

Water Takes Center Stage in Orange County

OWASA Leads by Example

By Mark Marcoplos

The drought of 2001-2002 was a momentous event. It was the first time in the history of our region that we ran up against the limits of an essential resource.

We survived without major trauma, only to catch our breath for a few years before hitting those same limits again in the current drought. Unfortunately, droughts of this magnitude are likely to occur again.

The good news is that we still have multiple opportunities to reduce our water consumption, improve efficiency, and prepare for a more sustainable future – if we can learn from experience.

When the “miracle rain” of October 2002 marked the beginning of the end of the drought in Orange County, neighboring jurisdictions rescinded water use restrictions and simply declared a return to business as usual. Governor Easley and his administration paid little attention to the crisis and missed a golden opportunity to advance sustainable water practices in the state.

The Orange Water and Sewer Authority (OWASA), however, which serves the urban area of Chapel Hill and Carrboro, reacted in a unique way to the 2001-2002 drought. The OWASA Board and staff realized that most of the emergency water-savings measures adopted during the drought had not impinged significantly upon the quality of life. After assessing lessons learned, the Board incorporated a number of measures taken during that drought into year-round water conservation requirements. These included reduced outdoor watering, limiting spray irrigation to three days a week, requiring rain sensors on irrigation systems so they shut off when it's raining, banning restaurants from serving water unless requested, directing hotels and motels to change and wash bed linens only upon customer's request, and banning general water wastage such as the irrigation of sidewalks.

At the same time, the groundwork was laid for a partnership with UNC to install a reclaimed water system that

would pipe treated wastewater to key locations on campus that currently use treated drinking water. When the system is operable in 2009, reclaimed water will be provided to four chiller plants which require lots of cooling water. Later the system will be extended to athletic fields and more chiller plants. It is projected that 530,000 gallons of drinking water per day will be saved, representing six to eight percent of daily usage.

Interestingly, this project was first considered in the 1990s, but the costs and benefits were not deemed worthwhile at the time. What a difference a drought makes.

UNC was highly motivated to resurrect the idea: if the 2001-2002 drought had continued for a few more months, students would have been sent home and the operations of the hospital would have been compromised.

Rate Changes

A cursory look at water use patterns revealed that a relatively small number of affluent users were spraying their lawns with enough water to meet the average needs of fifteen households or more. This and other considerations led to the adoption of a billing system with a tiered-rate structure designed to encourage conservation. In this system, a household that can bring its monthly usage below 3,000 gallons actually pays a discounted rate, while those in the average range (3,000-6,000 gallons per month) pay the average rate, and those in three higher usage categories pay premium rates. The highest tier, 16,000 gallons and above, pays three times the cost paid by the average user.

This rate change was instituted on
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Higher Conservation Standards Sought

By Bernadette Pelissier

For months there have been almost daily news articles about the drought. Initially, local media focused

on how much water remained in the reservoirs and on water restrictions. More recently, the conservation has turned to future actions of the state and area municipalities to help us wisely manage our limited water resources.

One method of increasing water supply is through conservation, which

can decrease our vulnerability to future droughts as our population increases. This is particularly important for Orange Water and Sewage Authority (OWASA) customers, who will be more vulnerable to drought between 2020 and 2030: After 2020, particularly under drought conditions, there is a risk that there will be a gap between water demand and available water supply. The expanded stone quarry that is slated to become a new source of drinking water for OWASA will not be available until 2030.

There are several initiatives currently under consideration to conserve county water supplies. Many of the conservation measures involve technological advances and are not dependent on individual voluntary conservation actions. Since 2006, these initiatives have been discussed by a joint local government workgroup made up of representatives from Chapel Hill/Carrboro and Orange County, a group that includes OWASA. The conservation measures being considered have been success-

fully implemented in other communities. A final report summarizing recommended measures is near completion. The OWASA Board of Directors will be asked to approve the workgroup recommendations in February 2008. The next step will be for OWASA and the local governing bodies to take action.

