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Sobering facts, optimism clash at State of the Region event

By Mike Grizzard
The Daily Reflector

Monday, January 26, 2009

KINSTON — The sobering facts of reality and glimpses of optimism clashed head-on for more than three hours Monday morning as economic experts, lawmakers and business leaders gathered for the second annual State of the Region conference at Lenoir Community College’s Waller Building Auditorium.

The reality is, experts said, that times are tough and likely will not show any significant signs of recovery before the end of 2009. The silver lining is the state — and eastern North Carolina — have the resources and foresight to survive and eventually prosper.

“I’ve got good news, and I’ve got bad news,” said Rick Niswander, dean of the College of Business at East Carolina University who also will be the featured speaker at today’s Greenville-Pitt County Chamber of Commerce Power Luncheon at Brook Valley Country Club.

“The good news is the economic world is not coming to an end,” Niswander said. “The bad news is I’m not totally sure about that.”

Niswander was among 10 speakers who presented their views to a turnout of more than 200 on the regional economy as it relates to national and world events. He said that, although there are many reasons to be concerned, the country has endured tougher times, including recessions in 1972-73 and in October 1987.

“We’re not in a depression,” Niswander said.

He said he expects the country to begin to emerge from the recession by the end of 2009, but admits his crystal ball is cloudy.

“There is a lot of ambiguity,” Niswander said.

What is clear is a dedicated effort to scrap for a competitive edge for North Carolina’s Eastern Region, which is composed by 13 counties.

Keith Crisco, the state’s new secretary of commerce appointed by Gov. Beverly Perdue, said companies must be willing to adapt to and embrace a changing global economy.

“How to survive is an issue that we all must address,” said Crisco, who operated Asheboro Elastics Co. for 22 years. “... We need to be sure that we do everything possible on the one hand to minimize the pain and on the other hand to increase prosperity.”

Vital to that is doing a better job of branding and marketing the state to attract jobs, he said. North Carolina’s unemployment rate hit 8.7 percent in December and is expected to climb into double digits in 2009.

“It is fair to say that we have a few jobs going out the back door,” Crisco said. “It’s a challenge to get as many in the front door as are going out the back door today. But the good news is ... we are bringing them in. ... North Carolina citizens are worried, and you need to know that you have a commerce department that cares and is working their tail off to help our situation.”

Experts agree that some of the prime areas for the state — particularly eastern North Carolina — to tap into are health care, biotech industries, the military and tourism. Al Delea, president and chief executive officer of North Carolina’s Eastern region, predicts “a dramatic change” in the region during the next two decades.
due to biotech and life sciences.

The 13-county region has 20 biotech companies employing more than 5,000 people now. The challenge, Delia said, is to the availability of facilities and recruiting companies to the region.

A global innovation network has been established, beginning with an organizational meeting in Krakow, Poland, and 10 member countries will begin operations this year. Delia also said an ECU-Jagiellonian University exchange program is being developed.

He said countries looking to invest in the United States are being targeted by the NCER.

"We want to put ourselves in a position when five or 10 years from now when those foreign markets decide to invest in North America that they will invest and look at eastern North Carolina first," Delia said. "We've begun to identify those markets, we've begun to market to those countries already. We've built relationships in Poland and Italy. In the coming year you will see us lead recruitment missions to Europe and across the United States and increasing our foreign direct investment."

An example of what is possible is the wooing and eventual landing of Spirit Aerosystems, which has begun construction of a 500,000-square-foot manufacturing plant in the Global TransPark. Spirit, which is based in Wichita, Kan., and has facilities in Europe and Asia, selected the Lenoir County site to build components of the Airbus A350 XWB (Extra Wide Body). Rick Davis, site development director for Spirit, said the available workforce and incentive package separated eastern North Carolina from other prospective sites.

Production is expected to begin in May or June of 2010. Davis said the economy will have no effect on the project.

"Airbus is very intent on us moving as quickly as possible." Davis said. "If there is any schedule softening it's only because of the engineering task ahead of us, not because of the economic slowdown."

The presence of Spirit could help spur an aerospace cluster of businesses, economic developers say. That could put an extra strain on a community college system already stretched by the rising number of unemployed looking for new skills.

Scott Ralls, president of the North Carolina Community College System, said enrollment in the fall semester was up 6 percent statewide and has climbed 31 percent since the 2001-02 recession.

"Those are huge challenges for our workforce development system," Ralls said. "I do think our system is up to those challenges."

