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The Art of the Grab

Like many small towns in rural counties Albemarle is not exactly a boomtown.

But a local banker and a Stanly County Commissioner have come up with a political grab that makes government funding of the Randy Parton Theatre look like a small-time sideshow.

The hydro-electric plant is a modern marvel. Hydro-electric plants create electricity and don't consume natural resources. There are no fuel waste products. Like with coal. No smokestacks. No pollution.

And there is a hydro-electric plant in Stanly County.

And it's up for re-licensing by the federal government.

And the banker and County Commissioner see the government taking it over as the solution to their problems.

Of course, they don't put it quite that bluntly. Instead, they've wrapped themselves in a lot of high sounding rhetoric. For instance, banker Roger Dick says about the Yadkin River, "Who has the right to control a natural resource - is it the local people or a private corporation?"

Now, in fact, no private corporation controls the river. The federal government does. But, that technically aside, what Mr. Dick really means - when he says local people should control the river - is that he wants Stanly County to have the power to deny Alcoa (which owns the plant) water to turn its turbines. Then, he and Commissioner Lindsey Dunevant say, the state can buy the dam and plant at a cut rate, run it themselves and provide Stanly county electricity at cost.

Now, assuming the government can run a hydro-electric plant without a meltdown, that's a great deal for Stanly County. Taxpayers in Raleigh, Charlotte and around the state buy the plant, they're on the hook if it turns out to be a boondoggle - and Stanly county gets cut-rate electricity.

Politicians have been divvying up tax dollars for 'incentives' and funding every sort of project - from Teapot Museums to country music theatres - for years. But, until now, no one ever thought of taking over a hydro-electric plant. You have to say this for the Stanly county politicians - they've taken the art of the political grab to a new level.

Best,

Carter Wrenn

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