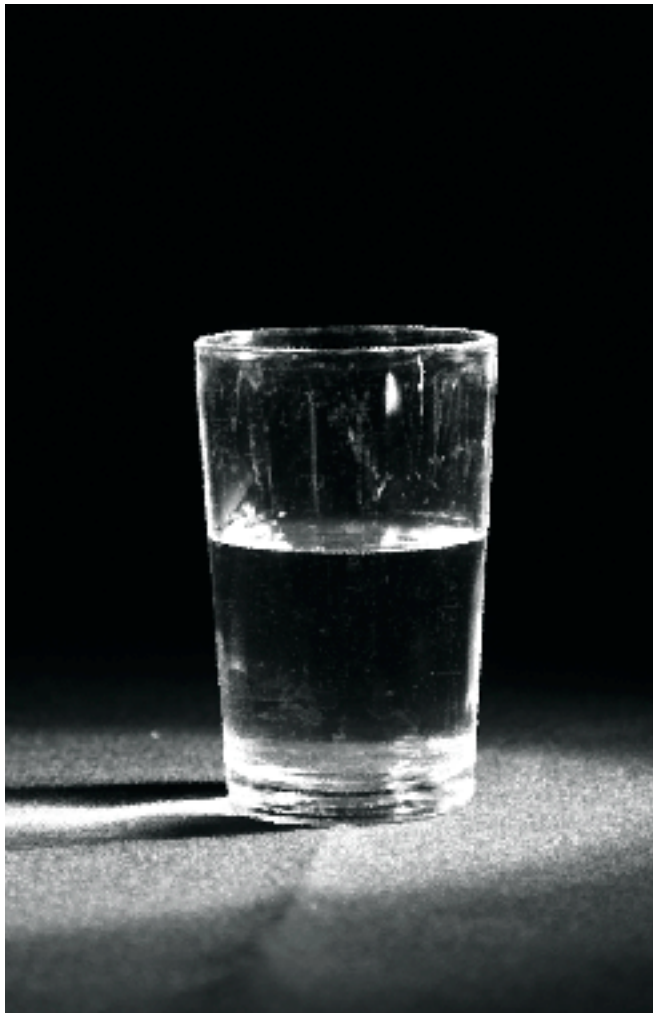
Among the report's recommendations, OWASA will be asked to implement higher conservation standards for new construction than are currently in place. These raised standards can then be referred to in town or county building ordinances. One condition would require sustainable landscaping, i.e., the use of landscape design, selection of plants, and design and maintenance of irrigation systems to save water. Proper landscaping measures can substantially reduce water demands, particularly during the summer. Landscaping standards could also include prohibitions against homeowner association rules which require maintenance of a certain amount of green turf.

Another condition of service recommended in the report concerns water-use efficiency standards in new development. New developments would be approved on the condition that builders adhere to minimal standards of water efficiency. These standards could include installation of ultra low-flow plumbing fixtures, connection to an existing water reclamation system, landscape design, and installation of cisterns, among others.

One of the proposed measures is an ordinance that will require enabling legislation – state legislation that provides the authority for a local government to adopt ordinances and regulations that they would not otherwise be able to adopt. In this case, the enabling legislation would permit Orange County and its towns to adopt water conservation ordinances.

The ordinance being put forth would require that plumbing fixtures be retrofitted at the time of property resale or change of use. The retrofitting of toilets, showerheads and faucets in just one single-family home built before 1980 could save up to 3,500 gallons per month, enough to supply all the water for a household of four for an entire month. Within the OWASA service area alone, there are 5,600 single-family homes and 7,810 multi-family units built before 1980. Without the passage of enabling legislation, OWASA or the towns and county can only offer financial incentives to property owners for such retrofitting of plumbing – not require that these measures be implemented.

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Annual Precinct Meetings – Where Victory Begins

The 2008 election year in Orange County gets off to a rousing start with the annual precinct meetings on March 11. At this year's meetings, precincts will fill any missing positions in the precinct leadership, elect delegates to the County Convention, and get organized for the upcoming elections.

Precincts are the foundation of the Orange County Democratic Party, the grassroots party organization. Precincts register voters, make the person-to-person contacts that are most effective in getting voters to the

polls, and man the polling places on election day. Some precincts undertake special projects. For example, last fall precincts collaborated to organize three very successful candidate forums that helped educate the public for the town council elections.