He said relying on short-term solutions like a proposed government stimulus package is not the best road to travel.

"One of the things that worries me a little bit about the conversations that take place in the notion of a stimulus is could we take our eye off the ball about long term," he said.

State Rep. William Wainwright said the region still must seek its "fair share" of any stimulus money, which could range from $5 billion to $10 billion for the state.

"It must be aggressive, organized and unified in seeking these dollars," Wainwright said.

"These dollars represent an opportunity to help solve some our infrastructure needs or problems we continue to face in our region.

"North Carolina is in better shape than a lot of other states, and we're happy about that, but we still have our problems. We still have hurdles to overcome."

Contact Mike Grizzard at mgrizzard@coxnc.com or (252) 329-9580.
Maine president also candidate at KSU

By Josh Humphries
The Daily Reflector

Monday, January 26, 2009

Kansas State University has named another finalist in its search for a new president, a post that may be offered to East Carolina University Chancellor Steve Ballard.

The third finalist is Robert Kennedy, president of the University of Maine, a position he has held since 2005. Kennedy is visiting the school this week.

Ballard was named as the second finalist earlier this month and visited the university last week.

Kirk H. Schulz, vice president for research and economic development at Mississippi State University also is being considered for the position.

Each candidate met with campus and community groups in Manhattan, Kansas. Ballard gave a presentation to the university community Friday afternoon.

Kansas State President Jon Wefald is set to retire at the end of the 2008-09 academic year after 23 years.

Kansas State has an official enrollment of 23,520 students for the 2008—09 school year, compared to ECU’s enrollment of 27,947 students.

Josh Humphries can be contacted at jhumphries@coxnc.com and 329-9555.

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Strength and courage her legacy

I walked into our locker room for the first time in 10 days since our flight landed in Durham from Boston, Boston, the site of the 2006 Final Four. A Final Four, at the time, I wanted to forget. We lost to Maryland in the national championship game in overtime. It wasn’t just a loss. It was a gutting, stabbing, devastatingly dark loss that left me and my head coach at the time, Gail Goestenkors, gulping for air as we tried to find our way to the surface after being drowned by a lifelong dream slipping directly through our combined fingers.

The locker room looked like it had been abandoned. Clothes were strewn, shoes left untouchable, since our arrival back, the whirl of packing for Boston eerily left behind a sense of what was not accomplished. I was coming in to grab a book I had left, wanting nothing to do with basketball that could cause the numb to fade and the pain to pierce. Scrawled in Coach G’s hardly legible handwriting, six words that were not there before our departure caught my eye: What is delayed, is not denied.

Coach Kay Yow reached out to a Duke team that had just lost the NCAA title game.

STAFF PHOTO BY CHUCK LIDDY

Tributes to Kay Yow

AREA EVENTS

N.C. STATE: On Wednesday, N.C. State will host a Tribute to Coach Kay Yow for the Wolfpack community, family and friends at Reynolds Coliseum. Doors will open at 6 p.m. and the program will begin at 7. Parking is available in the Reynolds Coliseum deck. The event will be streamed live for free on Pack Pass; go to www.gopack.com.

FUNERAL

A public viewing will be held 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Friday at Colonial Baptist Church in Cary. The funeral follows at 3 p.m., with Pastor Mitchell Gregory officiating. Burial will take place at 10 a.m. Saturday in Gibsonville City Cemetery in Gibsonville.

MEMORIALS

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Kay Yow/WBCA Cancer Fund and mailed to The V Foundation for Cancer Research, 106 Towerview Court, Cary, NC 27513; call (919) 380-9505; or visit www.jimmyyow.org/support-us/donate-now.html.

SEE YOW, PAGE 4C

Editor’s note: Duke senior guard Abby Waner shares her memories of how N.C. State women’s basketball coach Kay Yow affected her life. Yow died Saturday at age 66 after a long battle against cancer.
had passed along this simple quote to my coach. This became our team mantra, as they were the only six words that Coach G knew to help her cope with what was without a doubt the most gut-wrenching basketball game of her career.

**Motivating mantra**

In that moment, I felt the power of the statement that was going to be the pulsing motivation behind my every next workout in Cameron Indoor Stadium preparing for my sophomore season, the only words that would stare back at me as they were written in marker on the mirror of my locker, a reminder to a team that pushed through 30 games the next season without losing one on a mission to not be denied again.

