

HAL CROWTHER: FREE FRANK WETZEL? (p. 5)

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"I would have to move my mother, my father,
my grandpappy, my great-uncle.
My God, it would be the most
darn mess in the world."



The great-grandson of freed slaves, Michael Dillahunt knows who is buried in every Pleasant Hill cemetery. Now his community could be leveled by a four-lane freeway.

CAN PLEASANT HILL SURVIVE?

HIGHWAY ROBBERY, PART 3

PHOTOGRAPHY BY M.-J. SHARP



Colliding with Community

BY BARRY YEOMAN

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Moses and Eliza Dillahunt spent the days before the Civil War distilling turpentine and picking cotton on an Eastern North Carolina plantation. They dreamed of their exodus from slavery—and they saw the opportunity when the Union troops came through.

Moses fled, and joined the Northern army as a cook. He survived both gunfire and yellow fever, but some of his relatives weren't so lucky. Three Dillahunts died in 1864, the year the Confederate army tried to recapture the town of New Bern.

When the war ended, Moses and Eliza moved to the flat Craven County countryside to begin their new lives. Scraping together what little money they had, the Dillahunts bought 20 acres, six hogs and a mule. They made a decent living farming, and on Sundays they gathered with their neighbors under an oak tree to thank the Lord for their success.

Their community of freed slaves called itself Pleasant Hill.

Now the Dillahunts' descendants could face an exodus of their own. Unlike Moses and Eliza, the modern-day residents of Pleasant Hill wouldn't be fleeing slavery and war. Instead, they are threatened by the N.C. Department of Transportation (DOT), which could force them out of their ancestral homes to make way for a four-lane highway.

DOT is considering 10 corridors for the New Bern Bypass. Nine of those routes would pass through Pleasant Hill. The state's own environmental document says the nine routes could wipe out the farm community and replace it with an industrial corridor.

Many of the community's elderly citizens wonder what will happen if the government forces them off their land—maybe into housing projects, maybe onto welfare. Their homes are paid for and they have no money beyond what their farms produce and their small Social Security checks. Very few residents accept food stamps, even the poor ones. If they are moved to housing inside the city of New Bern, they say, they won't know how to survive without welfare.

The prospect seems strange and frightening to 76-year-old Leamon Dillahunt, who has lived in the same place all his life, on a farm that goes back four generations in his family.

"It's the only place I know anything about," he says.



For the past two weeks, *The Independent* has written about people with political power—the ones who use their clout to decide where DOT builds its highways. The saga of the New Bern Bypass is about the people who *don't* have power to stop the highway juggernaut.

Pleasant Hill's residents don't make big campaign contributions to political candidates. They don't attend cocktail parties with business leaders. They don't have heaps of money or easy access to the governor. But they have something most DOT insiders lack: an intimate knowledge of what it's like to lie in bed and imagine the bulldozers heading for the front porch.

In North Carolina, roadbuilding has displaced more than 3,200 families and businesses since 1983—part of a nationwide trend that has forced hundreds of thousands of people out of their homes over the past 35 years. While the numbers are not nearly so staggering as they were during the 1950s, '60s and early '70s, they still point to a hidden cost of the state's ambitious highway program: the ways roads wreck communities.

Highway planners call displacement an unfortunate but inevitable part of economic progress. DOT officials say that while road construction causes some people to lose their homes, it benefits far more people by attracting jobs to needy areas. What's more, the people who sacrifice their homes for new roads are few in number and well-compensated by the government.

In fact, DOT rarely weighs the real costs of roads against the benefits. In 1983 the department developed a cost-benefit "matrix" to assess individual highway projects. Transportation officials say the matrix is used only on occasion—early in the process, before the full effects of a road are known.

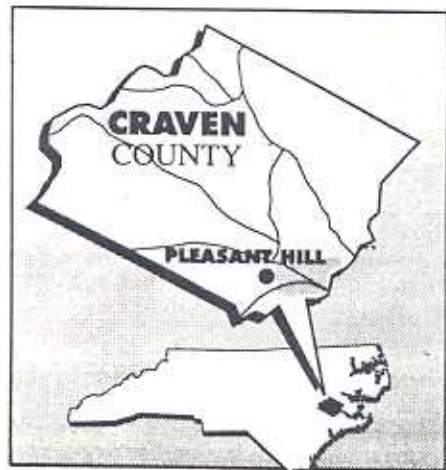
What's more, the numbers don't tell the whole story. Some people keep their houses but lose their yards. Some see their quiet neighborhoods turned into thoroughfares. Still others hear the noise, breathe the fumes and feel the vibrations of nearby highways. None of those people will be counted in government displacement statistics—and most receive no compensation.

