



"Thank God for the School of Government"

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Recently there was an article in *The Smoky Mountain News* about “a mysterious mass exodus of [Canton’s] elected town board members following the town election this fall.” For a host of different reasons all four of the current aldermen have decided to leave local politics.

One member said “I’ve been on [the board] for four years, and it’s time to give somebody else a chance to learn what it’s like to be a town leader. Everybody in the town should take the time to do that.” Another “listed family and his job as the reason he won’t seek a second term.” A two-term alderman simply said “I need a break from government right now.” The current mayor is the only board member running for re-election.

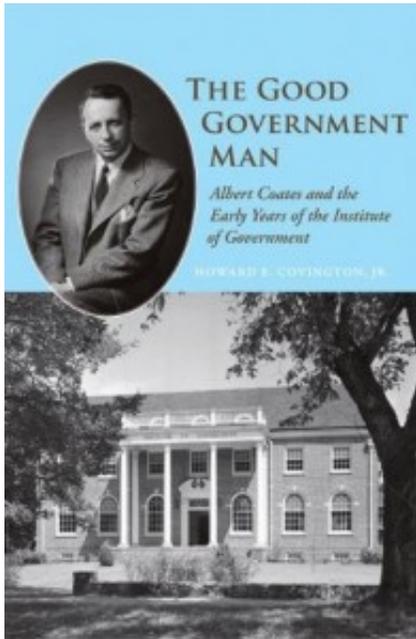
It would be challenging enough for the town to lose all of that experience at the same time. But it gets worse. The town manager, Al Matthews, also is retiring, “taking with him years of institutional knowledge as town clerk, assistant manager and eventually manager.”

The article also mentions that newly-elected officials attend seminars at the School of Government. **“There is a learning curve,” the current manager said, “Thank God for UNC’s School of Government.”**

Reducing that learning curve is exactly what Albert Coates had in mind when he created the Institute of Government (now the School of Government). “Every two or four years, literally



hundreds of newly elected officials were coming into the administration of public affairs in the cities, the counties, and the state of North Carolina, knowing all too little about their powers and duties at the start; learning as they went along; and going out of office at the end of their respective terms to be followed by successors who did not pick up the threads of government at the point where their predecessors had left off, but almost, if not quite, at the point where they began.” *The Story of the Institute of Government*, p. 19.



Albert Coates, Good Government Man

From the beginning, the School has existed partly to help “bridge the gap in knowledge and experience between outgoing and incoming public officials, and [to] cut down the lost time, lost motion, and lost money involved in rotating governmental personnel.”

The School’s faculty and staff stand ready to help all of the new officials in the Town of Canton, along with the many other newly-elected and appointed officials in North Carolina. Not only do we offer special courses for those officials, but we help them through our publications and our advising. People are not born with the knowledge required to be effective public servants and the issues facing them are more and more complicated. We continue to implement the vision of Albert Coates as we support state and local officials throughout their time in public service.

It also turns out that Canton will be voting in November on whether to switch to staggered terms for their board members. That would help to avoid this complete turnover of experience in the future. Whatever the voters decide, we look forward to helping future elected officials in Canton and across North Carolina, along with newly-appointed officials in a wide range of professional positions. Mr. Coates would be proud. (Special thanks for Sonja Matanovic and Ellen Bradley for



bringing the article to my attention.)



Canton, NC