

THE COMMUNITY LEADER'S LETTER

NEWS & VIEWS FOR SOUTH CAROLINA'S
GRASSROOTS LEADERS



Crime Number One Citizen Concern; Statistics Show Crime Overall Is Down

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National polls show that crime is now the number one concern of most Americans. Yet, based on law enforcement reports, recent national data show that crime overall is down, and the National Crime Victimization Survey, a random sample in which people are asked if they have been victims of crime in the past year, shows no upward trend.

Crime statistics can be mis-

leading, however. The national data show that murder rates, particularly random killings, are up. Such random murder understandably strikes fear in many people.

The only crime statistics available for South Carolina come from reports of law enforcement agencies. Crimes not reported to law enforcement do not show up in the statistics, and even then, under-

staffed and harried local law enforcement agencies do not always keep good records. The statistics have to be taken with a grain of salt.

Still, the evidence is strong that crime is on the rise in South Carolina (see graph). Violent crimes reported have increased

from 645 per 100,000 population in 1980 to 1,067 in 1993, with most of the increase occurring since 1989.

Fortunately, there is no discernible trend of increases in murder rates in South Carolina. Over the past ten years, murder rates per 100,000 population in the state have varied from a high of 12.8 in 1991 to a low of 6.1 in 1992, but generally have averaged about 10.0.

About half of all murders in South Carolina are the results of quarrels between people who know each other. About ten percent of all murders in South Carolina are associated with robberies.

In 1992, the highest crime rates in South Carolina were in Charleston, Richland, and Horry counties. Saluda had the lowest rate. Unlike the national picture where crime is highest in big cities, rural areas in South Carolina, particularly the Pee Dee coun-

*Continued p.4*

S.C. Arrests for Crime Index Offenses for 1982 to 1992

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■ Total      ▲ Non-Violent      ◆ Violent

Source: S.C. Law Enforcement Division, *Crime in South Carolina 1992*, p. 107.

ECONOMIC BRIEF NO. 17

## *Pleasing the Median Voter*

*Having the support of the median voter is the key to political power in a democracy.*

Politicians aim to please. So an important part of the campaign process is for candidates to find out exactly what will and won't please voters. When these candidates are elected and begin to craft budgets, laws, and regulations, economists assume that they are responding to a mythical "median voter."

Having the support of the median voter is the key to political power in a democracy. The median voter is not a single individual. A voter may be at the median on one issue and way off center on another, in which case someone else becomes the median voter. The notion of a median voter assumes that the preferences of citizens are somehow represented by a bell-shaped curve as is intelligence or height.

Shifts in the location of the median voter on the political spectrum signal changes in the demand for government services. As politicians sense the median voter has shifted a little to the left, Congress, state legislatures, and city councils give us more government and demand more taxes. And when the median voter moves to the right of where he or she used to be, we get less government and

lower taxes.

In a two-person election race, a candidate slightly to the right of center can usually count on getting the votes of everyone to his right, and perhaps a few just a shade to the left. The same is true of a candidate just to the left of center. The trick is to locate the center, get as close to it as possible, and then figure out just enough differences between you and your opponent to win half the votes plus one.

Recent elections, particularly in 1992 and 1994, raise questions about the capacity of our election system to actually produce candidates that lie somewhere close to the preferences of the mythical median voter.

The problem, if there is one, is in the process by which parties nominate candidates. To get on the ballot, candidates for most offices above the local level have to win a party primary first. The median voter of a party is likely to be different from the median voter of the total voting population. Each primary election pulls candidates toward the median of the party and away from the center of the voting population as a whole.

Thus, the primary system

leads us away from the middle-of-the-road candidate. Sometimes it produces candidates that tend to polarize the electorate rather than build coalitions. In such situations, the median voter casts a ballot for the less unacceptable candidate or chooses to stay home.

Candidates elected in polarizing elections often have trouble governing. Governing is about building coalitions that embrace the median voter from left and right rather than coalitions which add the median voter on to a bloc of left- or right-wing voters. One of the more interesting observations about the recent Congressional elections was the loss of moderate candidates in both parties, the ones who might actually be able to build bridges and seek consensus.

In politics, winning isn't everything. Winning is just the first hump. A candidate who can't make the transition from primary to general election, from campaigning to governing, and from the median voter in the primary to the median voter in the general election to the median citizen who may be next time's voter may have a short term in office indeed.

***In furtherance of Clemson University's land-grant mission, the Community & Economic Development Program at Clemson provides access for community leaders in South Carolina to expertise in all branches of knowledge on the University campus.***

## Mandated Programs, A Continuing Debate

Unfunded mandates have become a hot topic. Responding to loud complaints from governors, the new Republican majority in Congress has promised to address the issue early in 1995. In South Carolina, a special joint legislative committee on tax reform also got an earful from local officials about mandates.

According to a report of the U.S. Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations, South Carolina has more state mandates on local governments than any other southeastern state. Many, like provisions requiring counties to supply office space for state agencies, are artifacts of an era when legislative delegations ran South Carolina's county governments.