We have exciting and important races at all levels – local, state, and national. In addition to full support for our local candidates, Orange County Democrats must provide a big turnout for the state and national elections: the Democratic plurality in Orange County can make the difference in the

statewide races. A victory in November starts with strong precinct organizations now. So attend your precinct meeting!

To find where and when your precinct will meet, see the Annual Precinct Meetings list on the OCDP website (www.orangedems.com), contact your precinct chair (click the “How to Reach Us” link on the website), send a note to contact@orangedems.com, or call (919) 933-9662.

A Conversation with Carrboro Alderman Joal Hall Broun



Diana Kowal interviewed Alder(wo)man Broun for *The Democrat*.

What are your responsibilities on the Carrboro Board of Alderman?

We manage the town and set the policy. We decide land use policies and parks and recreation policies. We decide and set every policy that you can think about for the town. We set social policy. We decide whether or not a particular development is approved or not. Each of us acts as a liaison to a certain number of advisory boards.

How did you first get involved in town government?

I first got involved when I applied to be on the Economic Development Board and was appointed [instead] to the Orange Water and Sewer Authority (OWASA). I had spoken to the late Hank Anderson, to Frances Shetley, who had previously been on the Board, to Ellie Kinnaird, who was mayor at the time, and to Fred Battle, who was and still is head of the NAACP. I was interested in

participating in my community.

How many years have you been involved?

I moved to Carrboro in 1992, so since 1994 I've been involved in town affairs in one capacity or another. I like being involved in making my community better. I would encourage everyone who is a resident of Carrboro to get involved in how Carrboro is governed. We have a lot of advisory positions open and we want people to come in and participate. I think government is best when you have a really healthy exchange of ideas from citizens with diverse backgrounds and experiences – that come together and make Carrboro better. I'm always encouraging people to participate.

How much time does being an alderman take?

I would have to say ten hours a week, and that's a guess. Sometimes it's more, depending on what the issue is.

You have a full-time job and family. How do you balance it all?

Our house is messy. [Laughter.] Some of my Board work is done on nights and weekends. And I'm a really early riser. I can get a lot done if I'm the only one in my family up – both the household and other responsibilities that I have. You can call me at 5:00 am and I will talk with you.

What are your 2008 priorities for Carrboro?

My 2008 priority is to make Carrboro more economically sustainable for the middle class. When I first moved here Carrboro was very affordable. Our popularity has bred high housing costs. I'm trying to maintain the affordability of Carrboro for everyone. Land value has gone up and part of that is driven by the popularity of our schools.

What are you doing to get that to happen?

We're primarily looking at economic development because one of the things that makes it less affordable are the taxes. Part of the problem is that Orange County does not have a lot of commercial tax revenue. The other part of the problem is that Orange County is seeing a lot of its sales-tax revenue leave the county, and go either to Alamance County – because of the big retail complex on I-85 West between Burlington and Greensboro – or Durham County, because of Southpoint, which has really had an effect on Orange County as a whole. We at the political leadership need to be thinking to ourselves [that] if Carolina North is going to be a reality – and I believe it is – how can we, the surrounding municipalities, and the county, take advantage of that and encourage appropriate commercial development in our respective jurisdictions that benefits the entire county.

What are your challenges?

Our biggest challenge is to concentrate on developing homegrown businesses. Homegrown businesses typically are good corporate citizens, contribute to the community, and want the community to excel.

We have got to start thinking about if we are helping those folks who

want to have a business in Orange County, actually have a business in Orange County – in Carrboro or in Chapel Hill. Even if we reach our goal of doubling Carrboro's commercial base, we still need Chapel Hill and the rest of the county to help out.

Last winter I attended a meeting at the ArtsCenter about encouraging more cultural events to build the economic base.

Yes, Carrboro does a really good job at that. About 20 years ago we had the Hamlin Siler Report, when there was a

concentrated effort from the Board of Alderman to make Carrboro a walkable community. They wanted residents to be able to walk to a restaurant, to the Century Center, the ArtsCenter, or Cat's Cradle, for example. This vision is coming together, so now we have to take the next step.

And what is that?