Mark Jacobson, a national transportation-reform activist based in Virginia, says highways often hurt communities in indirect but profound ways. Urban freeways increase racial segregation, while suburban roads often drain money away from downtown business districts. And at a time of tight state and federal budgets, he says, highway construction takes money away from other programs.

"Community redevelopment and refurbishing are essential for solving social and economic problems," says Jacobson, who holds a master's degree in business administration. "Roadbuilding prevents these activities. You can't rebuild inner cities and expand roads—there is only so much money to go around."

In this third part of our five-week series, we look at two African-American communities—one rural and one urban—that could be hurt in different ways by new roads. *The Independent* examined the two cases as part of an eight-month investigation into the ways campaign contributions shape the state's highway system—wasting millions in taxpayer money, harming the environment and paving over human communities.

The first case, the New Bern Bypass, illustrates what happens to people without political power. The second case, Montlieu Avenue in High Point, shows what happens when big-money campaign contributors want to build a road—even though DOT professionals deemed the road unnecessary for drivers and dangerous to the community.





Leamon Dillahunt, Michael Dillahunt and Stephen Best gather under the oak tree where their ancestors used to pray. Six of the proposed routes for the New Bern Bypass would level the tree and the nearby Pleasant Hill A.M.E. Zion Church. PHOTO BY M.J. SHARP

THE HIGHWAY THROUGH PLEASANT HILL

Pleasant Hill is not much to look at. Bumped up against the city limits of New Bern, it seems like a random collection of houses on the highway—some historic but deteriorated, others undistinguished. There are two churches and a day-care center, some abandoned buildings and a Scotchman convenience store. Off the main highway is an old brick road, one of the few tangible reminders of the settlement's rich history.

Most of the past resides only within the memories of Pleasant Hill's elders. When 75-year-old Michael Dillahunt recounts that history, he gets lost in primal memory, his voice becoming a singsong and his eyes gazing far into the distance. The great-grandson of Moses and Eliza Dillahunt, he knows who was buried in every cemetery, whether they fought in the Civil War, how many children they had, how they contributed to the community.

Unlike most of the black farmers in the county, who subsisted as sharecroppers after the Civil War, Pleasant Hill's residents bought their own land to farm. It was a struggle, but by 1870 Michael Dillahunt's great-grandparents were harvesting Indian corn, tobacco and sweet potatoes. That's not much different from the crops Dillahunt grows today.

"I used to hear my mother talk about how there were five families within this area, and

they had 96 children," remembers Leamon Dillahunt. "They say blacks wouldn't hang onto things—but we've been able to maintain this land for 100 years." Many children have left the area; some came home and some stayed away. But a core of about 250 residents have remained, holding the community together.

"The close ties that are here—nothing can replace it," says Nancy Carmon, secretary of the Pleasant Hill A.M.E. Zion Church. "You go to cities like New Bern—you don't know your neighbors and you're afraid to trust them. But here, we know that we're related if we look close enough."

Along the two-lane road through Pleasant Hill, old men and women walk from their houses to the church; the simple cinder-block building is a meeting place for both sacred and secular events. "The church is like a central point of the community," says Carmon. "We come together for whatever is the occasion. Whenever something arises, it's addressed at the church."

Dately, the topic of conversation inside the church has been DOT's intention to build a bypass around New Bern. The road is part of a bigger plan to turn U.S. 17, the main north-south artery for coastal North Carolina, into a modern four-lane highway that bypasses the major towns along the

way. State officials hope the new road will stimulate job creation and move traffic to the beach quicker.

Before it made any public announcement, DOT considered 17 different corridors for the bypass. One by one, it narrowed the field. Some of the eliminated routes went through residential neighborhoods—predominantly white subdivisions, some with \$125,000 to \$150,000 houses, according to consulting engineer Thomas Keith Strickland. Another interfered with the 200-year-old Bellaire Plantation, which "has been associated with the most politically and socially prominent families in Craven County," according to a survey prepared for DOT. Still others were knocked out because of their effects on wetlands, traffic flow and a local dairy farm.

