went to see how the storm had affected Topsail Island, a long barrier island between Morehead City and Wilmington that is especially susceptible to beach erosion. On the beach he spoke with Topsail resident Laura McCormick. She gave this assessment: "We have at least lost, I would say, two thirds to three quarters of the beach that was just put back last year, and now we've lost it in one storm that wasn't even that bad," she said. "So my concern is during the next storm, when nobody knows when that's going to be, how much of it is going to be gone?"

Last week, she got an answer: Less. For a while, anyway.

It's not that the island's beach dynamics have changed; erosion pressures are likely getting worse with climate change and sea level rise. But for a few years, the beaches will be expanded by a windfall of federal dollars. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers announced last week that it will spend \$237 million to rebuild dunes and widen the beach on 10 miles of Topsail Island shoreline.

That's great news for homeowners and visitors to the towns of North Topsail Island and Surf City, which will get four and six miles of beach improvements, respectively. The Army Corps also had good news for another barrier island to the north, Bogue Banks, which will receive \$44.5 million to build nearly six miles of dunes and widen 22 miles of beach.

The cost of the projects is stunning. The federal government has, in effect, chosen to dump more than a quarter-billion dollars into the ocean. According to a Western Carolina University database, federal state and local governments have spent at least \$909 million in real dollars since 1939 to renourish North Carolina beaches. This year's outlay will be more than a quarter of that 80-year total.

Robert Young, a geology professor who directs the Program for the Study of Developed Shorelines at Western Carolina, said, "I understand the value of rebuilding beaches to the local community, but I've never understood the federal interest in spending that much money on a local coastal economy. We've been spending billions."

What makes the expense especially excessive is that it is coming out of funds for disaster relief. Those funds should go toward preventing storm damage in small towns in rural areas that can't afford to protect buildings, homes and roads from flooding. It's good that the Army Corps of Engineers is spending \$39 million to build a new levee in off-flooded Princeville, but much more is going to protect beach homes.

Orrin Pilkey, Duke emeritus professor of geology and an expert on coastal erosion, said in a letter to *The News & Observer*: "These projects can only be characterized as madness. The sea-level rise is clearly accelerating, increasingly intense storms are expected as has happened in the last four years, and the amounts of money spent on these beaches will need to be expended again and again for years into the future."

North Carolina Sens. Richard Burr and Thom Tillis and Rep. David Rouzer did impressive work in wrangling such an enormous amount of federal cash for local beach projects. The projects will help in the short run, but in the long run the sea is coming for these islands. Burr, Tillis and Rouzer said as much in a June letter to the Assistant Secretary of the Army that asked for federal funding for the beach projects. They noted that on Topsail Island, three hurricanes in the 1990s took 25 feet of beach and today "shoreline erosion continues at a rate of two to three feet per year in some portion of the project area."

Piling cash into the sand won't stop that for long.



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Rethink plan on Discovery Place

Regarding "New future seen for Discovery Place museum," (Jan. 17):

Either renovating or demolishing Discovery Place could make it unavailable for at least two years. Two years is an eternity for school-age children. Build a new Discovery Place someplace else to avoid denying thousands of school children access for an eternity.

Peter McLean, Rock Hill

Voters have good reason to oust Tillis

Last week I spoke with Sen. Thom Tillis' Washington office and was told the senator feels the House impeachment articles are weak and not persuasive, and for that reason sees no need for additional evidence or witnesses.

That doesn't sound to me like an impartial juror. But, I recognize that Tillis cares far more about his job than he cares for the Constitution or his oath of office.

I hope the people of North Carolina are paying attention to this impeachment and to Tillis' participation in it. My guess is Tillis will continue to support this president, knowing full well that he is guilty of the articles the House presented. Come November, I trust N.C. voters will remove Tillis.

Chris Porier, Charlotte

Charges against Trump are meritless

Regarding "Impeachment of Trump is no sham" (Jan. 10 Forum)

This Forum writer suggests Trump supporters are willing to overlook the Constitution in blind support of President Trump. Quite the opposite is true.

From before President Trump was sworn into office the left has been screaming impeachment. We have watched with amusement and horror as the left has leveled a series of meritless charges at our president.

All true Americans take the Constitution as our very foundation, but with such abuse of power by the House and lack of hard evidence, yes, we will overtly support our fairly elected president and his America First promise.

Jay Lewis, Davidson

Every senator should be ashamed

The word for today is "corrupt," which means having or showing a willingness to act dishonestly in return for money or personal gain. By taking a solemn oath that the majority of members of both parties know in advance they plan to violate, the Senate has declared itself to be the most corrupt governmental body in the world. Every single member should be gravely ashamed.

Nelson Furman, Charlotte

Pelosi I saw was consumed by hate

In her Jan. 14 op-ed Kathleen Parker opined that women should rule the world given that they are wise, sentient beings not given to violence and revenge — unlike us men.