Part of the next step is putting some commercial development out in the northern area of the town. We have a tremendous amount of residential property. Now it's time to talk about commercial or mixed-use development. Another thing that we need to discuss, in a fashion that makes sense, is that there is going to be an issue about the amount of water. This drought has been an eye-opener for some communities. We have really been blessed because we have reserves – we have the quarry. We're in a lot better position than some surrounding municipalities. We sell water to other jurisdictions when they need it — Hillsborough and Durham. But if the State starts talking about a mandated inter-local agreement requiring that we do that, it might be problematic. We need a general discussion.

In Carrboro we're developing an ordinance saying that home-owners associations can't require residents to have green lawns. A concentrated municipal water system is for drinking, cooking, eating, and sewage. Having a great lawn is not the reason

we have OWASA. That needs to be at the front of people's heads instead of the back, when there's a drought.

What's the most frustrating part of the job?

What's most frustrating is the difficulty in persuading people to think long term. One of our problems as a country is that we don't think about the long-term implications of some of the things we do. If we continually look at long-term effects, things tend to go better. I really believe that. We need to set long-term goals that will outlive our terms on the Board.

"I like being involved in making my community better."

Mariah McPherson Celebrated

The literary world has its Pulitzer Prize, but here in Orange County we Democrats awarded our first *Pollitzer Prize* to long-time volunteer and activist Mariah McPherson of Hillsborough.

The award was made back in October at the OCDP's annual Legislative Breakfast held at the Friday Center. The event drew a crowd of some 250 county Democrats together with current state legislators, candidates for local and national office, and our US House Representative, David Price.

Given jointly by the OCDP and the Orange County Democratic Women, the prize recognizes the same commitment to grassroots political action that marked the lives of Bill and Peggy Pollitzer, residents of Chapel Hill from 1957 until their deaths in 2002 and 2007, respectively.

A monetary award and a bouquet

of flowers accompanied the framed certificate presented to McPherson, which read: "In recognition of many years of commitment to Democratic Party values, grassroots politics, and activist work toward a better life for all."

Mariah

McPherson, formerly Mariah Ann Gordon, was introduced to politics early on. The Columbia, Tennessee native was born into a racially mixed family, and her maternal great-grandfather was a governor of Tennessee during the 1800s.

She came east to attend North Carolina College (now NC Central University) and worked for William Pearson, Durham's first

African-American judge. After finishing her college education, she married William E. McPherson and moved to Hillsborough.

In nominating McPherson for the prize, Precinct Coach Hazel Lunsford of Hillsborough told the nominating committee, "Working with local Democrats through the years, Mariah has held every possible office at the precinct level, has chaired the Orange County Democratic Party, currently serves on the state executive commit-

tee, led the Orange County Commission for Women, and has supported a host of organizations whose purpose is getting out the vote and finding ways to inform and involve minorities."

Florence Glasser of Chapel Hill presented the prize on behalf of the co-sponsoring Democratic groups, telling the crowd, "No one has worked harder for the Orange County Democratic Party at the grassroots level than Mariah McPherson. She has done door-to-door canvassing, called people to remind them to vote, and given rides to the polls. She is responsible for establishing the street leadership approach to getting out the vote."

Following the death of Peggy Pollitzer last March, the prize was established as a living memorial to the couple, according to OCDP Chair Jack Sanders.

"Both of the Pollitzers believed deeply in the power of the people to listen, learn, and make informed choices about national priorities at the vot-

ing booth," he said. "Each took a turn chairing the Kings Mill precinct, and Peggy helped to launch the Orange County Democratic Women.

"The Pollitzers believed in helping the needy and working together for strong communities, using the government to improve life for all of us. They were – and still are – a source of inspiration and motivation for us all."

Mariah McPherson, age 80, died on Jan. 21 – Martin Luther King Day. OCDP Chair Jack Sanders said, "Mariah was an energetic and motivational leader, and a warm and gracious person. We will miss her wisdom, humor, optimism, and friendship."

We send condolences to her husband William, son Billy, and daughter Maria. The family has started the Mariah G. McPherson Scholarship Fund in her memory. Anyone wishing to donate to the fund can mail contributions to P.O. Box 927, Hillsborough, NC 27278.



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Part 1: Immigration, Jobs, and Fences

We asked OCDP's Heidirose Kober to interview Marisol Jiménez McGee.