 Denied, we would not be, until March 3, 2007, when Kay Yow sat on the bench opposite of ours, and the undefeated, powerhouse, thriving machine that our team was lost in the ACC Tournament semifinal game to N.C. State. Coach Yow had missed 16 games that season for treatment, and yet there she sat, or rather anything but sat. She clapped, she yelled, she smiled, she subbed, she protested, she stomped — all with cancer at an otherwise debilitating stage IV.

**Inspired by Coach Yow**

N.C. State’s K.D. Whittington played with a bandaged lower lip, a braced knee and a twisted ankle suffered in the first half. Ashley Key led all scorers. Gillian Goring played through foul trouble and had the two biggest offensive putbacks of the game. Sasha Reaves nailed two clutch free throws down the stretch after only shooting 65 percent on the season.

We had beaten these same women only a few weeks before earlier in the season, but that was only the delay. They were most definitely not denied as they hugged, cried, fist-pumped and yelled at center court with the entire Greensboro Coliseum, a bleeding palette of Carolina and Duke blues, and Maryland and State reds, on its feet commemorating what would be one of the finer victories of Kay Yow's coaching career.

Our team included the national player of the year, the ACC defensive player of the year, the coach of the year, and now with a staggering "1" in the "L" column could do nothing but stand in the corner as Coach G refused to let us go to the locker room and moan, but rather stand by, defeated.

**Outplayed in every way**

Only later would I realize that I also stood awed — awed at a group of women who matched and outplayed us in a way that no one else had even remotely touched.

It was not only inspiration that Key, Whittington, Goring, and Fields played with. They played with wit, precision, execution, and talent. They played for a woman who battled off the court, as they emulated her battle on the court. My Duke team was beaten by a better N.C. State team that day. Coach Yow had provided me, Coach G and 10 other women with the six words that forged us through 30 unbeaten games. It was that 31st game that Coach Yow and her 14 women played for those words themselves.

This past Saturday, I stood among 9,033 other people as the Duke men's team prepared to take on Maryland. Before the game, a moment of silence for Kay Yow was preceded by a collective intake of breath as the sold-out arena was shocked by the announcement of her death. The tremor that circulated throughout that gym had made its way from the N.C. State women's team to all of college basketball. While this day was delayed for 20 years during her fight with breast cancer, that which is never to be denied is her strength and courage kept alive by those she touched.
In her memory
Keep cancer fight alive for Yow

Those mourning the loss of Kay Yow, the pioneering women’s basketball coach who died Saturday of breast cancer at the age of 66, speak about her achievements and personality off the court as much as they celebrate her professional accomplishments. Her death is a loss for N.C. State University, where she spent 34 years, and women’s basketball, but also to the many lives she touched.

Yow’s battle with cancer lasted nearly 22 years and, throughout that time, she raised awareness of that deadly disease and the need to promote research efforts aimed toward its eradication. That mission must continue now that she is gone, serving as a powerful testament to her memory and the opportunity to help others.

It was not basketball, but dreams of becoming an English teacher that first brought Yow to a college campus. That campus was East Carolina, where Yow earned her degree in 1964. At a High Point high school, she worked as an English instructor and librarian and became a basketball coach for the girl’s team, the career that would make her a legend.

At N.C. State, Yow was a determined and passionate leader who steered her team to four Atlantic Coast Conference Tournament titles. She amassed 737 wins over her 38 years in the coaching profession and captured a gold medal leading the United States national team in the 1988 Olympics. It was a resume that earned her a deserved place in the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame.

Her most impressive achievement came off the court and away from the crowds. She was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1987 and fought the disease in the years that followed with courage and determination. Though clearly sapped by the radiation therapy at times, she served as an inspiration to those beyond the basketball world for her resilience in the face of adversity.

Sadly, it is a battle that too many women — and men — must endure.

The National Cancer Institute estimates about 184,000 new cases of breast cancer were reported in 2008. About 41,000 were fatal. The United States witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of breast cancer cases in the 1970s, but that number has declined lately. The mortality rate has declined as well, since early detection of a cancerous lump, often found thanks to regular screening and self-examination, dramatically decreases the probability of the disease proving fatal.

Yow worked with several organizations to publicize the fight against breast cancer, the need for greater awareness and the importance of regular screening. That message must continue to echo now that she is gone. Her death leaves a hole in the North Carolina sports world, and celebrating her legacy should include carrying on her noble work.
Clinton seeks helping hands in an interdependent world

Ex-president says crisis demands more than honest work and voting

By Jay Price
Staff writer

RALEIGH — Calling interdependence among the people of the world “the fundamental fact of the 21st century,” former President Bill Clinton said Monday that regular citizens must step forward to attack problems such as climate change and the global economic collapse.

