Letters to the Editor - March 17, 2015

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Two weeks ago, the N.C. Alliance for Health released a statewide poll showing that over 70 percent of state voters strongly support the creation of a Healthy Corner Store Initiative as a way of tackling the state's childhood obesity epidemic.

These initiatives help small-scale stores in underserved communities increase the availability and sales of healthful, affordable foods. They also create new business opportunities. If the items sold are grown and/or produced in the state, a triple win could be realized in terms of health, economic growth for our farmers and community revitalization.

Food insecurity continues to plague our region. Most counties in the southeast contain food deserts, thereby making corner stores a primary source for groceries.

There are great local examples of agencies focusing on these initiatives, including: Feast Down East, Columbus County Health Department, FOCUS and the Southeastern N.C. Regional Health Collaborative and Center for Healthy Communities (housed at UNCW).

Also, the Alice Aycock Poe Center for Health Education, a statewide nonprofit, can assist up to 20 corner stores to create a designated healthy check-out lane.

These great strides – in addition to the statewide poll findings – should challenge us to consider ways to expand these in our community.

Marjorie Lanier, Wilmington

Replace gas tax

The North Carolina legislature is roundly scolded for changes to the fuel tax system. Editorials are written pleading for increased spending on roads and bridges. Meanwhile, the gas tax is not only highly regressive but is becoming a penalty on gas users.

However, every single North Carolina resident and business benefits from our roads and bridges. They provide access for emergency vehicles. They enable the delivery of goods and services ...

A better funding source for the N.C. DOT and one that spreads the burden to all those who benefit is to eliminate the gas tax entirely and replace it with a 1.6 percent sales tax on all retail sales. In that manner all who benefit, which is everybody, pay for the roads and bridges.
Based on 2014 retail sales in North Carolina of $115.8 billion and DOT funding from the gas tax of $1.8 billion, it takes a 1.6 percent sales tax to fully replace the state’s gas tax. At the same time gas users will see a reduction of $1.8 billion in fuel costs. That disproportionately benefits lower income workers.

Since sales taxes flow to the general fund it means the DOT will have to get in line with every other political supplicant seeking funding. This too is a long overdue reform. DOT does not deserve a dedicated source of revenue.

*Jeff Miller, Wilmington*