That left nine routes, which DOT unveiled in July 1990. The nine choices had one thing in common: They all passed right through Pleasant Hill.

DOT never told the residents their community was imperiled until the department announced its nine recommended corridors. Edwin Brown, head of the highway committee of the Pleasant Hill Community Association, says he didn't know the road would come through Pleasant Hill until he read about it in the paper. By then, DOT had already met with representatives of Weyerhaeuser Co., which owns a pulpwood mill in the area—and whose chairman had sent Gov. Jim Martin's campaign \$1,000 from Tacoma, Wash. The paper com-

pany was concerned about the road's location.

"No one was consulted in Pleasant Hill," says Leamon Dillahunt. "Next thing we knew, the bypass was coming through."

DOT officials say they didn't know how close-knit the community was when they chose the corridors. "It's not readily recognized as a community," says Jack Ward, DOT's planning and environmental branch manager.

According to the draft Environmental Impact Statement prepared for DOT, all nine of the original routes would level houses in Pleasant Hill, maybe as many as 17 homes. Six of the corridors would go through the church. The road would also go through up to seven Pleasant Hill cemeteries, some unmarked and some holding the bodies of African-American Civil War veterans. "I would have to move my mother, my father, my grandpappy, my great-uncle," says Michael Dillahunt. "My God, it would be the most darn mess in the world."

But the effects of putting a four-lane freeway through Pleasant Hill would run deeper. The road would divide the farms in the community, making it impossible for farming—the only means of survival for many of the older residents—to continue. The state's Environmental Impact Statement concedes Pleasant Hill would pretty much be wiped off the map.

"Pleasant Hill is a contrast to the light industry located...to the east and...west," said the voluminous document prepared by a Raleigh consultant. "Since water and sewer services have recently become available in the area...this traditional farming community could possibly be replaced with other light industries or services....Residents may be forced to move to other areas outside of the community's boundaries against their desire."



If anyone expected Pleasant Hill to remain docile about the New Bern Bypass, that misconception was blown away at a packed meeting this past January between highway officials and the Pleasant Hill Community Association. There, DOT planner H. Franklin Vick apologized for failing to inform Pleasant Hill about the highway—but said it was important the bypass be built.

"I am disappointed that we didn't have communication with the Pleasant Hill community before we got to where we are today," he told the crowd. Nonetheless, "New Bern's going to grow and, with the growth, the benefits of the bypass will be greater." He added that "Pleasant Hill was not a known factor" when DOT picked its nine routes.

Those words didn't placate the residents.

"We are not trying to impede progress, but we are trying to make you understand that we need our community and we need to survive," said Edwin Brown. "No one has given us a reason why the bypass should go through there and destroy our community."

Many Pleasant Hill have offered a reason of their own: race. DOT denies this, but many residents believe they were singled out because they are a relatively poor African-American community. Consulting engineer Strickland says other residential neighborhoods

were spared not because they were predominantly white and middle-income, but because they had higher population densities.

According to the draft Environmental Impact Statement, as many as 65 percent of the families displaced by the New Bern Bypass would be black. Overall, Craven County is 71 percent white.

"Everything that's dangerous comes through the predominantly black communities," says Charles Collins, a local resident active in fighting the road. "They didn't care about the community because the community's black. That's the bottom line. They figured this area is dispensable."

That's not mere paranoia on the part of Pleasant Hill's residents. "Pleasant Hill is scarcely the first black community to get run over by a highway project," says David Cecelski, a New Bern-area native who is now helping the residents fight the highway.

In the 1950s and '60s, putting pavement through African-American areas was part of "urban renewal" efforts to erase inner-city blight. For instance, Durham's city fathers made clear their desire to build the Durham Freeway through the predominantly black Hayti-Elizabeth Street neighborhood. "[The] area accounts for 21 percent of the pedestrian traffic accidents, 15 percent of the major crimes, 20 percent of the juvenile delinquency, 41 percent of the venereal disease and 20 percent of the illegitimate births in Durham," wrote the city's Redevelopment Commission in the 1960s. Building the freeway was part of an effort that the commission said would "put new life into the decayed sections of the area and...prevent good sections from decaying." The result was a highway that obliterated the city's downtown black business district.

