

Loop is key to BRAC

For all I know, Mecklenburg-metro officials have a solid case to make for completing the Interstate 485 loop. They do not have a solid case, or even a slightly plausible case, to make for stalling the Fayetteville Outer Loop.

Like Mayor Tony Chavonne, who stopped in Tuesday, I hope the standoff over loop money can be resolved without this further degenerating into an us-versus-them thing. We are, after all, talking about two duly authorized projects. But, like some others who were seated at the same table, I'm leery of leaving misinformation lying out there unchallenged — especially when it was put there by people of influence.

There is, for example, an idea that Charlotte Mayor Pat McCrory picked up and incorporated into his campaign patter during the recent gubernatorial contest. Fayetteville, he said, had "jumped line" and laid claim to loop money that was Charlotte's by right. (But let none dare call that politicizing the process!) The Fayetteville project, as noted here six weeks ago, dates to the 1970s and still has only part of one leg on the ground. I don't remember all this righteous fury about the sinister Outer Loop during the years before a recession drew down the money pool.

Another argument, repeated by several officials, holds that Transportation Department spending needs reforming because the money should go where traffic is heaviest. That's nuts. Under such a rule, Charlotte would always have first grab at whatever money was available, not only because of its permanent population, but because of its many major connectors. Eventually, as Charlotte surged ahead, even Raleigh would be left sitting on the curb, singing "Buddy, can you spare a dime?" As for comparatively light traffic on Fayetteville's Interstate 295, how dense would you expect it to be on the finished 20 percent of a loop whose first segment crosses several miles of open country and stops at the first thoroughfare it intersects?

There should be a way to do both. There may not be, but it needs consideration. This week Bob Morgan, who heads the Charlotte Chamber of Commerce, suggested that the state let both cities pay for their projects with tolls. That's a fine idea — for Charlotte. Go for it. But it isn't nit-picky to note that much of Fort Bragg lies within Fayetteville; that Fort Bragg is the nation's foremost rapid-response platform but has no interstate connection; that most of what enters and leaves Bragg moves by highway, and that putting toll plazas on the Outer Loop would be like building one in front of your local fire station. When these people are called into action, they need as little as possible in their way.

That brings us to the only person at the table who wore a uniform: Col. David Fox, garrison commander. If you missed his op-ed piece in Friday's paper, you can learn much about the Army's plans, projects and requirements by clicking the Opinion tab at fayobserver.com. For now, consider this: We didn't invent BRAC to win an argument about a loop that had earned approval long before the decision to move two commands to Bragg. But BRAC does add greatly to the urgency of the road work. The move is, in Fox's words, "a done deal." Huge commitments have been made. The loop, Murchison Road and N.C. 87 are a package deal that cannot be unbound. The fort already faces challenges in moving troops and materiel.

We should be able to discuss this as Chamber president Doug Peters and Jeannette Council, chairwoman of the Cumberland County Board of Commissioners, prefer: in terms of its great economic development potential. First, though, let's have done with the myth that reform isn't reform unless Charlotte-Mecklenburg ends up in control, leaving those who power the world's pre-eminent military base to fight just to get to work.

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Pope's comments on gays were wrong

The Times, London, on the Pope:

In his end-of-year address to the Curia, Pope Benedict XVI decried modern society's blurring of gender roles. He also urged the defense of heterosexuality — a cause that he likened in importance to preserving the rain forests from destruction.

The Pope was justified in his criticism of "gender theory," though the target is obscure and represents more an error than a threat. But in depicting homosexual relations as a threat to the natural order of creation, he is wrong. His remarks inflame rather than inform theological reflection on the intractable issues of human sexuality. And the nature and timing of his intervention detract from the reflective character of his Christian witness.

On other issues, the Pope has shown himself commendably willing to reflect critically on the church's role in history and society. The Pope has argued that Martin Luther was a church reformer rather than a heretic. And the pope has advanced dialogue with Muslim scholars.

Yet on matters of gender and sexuality, the Pope shows reluctance to move beyond superstition and to embrace tolerance.

From The National Post, Toronto, Canada



'Even after four years, I cannot forget how I lost hold of my wife and baby. I have tried in vain to look for them for three years. Now I have no choice but to accept their departure as destiny.'

— Ibrahim Musa, a 42-year-old civil servant in Indonesia, whose family was washed out to sea in the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami

Madoff has lost moral compass

Jerusalem Post, on Bernard Madoff:

Not many people have heard of the Yeshaya Horowitz Foundation, which disbursed about \$140 million over the past 15 years in Israel. Started by an anonymous donor, it funded basic medical research. Such work, however, often sets the stage for private industry to take over. Horowitz money paid for doctoral and post-doctoral fellowships, and was just now covering the completion of a lab to be jointly operated by Hadassah Hospital and the Hebrew University.

Now it appears that the Yeshaya Horowitz Foundation has been wiped out — one of a long list of organizations laid low or mortally wounded by the avarice of Bernard Madoff.