“I don’t think it’s good enough anymore to define citizenship as being a good, honest worker and taxpayer and someone who votes,” Clinton said in a speech at N.C. State University. “I think we all have to ask ourselves what can we do to advance the public interest and advance the interdependent world.”

Clinton spoke to a crowd of about 6,000 mostly students, staffers and faculty members in Reynolds Coliseum. His podium stood at one end of a court that had been the home hardwood of NCSU’s celebrated women’s basketball coach, Kay Yow, who died Saturday.

With Yow’s name literally hanging over the event on a banner, Clinton took a sober tone, noting that he is a big bas-

 SEE CLINTON, PAGE 4B

Jackie Saye takes a photo of Clinton during his speech.
About 6,000 people were in the audience.

See and hear more: See more photos and hear former President Bill Clinton talk about hunger in the U.S. at newsobserver.com/news.
Basketball fan and that Yow died from breast cancer — the same disease that killed his mother. "We should live every day the way [Yow] lived with her illness," he said. "I admired her very much."

The speech, part of NCSU's Millennium Seminar Series organized by former North Carolina first lady Mary Easley, was billed as a look at the way forward for the nation under a new president.

Clinton cited President Barack Obama's election as evidence that the United States has moved past its history as a nation of two races. He illustrated the point by asking everyone to look around and think about how much more diverse the group was than the audience for such a speech would have been 30 years ago.

"It is possible to escape the burden of our history, because this is not a biracial country anymore, and we don't see ourselves that way anymore," he said. "We are multiracial, multiethnic, multireligious."

Clinton said the promise of Obama's election was undermined by the huge problems the new administration must face, from the economy to terrorism to the conflict in Gaza between Israelis and Palestinians.

Because of an ever-more-global economy, Clinton said, a problem in one nation is almost sure to affect others. That makes it crucial for individuals to act, he said.

Taking action can be simple, he said, citing Kiva — an online service that allows people to loan sums of money as small as $25 to Third World entrepreneurs to help them lift themselves from poverty.

In one of the lighter moments, Clinton said he liked Obama's Cabinet choices — particularly his pick for secretary of state. That, of course, would be Clinton's wife, Hillary.

Obama beat her in a Democratic presidential primary during which Bill Clinton was criticized several times for harsh comments about Obama. Now, via his wife, Clinton has a delicate unofficial role in the new administration. In the speech, he mainly avoided naming specific things he thought Obama should tackle.

The lone exception came when he said the economic crisis and spending that Obama's administration is planning to stimulate the economy presents an opportunity to solve the problem of health-care inequality that has bedeviled presidents for decades.

Clinton said the major threats are global, but the opportunities are, too. "It's the most interesting time in human history to be alive," Clinton said. "What we have to do is make sure that the positive, interesting things make us peaceful and prosperous and aren't gobbled up by the negative ones."

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Duke surpasses goal for financial aid

From Staff Reports
Comment on this story

DURHAM - Duke University's initiative to increase financial aid for students raised more than $300 million, President Richard Brodhead announced Monday.

The four-year effort passed its overall $300 million goal in November.

More than 4,000 alumni, parents and friends contributed to the initiative, creating 478 new scholarships and supporting 330 funds that had been previously established.

Of the $308.5 million raised through gifts and pledges, $226 million is dedicated to need-based undergraduate scholarships, $20.6 million to athletic scholarships, and $61.9 million to graduate and professional student support.

Duke's current budget includes $86 million -- a 19 percent increase from the 2007-08 budget -- to support Duke's undergraduate financial aid program. About 45 percent of undergraduates receive financial support to attend Duke, and about 40 percent receive need-based aid. For more than a decade, the percentage increase of Duke's financial aid support has far outpaced the percentage increase of tuition.

This year, Duke has received more than 23,750 applications for admission, the largest number in school history and a nearly 17 percent increase over the previous record set last year.

Duke is one of a limited number of schools with a "need-blind" admissions policy, which means that all qualified U.S. applicants are accepted regardless of their ability to pay for college. Duke guarantees it will meet 100 percent of demonstrated financial need.