Q: The number of immigrants coming to North Carolina has quadrupled in the last 10 years. Why?

There are a lot of factors that have come together in North Carolina to bring folks into this state and throughout the Southeast. There was a significant economic shift, particularly in North Carolina, following the implementation of NAFTA in the mid-1990s, when much of the growth in immigration population really started to manifest itself. North Carolina had been primarily a production and agriculturally based economy; with NAFTA we saw a lot of that industry leave. In its place a growing intellectual economy developed, based on professionals who needed more housing and more services. They weren't prepared to work in agriculture and production. There was a gap that needed to be filled, and immigrants came and filled that gap.

The other part is that North Carolina has had an established migrant population that has been coming here seasonally for many years, and when they decided to settle in the US, they settled in the places they knew.

Q: Some say immigrants take jobs away from Americans and depress wages. Others say immigrants are critical for our continued prosperity and their absence would cause whole industries to collapse. Your view?

Immigrants are coming in and taking jobs that are primarily in low-skilled labor. In North Carolina the dynamic is two-fold: baby boomers began having fewer children, and their children had better access to higher education through community colleges and the university system. Once having attained a certain level of higher education, they were taking jobs that they had been educated for, primarily in more metropolitan areas, like the Raleigh/Durham/Chapel Hill area or the Charlotte/Mecklenburg area. Most were not necessarily returning to the

towns where they grew up. That left a major population gap in many rural areas throughout North Carolina. An entire generation of North Carolinians had left in pursuit of higher aspiration with their new degrees.

The other dynamic, though, is that there is a group [of North Carolinians] who have not been able to access higher education, have not been able to attain more professional positions, and in fact are prepared to take jobs in production, agriculture, construction, and the service industry. Undocumented immigrants who are trying to get those jobs are being positioned as more vulnerable workers who can be more easily taken advantage of by unscrupulous employers, and they are pitted against American workers who are trying to organize for living wages, safe working conditions, etc.

Undocumented workers are less likely to complain and they are less likely to get involved in organizing because they do not think they have any rights. Interestingly enough, that dynamic is not unique to North Carolina or even the United States. It is actually a dynamic created by our global economic system, which is always looking for more vulnerable workers who will "do the jobs nobody else will do" and work for the cheapest wages in the least safe working conditions with the least environmental

protection. The question is, who really is responsible for this type of dynamic among workers? Do you blame the most vulnerable workers for this dynamic, or do you look to the industries and corporations who take advantage of the situation and exploit these workers and hold the employers responsible?

Q: Do you believe that building a fence and militarizing our borders is an effective deterrent?

There have been many emotional debates around this idea of enforcement only. The reality is that immigration is such a complex issue, and such a complex system, that a single solution like that is never going to fix things. The United States has increased its expenditures on the US/Mexican border in terms of militarization, border control, and the

ous areas of the United States, specifically the Arizona desert. This year alone, over 500 people have died in Arizona, people who were trying to come into this country to landscape our yards, wash our dishes, and build our roads. People are dying to do that. The militarization of the border has been a direct factor in this humanitarian crisis.

The second thing building a wall has done is increase the level of smuggling. Because it is so much more difficult to come across, people are relying more and more on human traffickers to enter the United States. This has actually fed into an



entire black market for entering the US. Thirdly, what had been in the United States a cyclical, migratory pattern of people coming in seasonally, working for a season and then returning to their countries of origin has been cut off. It has not stopped people coming in, but rather stopped people from leaving.

Building a wall and calling it done has been a massive failure. It's time for us to have a difficult, complicated, controversial but critical conversation about the realities of what's happening with immigration and really begin the process of comprehensive reform.

Heiderose Kober, an immigrant from Germany, has lived in the United States since 1973 and in Orange County since 1996. She is an active member of the OCDP Policy and Action Committee, where she chairs the subcommittee on Foreign Policy and Immigration. She lives in Efland.

Marisol Jiménez McGee, originally from Chicago, IL, has worked for immigrant advocacy in Colorado and North Carolina, focusing on policy. She came to North Carolina in 2000 and earned her masters at the UNC-CH School of Social Work. Until recently, McGee served as advocacy director and lobbyist for El Pueblo. She lives in Chatham County.