Her words returned to me on Wednesday as I watched House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, consumed by hatred, gloating over the fact that she has forever branded President Trump with the scarlet letter of impeachment.

Steve Kardisco, Hickory

GAO says Trump broke the law

The evidence that Donald Trump abused his power and obstructed a lawful investigation is overwhelming and grows by the day. If constitutional misconduct isn't enough for some, consider that the Government Accountability Office just ruled that Trump's act of withholding aid to Ukraine constitutes a crime. A government official cannot arbitrarily refrain from performing his duty for the purpose of a personal political gain — and heaven help us if we allow that to stand.

Arnie Grieves, Charlotte

Quit excusing Trump's behavior

I am so tired of hearing Trump supporters say, "The president does many irascible things, but..." or, "I wish he wouldn't tweet

so much, but..."

Saying they don't like the way he behaves doesn't excuse them. They knew he was a narcissist who demeaned anyone who didn't support him unconditionally, and they elected him anyway.

If they truly don't like his meanness, they should insist that members of Congress challenge and check his behavior. Or, vote him and them out.

Ben Sharpton, Waxhaw

A refreshing take on Medicaid expansion

Thanks for the Jan. 12 editorial about Kansas' move toward expanding its Medicaid program. It is very refreshing to see conservatives called out for their actual ideological objections to beneficial policies, that it is not about the money, but rather their resentment over giving something to the "undeserving." That "moral pillar" is the same basis for their resistance to Medicare for All, which would permanently and definitively resolve all of these petty Medicaid expansion battles, while saving all of us a lot of money.

Denise Finck-Rothman



Dr. Denise Finck-Rothman, Charlotte

teachers. That's why next month The Belk Foundation is convening a conversation in Raleigh on Recognizing Top Talent: National Voices on Identifying and Retaining NC's Best Teachers.

Ms. Hill, the 30-year teacher veteran, is beginning to consider retirement and passing the baton to the next generation of educators. When it comes to coaching fellow teachers how to set and meet higher expectations for students, she says "we just have to change the mindset." It's a lesson we all need to heed for the benefit of 1.5 million North Carolina K-12 students.

Johanna Edens Anderson is executive director of the Belk Foundation, a Charlotte-based family foundation investing in K-3 achievement and excellent teachers and leaders.

FOR THE RECORD

In pursuit of equity, focus on teachers first

BY JOHANNA EDENS ANDERSON

"Raise our expectations!" That's always been Julie Hill's mantra as a teacher coach in CMS elementary schools. "We have to stop letting excuses get in our way, like language barriers or turbulent home lives. Put all that to the side and focus on what we can control in the classroom," says Ms. Hill, part of the CMS Teacher Leader Pathway program that promotes highly effective teachers into coaching roles, often supporting beginning teachers. "Every child can grow no matter where they start."

So instead of staying on the same reading level for four weeks, she challenges teachers to accelerate to

the next level in two weeks. Her focus on higher expectations for all students has significantly increased the number of kindergartners on track for reading at Governors Village STEM Academy, a Title 1 CMS elementary school recently removed from a list of the state's low performing schools because of its improved performance.

Now we have an opportunity to expand the pool of teacher coaches like Ms. Hill throughout CMS and North Carolina — and help close a persistent achievement gap that's holding back thousands of students in low-performing, economically disadvantaged schools. On Jan. 21, the CMS Community Equity Committee meets for the first time after

being created by the School Board to find ways to reduce inequities in student performance. While the committee could explore many different areas of equity, more effective teachers must be their priority. Research proves that teachers, more than any other in-school factor, drive student success.

The status quo isn't meeting the needs of our students. For example, in CMS, just 29.3% of economically disadvantaged third graders are reading proficiently, compared to 57.9% of third graders who are not economically disadvantaged. Effective teachers, and those coached by effective teachers, are the difference makers who can erase these inequitable

outcomes.

When we do the math, the potential is enormous. In CMS alone, there are more than 1,700 teachers with three years or less experience. With an average of 20 students per class, a total of 34,000 students could benefit from their teacher being coached by someone like Ms. Hill, providing real time feedback, co-teaching and reviewing small group plans. In CMS, as across the state, it's the high-poverty schools that have far more beginning teachers — a clear inequity.

The imperative for access to effective teachers is underscored by a recently released report: Sound Basic Education for All: An Action Plan for North Carolina by West-Ed's national researchers.

The report was prompted by the Leandro lawsuit that began in the mid-1990s and established the state's constitutional duty to provide all children a sound basic education. Of the key recommendations, West-Ed flags the potential for our most talented teachers to bring up the next generation of teachers. The report implores our state to provide high-quality mentors to novice teachers and to implement advanced teaching roles — ultimately, retaining and extending the reach of high-performing teachers.

More than two decades have passed since the Leandro mandate. State policy makers also need to recognize the urgency of recognizing, measuring and retaining our best