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NCSU graffiti portrayed as words of hate

NAACP leader says writings evoke fear, memories of KKK

ERIC FERRERI, Staff Writer
Comment on this story

CHAPEL HILL - Far from just ignorant ramblings, the racist writings on the wall of N.C. State's Free Expression Tunnel last November were a call-to-arms that sparked fear and conjured up memories of the Ku Klux Klan, the head of the state's NAACP argued Monday.

William Barber II, president of the N.C. Conference of the NAACP, told members of a UNC system commission on hate crimes that the graffiti sprayed on that wall threatening Barack Obama just after his victory in the presidential election should not be dismissed as a case of boys being boys. And it should not be protected by the First Amendment.

"You don't get to express freely a threat to kill somebody," Barber said.

To drive home the point, NAACP representative Al McSurely, a Chapel Hill attorney, passed around a poster-sized enlargement of the racist writings that sparked campus outrage and the UNC system commission's formation.

Red letters on a black background read: "Let's shoot that N______ in the head!"

Next to it, in white spray paint: "KKK."

"These words are not just words you happen on," Barber said. "It's specific language."

Barber and McSurely did not attend a recent public forum the commission hosted to gather input but were granted the time Monday to give their presentation.

Both spoke of the Klan's history in North Carolina and the South and called the writings "KKK-associated."

Four N.C. State students, who have not been identified publicly, confessed to the writings.
There has been no evidence that they have any formal relationship with the KKK.

Barber acknowledged after his presentation Monday that it wasn't his intention to suggest otherwise.

"This is the kind of language that comes out of those sorts of hate groups," Barber said. "We don't know who they're associated with, but the language has a history."

The Secret Service said the writings posed no threat to Obama, and Raleigh law enforcement declined to file any charges against the students.

The commission is examining whether the UNC system should have a specific policy on hate crimes. Currently, there is no systemwide policy, but all campuses have codes of conduct students must follow. Generally, the term "hate crime" isn't specified, but many of the codes cover threatening or assaultive behavior.

In interviews last week, UNC system leaders said a systemwide policy would give a top-down voice and some standard language for campuses to follow. For the most part, officials would like such a policy to serve as a prevention tool by making very clear to students what sort of behavior is unacceptable.

Harold Martin, a UNC system vice president leading the commission, said using the term "hate crime" in a policy would give it additional teeth.

"It makes it very clear and more important in a student's understanding," Martin said.

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Breast cancer lethal, but more treatable

SARAH AVERY, Staff Writer

Comment on this story

The high-profile death Saturday of Kay Yow, longtime women's basketball coach at N.C. State University, serves as a reminder that breast cancer remains a killer.

But area doctors and researchers say huge strides have been made in the 20 years since Yow was diagnosed, with death rates falling about 40 percent. Women who are diagnosed with the disease today have a much different experience than Yow.

"In 1987, treatment was a whole different animal," said Dr. Lisa A. Carey, an oncologist at the Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center at UNC-Chapel Hill. Most underwent surgery to remove at least part of a breast and then endured harsh chemotherapy and radiation.

Women today can be diagnosed much earlier using enhanced imaging machines. They have a refined diagnosis of the particular tumor's genetic qualities. And they are treated with an arsenal of chemicals that home in on tumor cells while leaving others unharmed.

Among the biggest treatment breakthroughs have been the use of the drug Herceptin, which targets a particular protein that is overproduced in some breast cancers, and a broader use of tamoxifen, which blocks growth in tumors fueled by the hormone estrogen.

Still, breast cancer claimed an estimated 40,480 lives in the United States last year, the American Cancer Society reports, including 1,300 women in North Carolina.

"We're certainly not done," said Dr. Kelly Marcom, an oncologist at Duke Comprehensive Cancer Center.

Marcom said one of the biggest impediments to curing breast cancer is the mystery behind cancer's insidious habit of lying dormant for years, then re-emerging in a more deadly form. Genetic scientists are trying to figure out why normal development somehow goes haywire, and whether it is genes, an environmental trigger or a combination of both that trips the switch.

"It's the $64,000 question," Carey said. "The science of metastases is unbelievably interesting and almost a black box right now."

For cancer survivors, the most alarming news is when breast cancer recurs or a new kind of cancer develops years later in people, such as Yow, who have been long considered cured.

Robin Hutchison, who was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2001 and was treated at Lineberger, said, "Anytime you find out about another woman who's not survived in the long run, it's very upsetting and disappointing."

Yet Yow survived for more than two decades, Hutchison said, and served as a role model, despite treatments that were likely less advanced than what most receive today.