"We have a continued need for immigrant labor in this country. Building a wall does not fix that."

OWASA from page 1

October 1, 2007, so it is too early to know how dramatic the effects will be. It is safe to say that usage will decrease as consumers consider costs.

Many of the same proactive measures that OWASA took in reaction to the first drought are now being considered by our neighbors due to the current drought. The Easley administration however, traditionally hesitant to enact any policies that might impinge on its big-business supporters, has yet to unveil any substantive policy recommendations.

OWASA's approach, by contrast, is both visionary and practical. A statement in its "Sustainability Report" explains: "Because there is a finite supply of water available to meet our community's future needs, we are working harder to manage and use our supplies more efficiently. Water conservation is no longer just a drought management tool. It will play an increasingly important role in meeting our community's future water needs."

In short, water conservation is regarded by OWASA as a source of future supply. Furthermore, a gallon gained from conservation and efficiency is much less expensive, much less disruptive to the community, and much more readily available.

The State Level

At the state level we sorely need leadership to enable the following changes. We need to:

- **Legalize greywater systems**, which are currently illegal in North

Carolina, basically because of a simple distinction that Europeans proved capable of making a long time ago. Ninety percent of unhealthy pathogens in our wastewater are found in the so-called blackwater from our toilets. The rest of the wastewater is relatively safe and treatable on site. North Carolina policy makers need to wake up to this issue and legalize greywater systems. They should encourage use of composting toilets and count them toward a reduction in septic system capacity in order to help with affordability. It is quite possible to build one's own very functional composting toilet in a couple of hours for about \$50 in materials.

- **Abandon plans for new large power plants** that use enormous amounts of water for cooling – especially during hot, dry months. Additional energy needs should be met by energy efficiency and alternative energy sources.

- **Shift our perspective on growth** from "more is better" to understanding the carrying capacity of the bioregions we live within.

Mark Marcoplos served on the OWASA Board of Directors from 1999-2006, including two years as chair. He runs a local residential construction business specializing in green building.

Resources:

www.owasa.org

http://members.socket.net/~llile/ConcreteStain/Compost_Toilet_50_gallon_drum.html

<http://www.harvesth2o.com/>

Conservation from page 1

Big-time Water Users

OWASA might, in the future, consider further increasing the rate for households with exceptionally high water use. This should be considered if water use does not drop to near the average single-family household use of 5,500 gallons per month. In July 2007, at a time when county residents were already being asked to conserve

water, there were approximately 50 households using more than 50,000 gallons of water a month. That's the amount of water it takes to fill a large backyard swimming pool. In contrast, 40 percent of the approximately 14,000 single-family homes in Orange County used 3,000 gallons or less. Reduction of water use by the highest single-family home users could supply water for an additional 800 homes that use 3,000 gallons per month.

The workgroup's water conservation recommendations have been initiated by OWASA for its service area – primarily, Chapel Hill and Carrboro. If enabling

legislation is instead requested by all of the local Orange County governing bodies, it could then apply to all water utilities and even to county residents using well water. In addition, water conservation measures involving conditions of service could be implemented by the county and other utility providers in the county. The tiered rate structure could be implemented by other water providers in the county as well.

Steps you can take to get involved

OWASA customers need to let Board members know that they support the proposed water conservation measures. Local elected officials in the towns and Orange County also need to hear that you support the implementation of long-term water conservation measures. If you want to be put on OWASA's mailing list to keep informed on water conservation initiatives, e-mail OWASA at webmaster@owasa.org or call Paula Thomas, sustainability administrator, at 537-4230.

The community needs more "insurance" in these times, given that the frequency and severity of droughts cannot be predicted. Increased water availability can be used to provide a buffer for the community in times of drought. If we adopt these water conservation measures, we can support more development while satisfying water demand.

Bernadette Pelissier served on the OWASA Board of Directors and is currently a member of the Water Resources Committee of the Commission for the Environment and the Orange County Planning Board.

To Impeach or Not to Impeach?

By Debby Stirling

It had the makings of a prize fight. In this corner, the idealist, and in that corner the political realist.

