

Memorable Memos

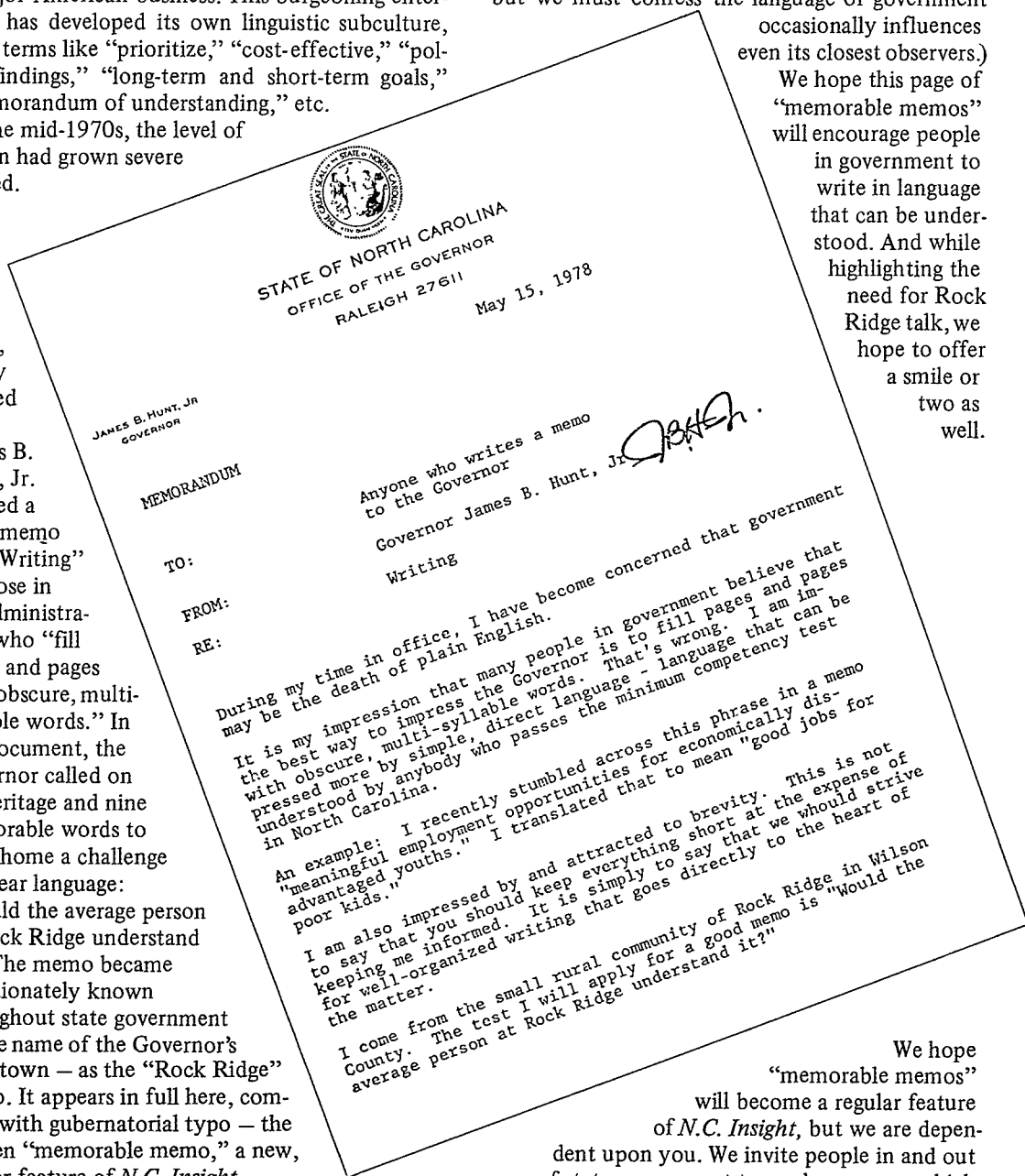
In the last 20 years, government — at the federal, state, and local levels — has ballooned into a major American business. This burgeoning enterprise has developed its own linguistic subculture, with terms like “prioritize,” “cost-effective,” “policy findings,” “long-term and short-term goals,” “memorandum of understanding,” etc. By the mid-1970s, the level of jargon had grown severe indeed.

In 1977, newly elected Gov. James B. Hunt, Jr. penned a terse memo “Re: Writing” to those in his administration who “fill pages and pages with obscure, multi-syllable words.” In the document, the Governor called on his heritage and nine memorable words to drive home a challenge for clear language: “Would the average person at Rock Ridge understand it?” The memo became affectionately known throughout state government by the name of the Governor’s hometown — as the “Rock Ridge” memo. It appears in full here, complete with gubernatorial typo — the maiden “memorable memo,” a new, regular feature of *N.C. Insight*.

Unfortunately for Gov. Hunt’s reading eyes and for his friends back in Rock Ridge, the memo does not seem to have halted the spread of “bureau-

cratese.” (Forgive us for using the very jargon which has made this feature of *Insight* necessary, but we must confess the language of government occasionally influences even its closest observers.)

We hope this page of “memorable memos” will encourage people in government to write in language that can be understood. And while highlighting the need for Rock Ridge talk, we hope to offer a smile or two as well.



We hope “memorable memos” will become a regular feature of *N.C. Insight*, but we are dependent upon you. We invite people in and out of state government to send us memos which might qualify for publication here, because of the quality of humor, the degree of jargon, or simply a unique style — or lack of style. □