Hutchison said today's cancer patients can serve future survivors by participating in clinical
trials. She joined a trial at Lineberger testing Herceptin, and she credits the drug with saving her life. Now, eight years after her own diagnosis, she thinks of her cancer as if it's tucked in a shoebox on the top shelf of her closet.

"For the most part, you don't have to deal with it or think of it very often, but it never really goes away."

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BREAST CANCER FACTS


MORTALITY: The death rate from breast cancer has decreased by 2.2 percent a year from 1990 to 2004, with a slightly smaller drop of 1.3 percent a year for African-American women.

LETHALITY: Breast cancer is the sixth-leading cause of death among U.S. women, and the second-leading cause of cancer death. The other top killers are heart disease, stroke, lung cancer, chronic lower respiratory disease and Alzheimer's.

SOURCE: U.S. CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION

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Scott funeral to bring ex-governors together

Comment on this story

Gov. Beverly Perdue today will lead a delegation to the funeral in Haw River of former Gov. Bob Scott.

Among those expected to attend are former Govs. Mike Easley, Jim Hunt and Jim Holshouser. Former Gov. Jim Martin is in Costa Rica and is not expected to attend. Others scheduled to go to the funeral include former U.S. Sens. Robert Morgan and Lauch Faircloth.

The funeral will be held at the Hawfields Presbyterian Church. Scott's body will be pulled by caisson, followed by a riderless horse, to the cemetery.

This is at least the third time the state's political establishment has headed to Haw River for a funeral. The first time was in 1958, when former Gov. Kerr Scott, Bob's father, was buried. The second time was in 1989, when state Sen. Ralph Scott passed away.

Scott once told the story of the last funeral of a past North Carolina governor -- that of Terry Sanford at Duke University in 1998.

Scott (1969-73) said that another member of the ex-governor's club, Jim Martin (1985-93), turned to Scott and said: "You're next."

Martin was apparently trying to be funny, but it was also a recognition that after Sanford passed away, Scott was the oldest former governor.

But Scott seemed to think the comment was more cheeky than funny.

Willing to try

House Speaker Joe Hackney says he is willing to take another run at a bill that would award legal fees to those who win in public records lawsuits.
Open government types and news organizations sometimes complain that the expense of successfully suing a governmental body or agency over public records discourages such lawsuits. They say that automatically awarding legal fees would give government officials pause before restricting the public’s access to records.

A bill that would automatically award fees in such cases sailed through the Senate but died in the House last session. Bill Holmes, a spokesman for Hackney, said the speaker is interested in passing a bill that would allow automatic recovery of costs as long as it wouldn’t strip all discretion away from judges.

"He just wants to make sure the fees are reasonable," Holmes said. "There’s no other area of law in North Carolina that allows for automatic recovery of fees."

**Drilling task force**

Legislative leaders have named the members of a task force on offshore drilling.

The 24-member committee will look into the economic and environmental impacts of allowing drilling for oil and natural gas off the coast of North Carolina.

The members were appointed by Hackney and Senate leader Marc Basnight, who have said they expect the study could cost as much as $100,000 and take a year to complete.

The co-chairmen are James Leutze, former chancellor of UNC-Wilmington, and Doug Rader, chief ocean scientist for the Environmental Defense Fund.

**Disability rally set**

The N.C. Disability Action Network is holding a rally Wednesday morning, a few hours before the legislative session begins, to demand improvements to the state mental health system and safety in state hospitals.

The group has more than a dozen recommendations for improving hospitals and community care.

The group will rally from 10 a.m. to noon at Bicentennial Mall, across the street from the Legislative Building.

**Fundraising party**

U.S. Rep. Larry Kissell will have a birthday fundraiser.

The Biscoe Democrat will hold a birthday party and North Carolina barbecue at the National Democratic Club Townhouse in Washington on Wednesday -- three days before he turns 58.

Tickets to the event range from $500 for a guest to $5,000 for an honorary host.

The event is being promoted by the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, which backed Kissell's campaign.

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By staff writers Rob Christensen, Ryan Teague Beckwith, Lynn Bonner and Ben Niolet.

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Will N.C. get what it needs?

As economic rescue takes shape, state officials wonder if priorities are straight

BARBARA BARRETT, Washington Correspondent

Comment on this story

WASHINGTON - The massive economic stimulus package Congress is considering this week could include billions of dollars for North Carolina, an infusion of cash the state craves.

