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Cooper touting safety actions

By Jimmy Ryals
The Daily Reflector

Cooper was in town for a two-day, statewide campus safety symposium sponsored by East Carolina University. Today's events include a training session with a Secret Service official and a teleconference between ECU and Virginia Tech students.

Addressing more than 250 college law enforcement officials from around the state, Cooper touted the work of a campus safety task force he convened after the Virginia Tech rampage.

Among the panel's recommendations was the creation of a state center to track new campus safety concepts. The center could follow the state Center for School Violence Prevention's model, Cooper said. Launched in 1993, the K-12 center has a small staff but has improved violence preparedness in N.C. schools, he said.

"With higher education, it's a different issue than a one- or two-school-building, K-12 camp-

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pus," he said. "You've got little communities with campus, sometimes big communities, and they have to be responded to differently."

The panel also called for new restrictions on the sale of guns to people who've been involuntarily committed for mental illness. Involuntary commitments should show up on a national database gun sellers consult when they do background checks, Cooper said.

"People with serious and violent mental illnesses shouldn't be able to buy a gun, period," he said. "It's as simple as that."

Cooper and the task force also called for more information sharing between mental health providers and college safety agencies, and between campus and community police forces. He urged the officers in his audience to use the task force report on their campuses.

"We believe that the recommendations of this report will help us in potentially preventing a violent incident," he said. "We don't know whether it will or not, because with something that never happens, you never know."

Before his lecture, Cooper said he hopes the General Assembly will fund the task force's suggestions.

"Many of them can be done internally and will not require, additional dollars, but it's a very small investment to make to put together this center for campus safety," he said. "We have seen it work in K-12 public schools."

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Our Views

His legacy

Life of service defines Gaston Monk

Gaston Monk devoted his life to serving this community. As an educator and school administrator, and as a member of several governmental boards, Monk provided determined leadership to the people of Pitt County.

Yet, Monk, who died Monday at the age of 85, will also be remembered as a key figure who helped this community navigate the turbulent waters of integration. His conviction and compassion through those difficult times contributed to a legacy Pitt County should honor.

Public education acts as a powerful force, as was readily apparent throughout Monk's life. He first pursued a strong academic foundation for himself, earning degrees at Elizabeth City State Teacher's College and N.C. A&T State University. Then he used that knowledge to help Pitt County schoolchildren, first as principal of the one-room Nicholas School in Bell Arthur and later at Ayden Middle School, a new and integrated school.

During his 34 years in public instruction, Monk found himself fighting the forces of segregation and the separate-but-equal status quo that allowed the all-black schools to do with inferior facilities and supplies. His advocacy for his students fostered the achievement of untold numbers of county youth who would otherwise have gone without.

But Monk's legacy is accentuated by the knowledge that, even as a man of color in a troublesome era, he sought a public life in the interests of his community.

His work for social justice was also evidenced by his 14 years as president of the Pitt County chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. While that would have been contribution enough to his community, Monk also served on the Pitt County Board of Social Services, the State Employees Credit Union Advisory Board and as secretary-treasurer for Bell Arthur Water Corporation.

Without question, that represents a remarkable list of achievements and a lengthy record of public service. But Monk's legacy is accentuated by the knowledge that, even as a man of color in a troublesome era, he sought a public life in the interests of his community. That is a choice that few would make, but one that Monk embraced.

Monk will be interred on Saturday following a funeral service at South Central High School, Pitt County's newest high school and a facility that serves students of every culture and background without reservation. It is an appropriate setting to celebrate a life of service, one spent in the pursuit of equality.
Study finds a simple way to avoid cerebral palsy: Epsom salts

BY JEAN P. FISHER
STAFF WRITER

Doctors were able to dramatically cut the rate of disabling brain damage among premature babies using a remedy that is safe, readily available and costs just pennies a dose. The wonder drug? A solution of magnesium sulfate, more commonly known as Epsom salts.

A study conducted at UNC Hospitals /Lake Forest Baptist University Medical Center and 18 other medical centers around the country found that giving women in early labor magnesium sulfate infusions reduced by nearly half the number of premature babies born with serious cases of cerebral palsy. Such children often are confined to wheelchairs and need help performing the most basic tasks, such as eating.

Results of the study, which involved 2,231 women at risk of preterm labor, were presented Thursday in Dallas at the annual meeting of the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine. About 6 percent of children born to women who got magnesium sulfate infusions had moderate or severe cerebral palsy when evaluated at age 2. Just over 7 percent of children born to women in the control group had moderate to severe cerebral palsy at the same age, the study found.

"It's sort of amazing that something so simple and cheap can have such an impact — I really think this will change practice," said Dr. John Throp, a UNC-CH obstetrician and study co-author. He said the treatment is already an established therapy for pregnancy-induced high blood pressure. It has also been used to try to slow preterm labor, with limited success.