Bob Morris, a Maryland transportation consultant who has worked with displaced communities in North Carolina and elsewhere, says highway decision-makers today "are more sensitive to social issues." State-government insiders agree, saying DOT has grown less willing to build roads that displace large numbers of people.

DOT does not break down its displacement statistics by race. But the fact remains that black-owned real estate is generally cheaper to acquire than white-owned property, which makes it more appealing to highway officials.

"Unfortunately, it's 'least-cost' in another respect as well," says Yale Rabin, a University of Virginia professor emeritus and one of the nation's foremost experts in highway displacement. "These are the people that have the least political clout, so they are the least able to resist the decisions that adversely affect them. They end up being the most vulnerable and the easiest picking."

But the people of Pleasant Hill have not proved "easy picking." At the January meeting, DOT officials agreed to look for an alternative route—and came back this spring with a new 10th alternative, one that would avoid Pleasant Hill altogether.

Highway officials make it clear this 10th route is not necessarily a *preferred* corridor—it's simply another option to consider. The state

is now studying the new proposal and plans to hold another public hearing later this year. "The preferred alternative has not yet been selected," says Tommy Peacock, DOT's chief preconstruction engineer.

Until the route is picked, 79-year-old Pleasant Hill resident Oliver Humphrey can only wait—and hope. If the road comes through his farming community, he says, "my life would pass away. My house would be taken away. At my age, I don't even know how to figure." □



If DOT re-routes Montlieu Avenue, the streets behind High Point University will turn into a busy thoroughfare. PHOTO BY M.J. SHARP

THE BYPASS AROUND THE UNIVERSITY

Two hundred miles from Pleasant Hill, another black community is bracing for the steamrollers. The story of the Montlieu Avenue relocation points to the power of big-dollar campaign donors—and their ability to push through a road that, according to one state document, “will actually worsen existing conditions.”

The existing Montlieu Avenue connects downtown High Point with the city's inner loop. Along the way, the two-lane road runs through the campus of High Point University, dividing two academic buildings and the chapel from the rest of school.

High Point University has big dreams for itself. After more than 65 years as High Point College, it changed its name last year to reflect its planned graduate programs. Now the school is pursuing a \$20 million fund-raising campaign to create faculty and student endowments, to build an athletic complex and to renovate its brick buildings.

The jewel of those expansion plans is a \$4 million Fine Arts Center, which would stand at the entrance to the campus, surrounded by formal gardens. “We want an entrance that's more dramatic than what we have,” university vice president John Lefler told a reporter in 1986. “We're creating an... identity.”

The school has already received an “extremely valuable” collection of English oil paintings that would hang at the Fine Arts Center, and the university has been talking to the N.C. Shakespeare Festival about serving as the festival's headquarters, says Lefler. “A Fine Arts building would serve not only the campus but the entire community,” he adds.

The site where High Point University wants to build this Fine Arts Center happens to be where Montlieu Avenue is currently located. So the university came up with a plan to close the current road and build a new one bypassing the campus.

Rerouting Montlieu Avenue, however, would be no easy task. It involves a “major encroachment” of a creek, according to a DOT document, and could lead to increased flooding in a nearby neighborhood. More important, the \$1.1 million rerouting would go through the quiet working-class black community just south of the college—turning the narrow streets where small children play and old people stroll into a thoroughfare.

Ann Butler is raising five children in a small house facing the back of the university. The new road will run right in front of her house. “My kids ride up and down the street,” she says. “If it's a highway, they're going to be killed.”

DOT's planners seemed to agree that, while rerouting Montlieu might help High Point University, the harm to the surrounding community outweighed the good.

“The neighborhood...will be adversely impacted by increased traffic and noise,” wrote DOT planner William Brock. “Small children living in the neighborhood will be exposed by increased danger imposed on them by the increased traffic generated by this proposed action.” The rerouting would also impede ambulances and fire trucks, he wrote.

But High Point University was determined to get the road built. “We used everybody we could,” says vice president Lefler. In particular, they turned to two influential Board of Transportation members—both with strong ties to the school. Former board member Charles Shelton and current member S. Dave Phillips were quite happy to go to bat for High Point University.