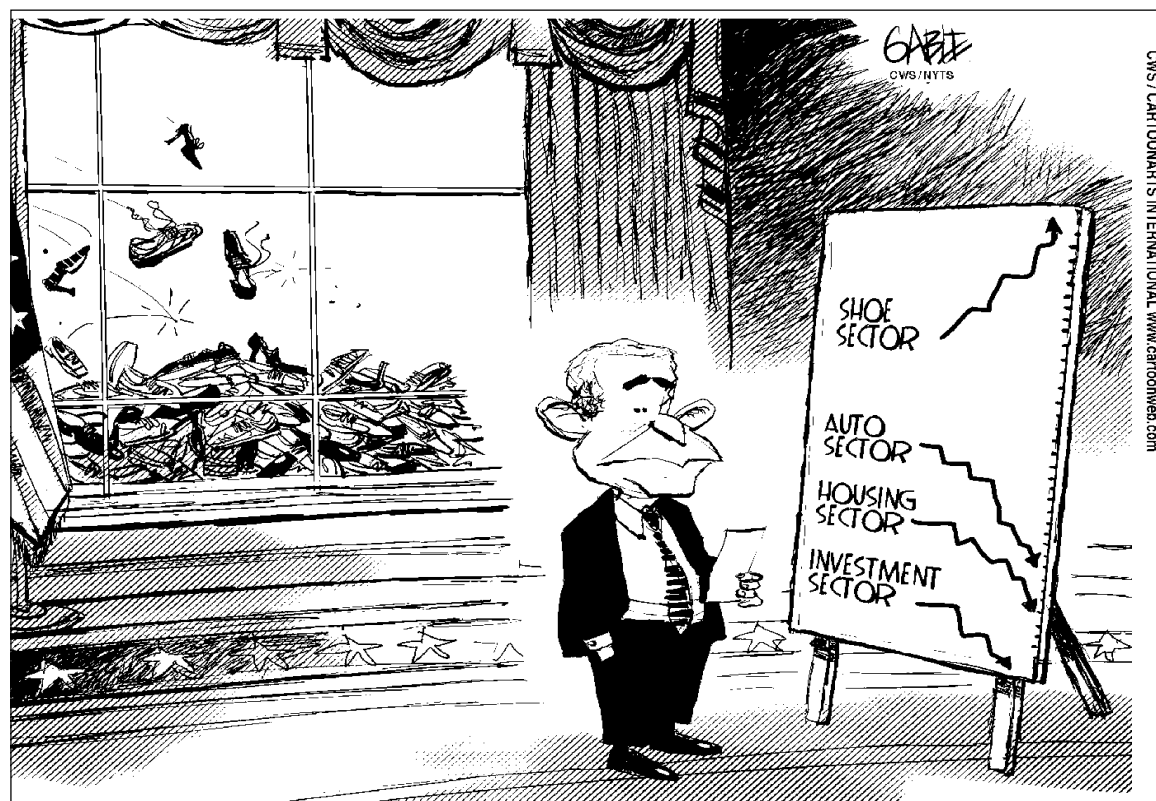
The Jewish world finds itself shaken — by the financial losses caused by the international economic downturn, by the blows inflicted by Madoff and, on top of these, by a profound sense of embarrassment at the perpetrator's openly aligning himself with modern Orthodox Jewry. If we tell ourselves that Muslim terrorism is enabled by a larger collective that tolerates extremism, what do we say about a swindler with such close ties to our community?

Was not Jerusalem Post financial columnist Pinchas Landau spot-on when he inquired whether it was Madoff alone who had lost his moral compass? Landau is surely justified in emphasizing the ethical component to Judaism and arguing that too many of us, focused on ritual, have lost sight of its centrality.

The Jewish people have engaged from time immemorial in a never-ending struggle to be a light unto the nations. Madoff is a dismal reminder that we still have a long way to go. Our capacity for communal soul-searching is a strength. Let's not shirk it.

If we tell ourselves that Muslim terrorism is enabled by a larger collective that tolerates extremism, what do we say about a swindler with such close ties to our community?

From The Globe and Mail, Toronto, Canada



'Let us pray for mutual understanding, that hearts will be opened, so that borders can be opened.'

— Pope Benedict XVI, at Christmas Midnight Mass, on his hopes for the Holy Land

Promote bill to aid the unemployed

Asahi Shimbun, Tokyo, Japan, on the economy:

With a third of its work force hired as irregular employees, this recession has hit Japan's new labor environment hard. Companies view such employees as adjustment valves, and fire them with little thought. In such an environment, an economic downturn has an immediate and major impact on employment as has never been seen before.

Three opposition parties, including Minshuto (Democratic Party of Japan), have submitted and passed an emergency employment bill in the Upper House, but, amazingly, Prime Minister Taro Aso and the ruling coalition are bent on burying this in the Lower House.

Many features of the bill are similar to what the government has already proposed, such as making public housing and financial aid available to those who've lost their jobs and homes.

The important thing here is speed and the ability to move with alacrity to implement security measures so that the newly jobless can receive relief quickly.

We urge the prime minister to forego his holidays. He should seek cooperation from the opposition parties and promote whatever legislation is necessary for emergency job security measures.

From The Economist, London, England