But the package would leave little room for flexibility in how states spend the money. It would be spread among dozens of federal programs. And, some argue, it might not offer the economic jolt we need in a state reeling from job losses.

"It's becoming all-expansive ... to include this, that and the other," said U.S. Rep. Howard Coble, a Greensboro Republican and member of the House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. "I'm afraid it's too much."

Under the House version of the stimulus bill, North Carolina could see money for education grants, for school construction, for Medicaid recipients, for unemployed workers and for poor college students. Money could go to buy city buses, patch highways and buy food for the elderly. There is a tax credit for middle-class families, and another tax credit for school construction.

"It will stimulate the economy in North Carolina," said U.S. Rep. David Price, a Chapel Hill Democrat who helped shape the legislation. "Whether it's enough to enable the whole country to turn the corner to the degree that we're needing it to, that's hard to say."

With North Carolina's jobless rate at its highest in a quarter-century and the state nearly $2 billion in the hole, local officials have been looking to Washington for help. Gov. Beverly Perdue bluntly told North Carolina's congressional delegation this month that she wants as much flexibility as possible in spending the money.

The $825 billion package is President Barack Obama's first test of his pledge to get the flailing economy back on track, but it faces strong opposition from Republicans who call it large and unwieldy. Although the bill likely to pass the House this week, it will be easier for opponents to delay it in the Senate. Details about the Senate's version of the stimulus package began to emerge Monday. There, Democrats need 60 votes to move forward.

Plenty of doubts

Meanwhile, economists argue the package's effectiveness.

N.C. State University economist Michael Walden said it makes sense that if the private sector isn't spending money, than the government ought to. But, he added, the bill's wide dispersal of dollars may lessen each project's effectiveness.

"It would probably help some, but not as much as promoters may think," Walden said. "I
would focus it on some key areas: transportation, energy efficiency, maybe assistance in helping states close budget gaps, maybe housing."

Already, state legislators have said the $900 million that North Carolina could receive for road and transit projects doesn't begin to address state needs.

"This is just about two 'bridges to nowhere,' " said state Sen. David Hoyle, a Gastonia Democrat who chairs the state Senate Transportation Committee, referring to a controversial $400 million project that has been promoted by Alaska politicians. "And it doesn't seem like it's quite enough for this growing state.

Some state officials also worry they won't have enough flexibility to spend money as they want.

Much of the education money, for example, is broken down into separate pots of money directed to poor schools, special-education funding, renovation projects and other programs.

Some officials would rather see money go into a general fund with more state control.

"With the strings attached to these programs, it's not really benefitting us over the long period," said Paul LeSieur, director of school business services for the N.C. Department of Public Instruction. "You only have so many children with special needs in your system that you have to offer services to. You only have so many Title I schools," which are schools with pupils receiving free and reduced lunch.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi sent out a flurry of state-by-state breakdowns on the stimulus package last week, arming lawmakers with the details to persuade constituents to support the bill. The charts are just estimates, though. Some money could go to states through formulas; other money might go to federal programs and be distributed based on grant applications.

North Carolina could get, for example, $18 million in low-income energy assistance, $24 million in education technology grants, $2.2 billion for Medicaid and $1.8 billion to plug a hole in the state's budget.

A breakdown by the Congressional Budget Office, a nonpartisan agency that serves Congress, indicated that much of the bill's stimulant effect might not take place until 2010. Democrats called the analysis premature and misleading, but Walden, the economist, said that analysis raises important questions.

"You do have to worry about how fast these monies get into the system," Walden said.

Price called some GOP questions about the bill "frivolous."

"Just nitpicking," Price said. "Nobody's saying this is the ideal process. On the other hand, this is not a normal situation."

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Staff writer Bruce Siceloff contributed to this report.

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Regarding your Jan. 10 story "UNC-CH drops plans for airport": Chancellor Holden Thorp deserves praise for leading his campus away from a scheme that would have despoiled a chunk of Orange County, creating enemies for the university right in its own backyard.

Of course, friction with its own hometown has already resulted from UNC-CH's big plans for Carolina North (a complex that will have precious little to do with undergraduate instruction -- the university's first mission). Carolina North, with its new law school (isn't there already a nationally recognized law school complex on campus?) and parking palaces will supplant Horace Williams Airport -- a fine facility that's long been accepted by its neighbors.

Here's hoping Thorp's common sense approach will continue to rein in Tarzilla.