The university's officials were savvy in looking to Shelton. A respected real-estate developer from Mount Airy, he moved to Winston-Salem in 1977 to build office and industrial buildings for corporations such as Piedmont Airline. Shelton's many real-estate part-

nerships reshaped that city until 1990, when he and his brother Ed moved to Charlotte. Shelton told *Business North Carolina* he left

Winston-Salem because he had grown tired of the city's refusal to move forward on its major economic decisions without first building broad community support.

"The people who give the money have got to be allowed to be the leaders," he told the magazine.

The Sheltons *do* give the money. Not only do they donate to civic and charitable groups, but they also dole out hundreds of thousands of dollars to political candidates. Indeed, Charles Shelton and his relatives are among the biggest campaign contributors in North Carolina.

The Sheltons play both sides of the political fence, with Charles focusing on Republican candidates and brother Ed making most of the Democratic contributions. According to state and federal election figures, the Shelton brothers and their families have given more than \$450,000 to top Republicans since 1984, including \$61,530 to Gov. Jim Martin. The two brothers also belong to the elite Team 100, a big-time money-raising effort operated out of the Republican National Committee by President Bush's chief fund-raiser. Team 100 members are entertained at the White House and receive special briefings; in exchange, they have pledged to contribute at least \$275,000 each in indirect contributions to President Bush's election efforts.

Shelton also chaired the finance committee for Gov. Martin's reelection bid. According to published reports, the developer used his many business and civic contacts to bring in \$500,000 for Martin, sometimes raking in \$30,000 daily. That talent for raising big dollars won him a place in the governor's inner circle and a seat on the Board of Transportation.

Once Martin appointed Shelton to the board, the developer seemed to have little reservation about using his power to push for roads that helped his businesses. In a 1989 investigation, the *Winston-Salem Journal* identified three road projects he championed that the newspaper said benefited him personally. In one instance, Shelton pushed for the expansion of an interchange that routed traffic into an industrial park and office complex his company was developing. Shelton said he was being harassed by the newspaper. The State Bureau of Investigation conducted a preliminary inquiry and concluded Shelton had broken no laws.

Lucky for High Point University, Shelton's son Chip was attending school there. Shelton was an active supporter of the university; he helped with the planning and construction of its satellite Winston-Salem campus, and he attended various events at the main High Point campus, such as prayer breakfasts, according to Lefler.

In 1990, the university invited Shelton to a luncheon. There, school officials asked Shelton and others for their support in getting the state to reroute Montlieu Avenue. According to Dave Phillips, the current board member, Shelton became one of the principal advocates for the road. Five months after that lunch, the board added Montlieu to its long-range highway plan.

"If I were to think of people who were most helpful, I would certainly think of Charlie Shelton," says Lefler.



"The Montlieu situation has become more sensitive than ever," wrote Board of Transportation member S. Dave Phillips. "Somehow all of us have got to be more savvy about handling this situation." PHOTO BY M.J.

Shelton failed to return repeated phone calls.



The day after DOT released its new highway plan, Dave Phillips was sworn in as a board member. From there, he became the main advocate for the project.

The scion of one of High Point's leading industrialist families, Phillips started his career in his father's textile business. He has built that business into a \$50-million-year holding company called Phillips Industries, which both finances and manufactures fabrics for the furniture industry. He's been involved in real estate, furniture showrooms, hotel development and the film industry; the trade journal *HFD* called his businesses a "mini-empire."

"Dave Phillips is a very bright, highly sophisticated businessman. He can also be a tough negotiator," says Louis "Nick" Fisher, a member of the High Point Economic Development Corp.

"I really do look at the whole world as an opportunity. Sometimes I get frustrated that I can't experience but so much," Phillips once told a reporter.

The Phillips family also has a longtime connection to High Point University. Phillips' businessman father contributed more than \$250,000 to expand and strengthen the college's business program. In 1973, the college renamed its business school the Earl N. Phillips School of Business Administration. The younger Phillips is vice-chair of High Point University's Board of Trustees and serves on the steering committee of the university's fund-raising campaign.

When he's not chasing dollars for High Point University, Phillips can sometimes be found raising money for Republican candidates. On two occasions, he and his wife Kathleen hosted fund-raisers for Gov. Martin at their 13,000-square-foot Georgian-style home on the 250-acre Valleyfields Farm. One

of those events featured then-presidential candidate George Bush, whose inauguration Dave Phillips later attended.