Unquestionably, mandated programs, many with substantive merit, are a driving force behind recent hikes in local property taxes and user fees. But it is probably true that most big-ticket mandates that burden the state's local taxpayers originate in Washington.

Federal law requiring a battery of tests on drinking water has driven up water rates. Federal and state laws mandating treatment of solid waste account for large increases in local government expenditures across the state.\* Retrofitting buildings and other facilities to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act

(ADA) is also expensive.

Although many mandates have wide public support, the ability of elected officials at the federal or state level to pass laws and force local governments to pay for implementation represents a dangerous threat to federalism. Federal and state officials can get the political credit for the good things programs provide, but can avoid the pain of paying for their costs. And as long as federal officials can send unfunded mandates to states and localities, they can easily avoid whatever discipline might be implied by a balanced budget amendment to the federal Constitution.

Almost everyone agrees that something should be done to put a halt to many of these mandates. But what?

The problem is complicated. Consider the qualitative differences between the mandates arising from the ADA and the Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA). The ADA defines accessibility to public facilities as a basic right and requires businesses, as well as governments, to respect that right. The SDWA requires all sources of drinking water to be tested for any possible contaminant that might be found anywhere in the United States, even if it is highly unlikely a contaminant is present locally. It leaves no discretion to local communi-

ties to determine what contaminants to test for based upon local risk factors.

To sort out the mandates issue one must come to terms with an acceptable division of labor between levels of government. In the ADA case, the federal government is acting to protect the rights of a distinct class of citizens, akin to protection of civil rights. With the SDWA, however, the federal government denies localities the right to accept higher risks locally. For the most part, this choice is not likely to affect persons in other localities who may be less willing to risk that some rare contaminant will be in their own drinking water. Many argue that protecting local drinking water is and should be solely a local concern, that there is no compelling need for national uniformity. But not everyone agrees with this argument.

No solution to the mandates problem is likely until consensus is reached about the legitimate roles of the three levels of government. Political disputes over the roles predates the federal Constitution and have recurred throughout American history. As with most great constitutional debates in our history, the courts rather than legislatures and Congress may have to resolve the issue.

\*See *Community Leader's Letter*, Fall 1992.

The National Drinking Water Clearinghouse (NDWC) has begun a new quarterly newsletter, *Water Sense*, to address financial challenges facing drinking water systems in communities with a population of 10,000 or less. The newsletter is aimed at local, state, and federal officials; planning commissions, consultants, and engineers; assistance organizations; regional and national water associations and others involved in providing safe drinking water to small communities. Topics will include information on funding sources, updates on legislation affecting drinking water funding, "real-life" success stories, cost-saving strategies, innovative financing mechanisms and listings of resources that provide assistance with drinking water financing. To receive a free subscription to *Water Sense*, please contact NDWC at 1-800-624-8301. NDWC also publishes *On Tap* which can be obtained from the same source.

## Crime Citizen Concern; Crime Overall Down—From p.1

The Community Leader's Letter is printed quarterly. It is the newsletter of the Community & Economic Development Program at Clemson University, a joint program of the Strom Thurmond Institute, the Cooperative Extension Service, the South Carolina Agricultural Experiment Station, the College of Commerce and Industry, and Office of Public Affairs. Program offices are in the Institute's facility on the Clemson University campus.

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ties, show relatively high rates.

There is some evidence that the law enforcement apparatus in South Carolina is being overwhelmed by the increase in crime. Clearance rates for all major crimes are down. Except for murder, rape, and aggravated assault, the odds are less than 50-50 that law enforcement will be able to identify the offender and accumulate sufficient evidence to take him or her into custody. There is less than one chance out of five that a person committing an auto theft or breaking and entering will be arrested.

Even so, the jail and prison population in South Carolina has grown rapidly. From 1983 to 1993, the number of inmates admitted to Department of Corrections facilities almost doubled. More than 20 percent are serving time

for drug offenses. If law enforcement had greater success apprehending and con-

victing criminals, the jail overcrowding problem would be even more severe.

### Applications Available to Communities For Intergenerational Grant Program

Are you interested in enhancing and improving the lives of at-risk youth in your community by using the older adults in your community as resources? A grant program administered by the United Way of South Carolina is selecting five communities to participate in a program to link intergenerational networks in communities (LINC). LINC's goal is to improve communities by partnering at-risk youth and older adult mentors in community service teams. Over a five-year period, teams would take part in projects such as dropout prevention, literacy programs, community health fairs, community gardening projects, home repairs for the needy and elderly, visiting the homebound, and other special projects tailored to a community. To receive an application to be considered as one of the five LINC communities, contact Kevin Rice, Strom Thurmond Institute, Clemson University, Box 345130, Clemson, SC 29634 (telephone 803 656-0211) or David Cline, United Way of South Carolina, 2711 Middleburg Drive, Suite 307, Columbia, SC 29204 (telephone 803 252-9101).

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