Randall Rickman, Raleigh

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Journal honors East Carolina University professor

The Associated Press

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GREENVILLE, N.C. - The scientific journal Nature says an East Carolina University biology professor has put forward some of the decade's best ideas on evolution.

The journal recognized Jeffrey McKinnon for his work on the mating habits of three-spine sticklebacks, which are silvery fish about 2 inches long.

McKinnon studied sticklebacks from Alaska, British Columbia, Iceland, Scotland, Norway and Japan to better understand how new species form. He and his co-authors published their findings in 2004, while he worked at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater.

McKinnon now chairs the biology department at East Carolina.

Nature's list of 15 "evolutionary gems" also includes studies of the origin of feathers, evolution of teeth and natural selection in lizards.

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The Surprising Causes of Those College Tuition Hikes
A new report finds that much of that money does not go directly toward educating students

By Kim Clark
Posted January 15, 2009

Why has college tuition been rising so high and fast? Will college costs ever drop back to more affordable levels?

Those questions have been frustrating parents and students for years. A new report provides some surprising answers that will, unfortunately, probably only frustrate and anger them even more. At public colleges, tuition has generally been driven up by rising spending on administrators, student support services, and the need to make up for reductions in government subsidies, according to a report issued by the Delta Cost Project, a nonprofit based in Washington, D.C.

In some cases, such as at community colleges (which educate about half of the nation’s college students), tuition has risen while spending on classroom instruction has actually fallen. At public colleges especially, the current economic troubles will likely only accelerate the trend of rising prices and classroom cutbacks, says Jane Wellman, the author of the report. After analyzing income and spending statistics that nearly 2,000 colleges reported to the federal government, Wellman concludes: "Students are paying more and, arguably, getting less in the classroom."

Among the more surprising findings:

- The main reason tuition has been rising faster than college costs is that colleges had to make up for reductions in the per-student subsidy state taxpayers sent colleges. In 2006, the last year for which Wellman had data, state taxpayers sent $7,078 per student to the big public research universities. That's $1,270 less (after accounting for inflation) than they sent in 2002.
Public universities have been reinining in overall spending per student in recent years. Flagship public universities’ spending per student has risen from about $12,400 in 1995 to $13,800 in 2006 after accounting for inflation. But since 2002, spending at public colleges has generally not exceeded inflation.

Increases in spending were driven mostly by higher administration, maintenance, and student services costs. Public universities spent almost $4,000 per student per year on administration, support, and maintenance in 2006, up more than 13 percent, in real terms over 1995. And they spent another $1,200 a year on services such as counseling, which was up 23 percent. Meanwhile, they spent about $8,700 a year on classroom instruction for each student, up about 9 percent.

Big private universities, powered by tuition and endowment increases, have increased spending dramatically while public schools have languished. Total educational spending per student at private research universities has jumped by almost 10 percent since 2002 to more than $33,000. During that same period, public university total spending was comparatively flat and totaled less than $14,000 a year.

That growing gap between rich schools and poor schools worries observers like Wellman. The cost of attending a public university, even after subtracting out aid and inflation, rose more than 15 percent in the last five years, according to the College Board. But almost all of the recent price increases at public universities are "backfilling for cuts in state funds," Wellman says.

Some college presidents say the report shows they haven’t been raising prices irresponsibly.

"Virginia Tech" explained David Hodge, president of Miami University of Ohio. "Everybody expects us to do a lot more security. Students are coming with more physical disabilities and emotional needs. There are greater expectations for career services," he says. And that kind of administrative and support spending "is a really good investment. It helps the students."

In addition, public schools tend to serve many low-income students and minority students who need more remedial classes and extra counseling services than better-prepared
students who attend elite private universities, says F. King Alexander, president of California State University—Long Beach.

One of the reasons that Duke University costs about $51,000 a year is that the elite schools are in a bidding war for top faculty and better services for students, says college spokesman Michael Schoenfeld. In addition, competition for the best students forces schools to offer bigger and bigger scholarships, which means few students actually pay the full sticker price, he notes. Duke's record-breaking flood of applications for the next academic year shows there's still plenty of demand for what private universities offer, he says.

But as more and more states facing budget crises consider further subsidy cuts and tuition hikes for public schools, parents and students are increasingly objecting to price increases for any reason. "Enough is enough," says James Boyle, president of the College Parents of America. A tsunami of applications at lower cost schools such as the California State University campuses shows that students and parents are voting with their feet. "The changing market for higher ed will cause colleges to hold down their expenses and state legislators to increase their subsidies," Boyle predicts.