Cerebral palsy, which is brain damage that can affect movement, speech and learning, is relatively rare, occurring in between two and three of every 1,000 babies born.

Cerebral palsy “makes those lives more expensive and less productive than they could be," Throp said. "It sure makes your life much more difficult.

Lisa Schwab of North Raleigh, whose 17-year-old son, Patrick, is severely impaired by cerebral palsy, can attest to that. Patrick is a bright and happy teenager, she said. But brain damage has left him unable to speak or walk. He drives a powered wheelchair. To communicate, he shakes his head or uses hand signals to indicate yes or no.

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Schwab carried Patrick to full term, so she would not have been a candidate for magnesium sulfate had it been available when he was born. But Schwab said she is encouraged to see progress toward preventing some cases of such a profoundly disabling condition.

"This is great," said Schwab, who is a former board member of the state chapter of Easter Seals United Cerebral Palsy. She hopes this therapy will be routinely available to women in early labor.

Doctors treated 947 women in early labor with infusions of the study drug and gave 655 women in a control group drips of an inactive solution; the remainder of women in the study were ineligible for treatment, often because they delivered their babies too quickly for intervention. All the women were between 28 and 31 weeks into their pregnancies.

MAGNESIUM SULFATE did not affect rates of death among babies born to women in either group. Researchers observed a significant difference in cerebral palsy rates.

Treatment with magnesium sulfate did not have serious side effects in women or their babies. Throp said UNC Hospitals is already offering magnesium sulfate to women in premature labor. He hopes more hospitals will do the same.

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It was called Carolina First, and by any measure the eight-year fund-raising effort by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill was a stirring success. And then some. The university raised $2.38 billion, well past the original $1.8 billion goal. Some $345 million will go for student fellowships and scholarships, and $419 million will go for faculty, including 208 endowed professorships. The figures are head-turning, indeed.

The closing of the campaign follows closely the ranking by Kiplinger’s Personal Finance magazine of UNC-CH as the country’s best value in public higher education, a distinction the university has had for seven years in a row. (Other member campuses of the UNC system also did well.)

These things are good news. And even though UNC-CH continues to be regarded as a splendid value, which it undoubtedly is, UNC system officials and those who rule the Chapel Hill campus mustn’t lose sight of that proud tradition. Value is tied both to excellent academics and low expenses for in-state students.

North Carolina’s constitution, in fact, provides for a low-cost college education, and the tradition has served the state well now for more than two centuries. Many successful alumni, likely many of those who contributed to the Carolina First campaign, can say to this day that they might not have attended college at all had it not been affordable, which not too long ago meant almost free with respect to tuition. In recent years, however, tuition increases have become fairly commonplace, even if costs are still relatively modest.

Also, while the Carolina Covenant program in Chapel Hill provides for a debt-free education for lower-income students, the burden on those in the middle class who may not qualify for much financial aid is greater than it used to be. It’s time to hold the line on tuition hikes.

Expenses have escalated nationwide, and the U.S. Senate may be looking into tuition rates and endowments and basically, taking an overview of how colleges and universities handle their money. The prospect of scrutiny from Washington may already have gotten the attention of some in higher education and perhaps made them interested in pulling the reins on students’ costs.

It wouldn’t be good for the issue to become some sort of convenient political hot button. But it’s understandable that concerns about the rising costs of education these days would send constituents to their representatives in Washington.

In the meantime, let’s hope leaders of the UNC system understand that being regarded as a great value is a point of pride worth every effort to maintain.
Study finds why it's hard to stop scratching an itch

BY JEAN P. FISHER
STAFF WRITER

Ah, that’s the spot. Everyone with an itch — or a dog — knows how blissful it is to scratch, and how hard it can be to stop. Now researchers at Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center think they know why.

In a first-ever study, the scientists used imaging technology to look at what happens in the brain when we scratch. They found that scratching suppresses brain activity associated with bad feelings and memories, and stimulates parts of the brain associated with compulsive behavior — which could explain why some of us keep at it even when we know we shouldn’t. Doctors advise against scratching, which can damage the skin.

The average person with a mosquito bite probably doesn’t need to know all that, acknowledges Dr. Gil Yosipovitch, a dermatologist and itch specialist who led the Wake Forest team.

But he said the new findings, published online Thursday in the Journal of Investigative Dermatology, may point the way to new treatments for people with hives, poison ivy and chronic conditions such as eczema and psoriasis. Cancer and kidney patients also develop itch as a side effect of treatment. Knowing the parts of the brain involved in itching and scratching may suggest medications known to target those parts, for example.

"I see these patients in real life," Yosipovitch said. "There are millions of them, and they suffer."