Sponsored by the Coalition for the



Constitution and billed as “an historic debate on the question of impeachment,” the Jan. 15 interchange between constitutional law expert Bruce Fein and national journalist Michael Tomasky lived up to expectations, playing to a packed house at Carrboro’s Century Center.

The debate summoned up a variety of passionate emotions – hope, discouragement, laughter, and even some genuine anger.

The discussion was moderated by Mississippi-born journalist and author Hodding Carter III, former assistant secretary of state in the Jimmy Carter administration and, since 2006, UNC-CH professor of leadership and public policy. Fein, a staunch Republican, was arguing for impeachment; Tomasky, a political liberal, was arguing against it.

Anticipating the politically liberal predisposition of the audience, Carter urged listeners, “Pay close attention to both arguments and keep in mind that fewer than ten people have been convicted and impeached.”

Opening Statements

Fein went first. The eloquent lawyer and constitutional scholar quoted Benjamin Franklin, Tom Paine, and Henry Clay and made an impassioned case for impeaching President Bush and Vice President Cheney, based on a defense of the Constitution’s authority over even the President. He began by recounting a litany of presidential wrongdoing:

- Signing statements attached to every piece of legislation, intended to give the President illegal line-item-veto power whereby “he only accepts the parts that he likes.”
- A nebulous “enemy combatant” status assigned to prisoners of war, thus denying them legal counsel and trial by a jury of their peers. “These are practices that no civilized nation tolerates! They are a throwback to the Spanish Inquisition,” Fein thundered.

• Extraordinary rendition of prisoners for torture, illegal and warrantless surveillance of US citizens . . . and on and on.

“All of this is counter to the Constitution,” Fein argued. “We cannot ignore it; we must pursue impeachment, because if the crimes of this administration go unrebuked, future presidents will have a precedent for excessive power and our democracy won’t have a long shelf life. The powers this president has unlawfully seized will lie around like a loaded weapon for some future president to use, unless we take a constitutional stand now – by impeachment – against presidential misappropriation of those powers.”

Tomasky took the microphone almost reluctantly. “I agree with every single word of Bruce’s presentation,” he said, “I cannot argue the legal case, but I care deeply about the law, the Constitution and our civic discourse.”

Instead, Tomasky approached the

question of impeachment strictly from the practical point of view of what we must weigh, beginning with the reality that it is politically impossible to win a conviction without adequate votes.

“Some of this is attributable to the Democrats’ fecklessness and weakness of will,” he acknowledged. “They are afraid of losing new gains in ‘red’ states. But Democrats don’t have anything close to even half of the 67 Senate votes they need to convict a sitting executive,” he pointed out.

Since we cannot win an impeachment conviction, Tomasky said, our efforts are better directed elsewhere over the remaining year of this administration. “We need to elevate the discourse,” he told the crowd. “This Republican Party is interested first and foremost in attaining and holding onto power, so how should we proceed? Let’s un-elect more of them.”

“Bush and Cheney have already been rebuked at the polls in 2006,” he reminded the audience, “and I think an impeachment battle could tear the country in two. It would be seen as political payback for Clinton’s impeachment.” That animosity, he concluded, would make it impossible for the country to make vital progress on education, health care, energy, and other crucial domestic matters that will require bipartisan solutions.

Rebuttals

Then it was Fein’s turn again at the podium, and he jumped on Tomasky’s prediction that an impeachment battle could divide the country. “A fight in defense of the Constitution? What could be more unifying than that?” he asked.

Fein suspects that the Democrats’ reluctance to move on impeachment may have to do with their own culpability. “For example, House Speaker Pelosi and a few other Democrats were briefed on water-boarding. Even though they were sworn to secrecy for security reasons, they knew about it,” Fein said. “But when Pelosi took impeachment off the table in November, 2006, it was tantamount to providing a blank check for abuses or a free pass that exacerbates the problem. We cannot trust the next president to say, ‘I’m giving all this power back.’”

Fein refused to define success or



failure in terms of votes for or against impeachment. “It shows statesmanship to punish wrongdoing,” he insisted, ending with a rhetorical flourish. “Every generation has to win its own liberty. Democracy is not on cruise control!”

“Oh all right,” Tomasky answered in mock resignation, presumably acknowledging that Fein’s “sexier” moral-outrage argument would continue to generate all the crowd-pleaser lines and trump his practical view based on what is possible.