Phillips and his wife have given at least \$27,900 to top Republican candidates since 1984, including \$14,250 to Martin. They gave another \$1,000 to U.S. Sen. Jesse Helms' political organization, the National Congressional Club. Those contributions helped land him a seat on the Board of Transportation.

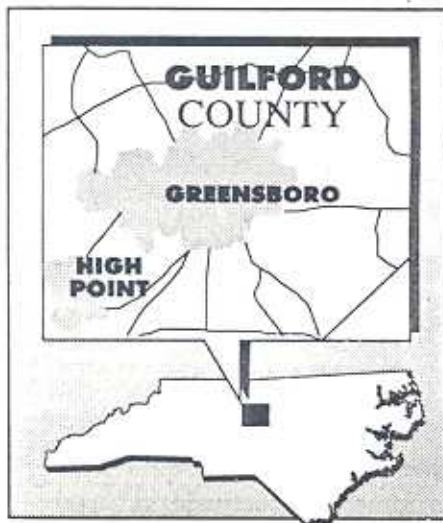
"Gov. Martin has been really nice to me over the years," he says.

Phillips denies having any influence on the progress of Montlieu Avenue. "I was not able to influence anything about it. It's got a life of its own," he says. But interviews with state and local government insiders and a review of the documents shows Phillips has been the principal champion—the person who was able to keep the project on its course despite professional assessments that the project would worsen traffic and wreak havoc on the surrounding community.

"This project is supported [by] a Board of Transportation member who wants the project pushed through as quickly as possible," said a memo written by State Historic Preservation Office staffer Robin Stancel after a meeting with DOT professionals. "According to the engineers present, the rerouting of Montlieu Avenue will not cause any positive results; it will actually worsen existing conditions. From an engineering standpoint, there are no reasons to do this project."

Another time, Tommy Peacock, DOT's chief preconstruction engineer, took notes during a conversation he had with another DOT manager. "Phillips attended High Point College, is on Board of Directors (?), and supports college," Peacock wrote. (Actually, Phillips didn't attend the college, and he's on the Board of Trustees.) "Very controversial...City people don't support project."

Three days later, in July 1991, Peacock wrote to state highway administrator William Marley Jr., saying this was a "priority" road and surveying had to start immediately.



When DOT announced its project —on an accelerated schedule that put it ahead of the roads on High Point's wish list—it took city officials and planners by surprise. No one had asked the local government if it wanted the road.

"We hadn't asked for it. It wasn't a priority. We found out about it through the release of the TIP," says High Point transportation planner Carol Carter, referring to DOT's annual Transportation Improvement Plan. Local road planners had merely noted to DOT that High Point University wanted Montlieu rerouted.

"To my knowledge, there was no conversation between the Transportation Board and the elected body or city staff," adds mayor pro tem Becky Smothers. "Everybody seemed to be pretty surprised when the news broke. We had no say whatsoever, and I have a clear impression that project's gonna be built."

ABOUT THE SERIES



ighway Robbery," a five-part series running from May 20 to June 17, examines how campaign contributions influence the state's \$1.6 billion annual transportation budget.

To research the series over eight months, we examined thousands of documents at eight state agencies and interviewed more than 150 people, including state employees, local planners, transportation experts, community residents, environmental leaders and elected officials.

The dollars described in the series as supporting "Republican causes" were tracked through (1) a database created by the Institute for Southern Studies of contributors to Gov. Jim Martin, Lt. Gov. Jim Gardner and the N.C. Republican Party since 1983; (2) Federal Election Commission printouts of contributors to presidential and congressional candidates, along with national PACs; and (3) a database compiled by the Washington-based Center for Responsive Politics of large donors to the national political parties.

Except for figures from other news re-

ports, our totals generally do not include contributions to local or state legislative races.

Research for this series was funded by the Durham-based Institute for Southern Studies as part of a larger study of how private money influences public policy. Founded in 1970, the Institute is a non-partisan research center and publisher of *Southern Exposure* magazine.

As the first part of its Money & Politics Project, the Institute determined that lobbyists spend more than \$10 million to influence each session of the N.C. General Assembly—yet the source and purpose of most of that money remained unreported due to loopholes in the state ethics laws. Reforms passed in the 1991 legislature will close many of those loopholes.