Even so, Tomasky soldiered on, telling the crowd that he didn’t think it fol-

lowed that any other administration would be like the current one. “So whether it’s a Clinton or an Obama administration . . .” he started to say, forgetting that he was in John Edwards’s hometown until the crowd’s groans made the point. He said he had interviewed Hillary Clinton and was satisfied with her response that the Democrats would curtail executive power and restore Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA) reviews.

Tomasky revisited the futility of an impeachment effort, saying that he “just doesn’t see this happening” because of the intensely partisan nature of the current Republican administration. “They’re not even answering subpoenas,” he pointed out with examples.

“Look, if there’s a picture of Dick Cheney in handcuffs on the front page of the *Washington Post*, you won’t hear me complaining,” he said. “I just think it’s more important, on balance, to think of the future of the country more broadly.”

Questions from the Floor

Carter kicked off the unstructured questions from the audience by asking, “What can ignite the American public?”

Bruce Fein said it was very difficult in a democracy for individuals to respond to matters that do not affect them directly. “How do you create that sense of obligation that makes people care about posterity? Can we return to the spirit of the Founding Fathers?”

Ever the realist, Mike Tomasky responded, “To ignite the public, I think it would literally take finding Bush’s fingerprints all over one of these wrongdoings.”

A British member of the audience was cheered for saying that the world is watching the United States. Fein agreed, identifying the crux of the argument as the principle that no person is above the law. “The future generation is bound to ask us, ‘Where did you stand?’”

Someone asked whether there was any procedure whereby members of the administration could face charges of war crimes at The Hague. Tomasky took the question and was explaining that the United States was not a member country of the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) “thanks to Bush and Cheney” – a comment meant sarcastically.

In closing remarks, moderator Carter

reminded the standing-room-only crowd, “Impeachment is not a tidy affair that takes only weeks or months to complete, and it would not even conclude during this administration.”

Meanwhile, what can we do?

Tell your member of Congress, “This is a litmus test. Vote for this or I won’t support you for re-election” was Tomasky’s advice. “That’s not a very satisfying answer, but it’s about all that’s available short of starting your own blog.”

Saturday, February 9

9 am-10:15 am – OC Democratic Breakfast. Location: Occoneechee Steak House, 378 S Churton, in Hillsborough. The breakfast provides a regular, informal, and congenial setting where we discuss issues with fellow Democrats and have occasional speakers or programs.

Monday, February 11

Noon – OC 2008 elections candidate filing begins; for further information, please go to: <http://www.co.orange.nc.us/elect/2008elect.asp>.

Thursday, February 21

6 pm – Orange County Democratic Women Executive Committee meeting; location to be announced at a later date.

Saturday, February 23

9 am-10:15 am – Orange County Democratic Breakfast. Location: Occoneechee Steak House, 378 S Churton, in Hillsborough. The breakfast provides a regular, informal, and congenial setting where we discuss issues with fellow Democrats and have occasional speakers or programs.

Thursday, February 28

7 pm – Orange County Democratic Women general meeting; location: Southern Human Services Center. Details about the program will be announced later.

Friday, February 29

Noon – Orange County 2008 elections candidate filing ends; for further information, please go to: <http://www.co.orange.nc.us/elect/2008elect.asp>.

Saturday, March 1

7 pm – The Triangle progressive community, including NC Policy Watch, will host Dr. George Lakoff of Berkeley, CA, author of the book, “Don’t Think of an Elephant.” Location: Hilton Garden Airport-RDU. There will be a cash bar open at 6:30 pm with dinner at 7:00 pm for a price to include the meal and the facility. Please email Senseney Marshall at senseney@ncjustice.org

Tuesday, March 11

7 pm – Annual precinct meetings; Location: polling place.

Monday, March 17

First day of availability of absentee ballots. For further information, please go to: <http://www.co.orange.nc.us/elect/2008elect.asp>.

Thursday, April 17

(Times and other locations to be announced) – One Stop Voting begins at the Orange Co. Public Library. For further information, please go to: <http://www.co.orange.nc.us/elect/2008elect.asp>.

Saturday, April 19

County Convention, time and location TBA.

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