Support for the Institute's Money & Politics Project comes from the Z. Smith Reynolds, Mary Reynolds Babcock, Arca, MacArthur and Skinner foundations.

Independent intern David Richardson provided substantial research assistance for the series.

Smothers' frustration is compounded by her view that High Point's road system is a mess. In fact, the city was excluded from the \$9 billion Highway Trust Fund passed in 1989. "When you go around other cities, the state has built their road system," she says. "But when you get here, we've got a bunch of half-finished projects, or totally not developed. We've got parts of roads that haven't been completed, and a million dollars could go a long way."

Two months after it announced the Montlieu project, DOT softened the blow by restoring the

schedule of a much-wanted High Point road that was earlier delayed. But the state agency again angered city officials by scheduling a public meeting on the road just as many residents were leaving town for the July 4 holiday last year. Council member Liz Rogers called it a "terrible time," and Mayor Roy Culler sent off a letter of protest.

And Dave Phillips, the Board of Transportation member, sent off an angry letter to DOT's Jack Ward.

STEAMROLLER OF THE WEEK



ILLUSTRATION BY TOM CHALKLEY

Top-dollar campaign donors don't mess around with petty state bureaucrats. They go straight to the governor's cabinet members for help.

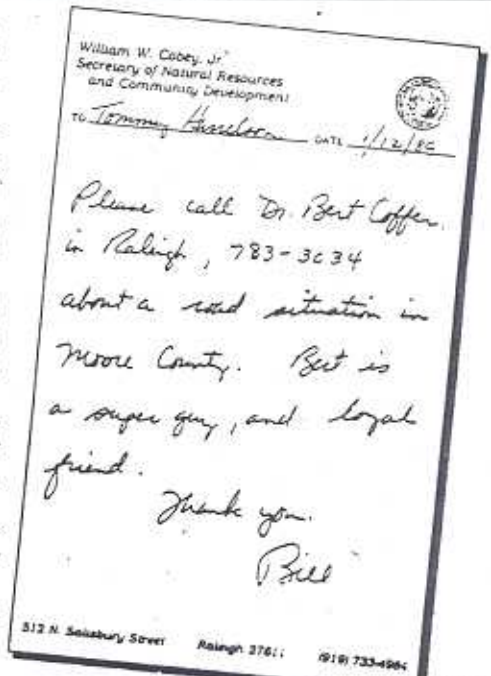
When Raleigh doctor Bertram Coffey bought a farm with his brother-in-law, he wanted to take control of a state-maintained road that ran into his land. So Coffey turned to an old friend: state Environment, Health and Natural Resources Secretary Bill Cobey.

"Please call Dr. Bert Coffey...about a road situation in Moore County," Cobey wrote to Transportation Secretary Thomas Harrelson. "Bert is a super guy and a loyal friend."

Loyal indeed. Since 1983, Coffey and his wife have given more than \$32,300 to the Republican cause—including \$2,000 to former congressman Cobey. Coffey has also given \$9,500 to the National Congressional Club, which masterminded Cobey's political campaigns.

Asked for comment, Cobey spokesman Don Follmer said his boss's note was not alluding to Coffey's campaign contributions. "[Coffey] is, in Bill Cobey's opinion, a super guy and a close friend," Follmer said.

By the way, Coffey later dropped the road matter, saying there was too much legal work involved.



"I must tell you how frustrating the handling of the Montlieu situation has become," Phillips wrote. "The whole purpose of having a meeting was for public relations reasons and now it has backfired. We had the whole crew from DOT here in May to plan the process and now we have done more damage than good....Needless to say, the Montlieu situation has become more sensitive than ever....Somehow all of us have got to be more savvy about handling this situation."

City Council passed a resolution opposing the project. But mayor pro tem Smothers believes city officials have been dealt out of the decision-making process. Asked about the city's next move, she said, "We don't really have a move. We're not even at the table with the playing board."

Similarly, the neighborhood groups have given up. "Originally we were going to fight it, but we realized with the state's stand, that we had nothing to fight," says area resident Ernest Fleming. "We're just hoping to minimize the damage."

The project is slated for construction beginning next year. Only DOT can stop it. In this case, as in all others, the final decision rests with the Board of Transportation. ■

Next week: The all-powerful Board of Transportation.