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RALEIGH — Seeking to assuage state employees worried that North Carolina's budget woes could cause massive layoffs, Gov. Beverly Perdue and legislative leaders said Tuesday they would do their best to preserve vital state positions.

Perdue, who ordered spending cuts of up to 7 percent to narrow an estimated $2 billion shortfall for the budget year ending in June, said three weeks ago that such reductions would likely lead some agencies to lay off people. But the new governor has backed off that comment, and the federal stimulus package weaving its way through Congress could help stave off so-called RIFs, or reductions in force, in government parlance.

"I want everybody to be prepared. I do not anticipate RIFs or layoffs or even a four-day ... workweek for some state employees," Perdue told reporters after the meeting of the Council of State. "But I think it does us all justice to be prepared as the economy continues to soften."

Washington could send down $900 million a year for the next two years to help fill budget holes, and that's not including paying for an increased percentage of Medicaid expenses.

That's good news for North Carolina's efforts to improve public education and keep quality teachers in the class-
room to train students for the high-tech economy, according to House Speaker Joe Hackney, D-Orange. Education accounts for more than half of this year's $21.4 billion budget approved last year by the Legislature.

The federal money “hope-fully will help us from cutting school teachers,” Hackney said at the North Carolina Chamber's annual Government Affairs Conference in Raleigh, adding that this year's legislative session in part is “about saving jobs for those in state government who deliver essential services.”

Lawmakers are now moving ahead with plans to write and approve a budget for next year. At a public budget briefing, legislative staff economists projected the gap between revenues and expenses is at least $2.1 billion.

Add likely expenses to plug a hole in the state employee health insurance plan and pay for thousands of additional students going to school this fall and teacher bonuses, and the gap reaches $3 billion. Perdue said she will present her two-year budget proposal by the second week of March.

“We’ve got a deep hole we’re going to have to try to dig out of,” said Sen. Linda Garrou, D-Forsyth, who is expected to remain co-chairwoman of the Senate Appropriations Committee for the next two years.

But Garrou said it shouldn’t be surprising that lawmakers consider potential work force cuts among the more than 322,000 state employees and teachers given that private sector businesses are cutting their payrolls.

North Carolina’s unemployment rate of 8.7 percent is the highest in nearly 26 years.

“That may be an area that we need to look at it,” Garrou said. “We certainly hope that we won't come to that but that may be where we are headed.”

State workers are anxious about their future, but the state can’t afford to reduce its work force when citizens are relying more than ever on services for the jobless and the less fortunate, said Dana Cope, executive director of the State Employees Association of North Carolina.

“When you have mass layoffs in state government, that creates a ripple effect in the state economy,” Cope said, adding that the federal stimulus funds “can be used so we don’t have to reduce our force or have layoffs.”

At the chamber meeting, Hackney and other legislative leaders agreed that the state must find ways to eliminate duplications and find other cost savings in state government.

Senate leader Marc Basnight, D-Dare, suggested that former Gov. Jim Hunt's early childhood education program could be merged with the More at Four preschool program championed by former Gov. Mike Easley.

House Minority Leader Paul Stam, R-Wake, also said the Legislature should expand the number of charter schools and provide tax credits to parents of special education students to attend private schools. The initiatives would cost less per pupil than the cost of teaching them in traditional public schools, he said.

“We need to do more with less,” Stam said.
Historic meeting of Council of State takes time to recall the service of Long

BY GARY D. ROBERTSON
The Associated Press

RALEIGH—North Carolina's top elected statewide officials remembered former colleague Jim Long at their regular monthly meeting Tuesday, calling the ex-insurance commissioner a friend who dedicated his career to the state.

Long's death Monday subdued what was otherwise a historic council meeting, in which a majority on the 10-member panel were women for the first time, led by the new governor, Beverly Perdue.

Long, who died at age 68 after suffering a stroke two weeks ago, served 24 years as commissioner and on the council before retiring last month.

"He was such a tremendous public servant," Perdue said after the meeting. "He was so looking forward to this part of his life ... it makes you realize that you've got to enjoy every day and live it to the fullest because nobody expected this."

Perdue opened the meeting with a moment of silence for Long, who regulated the state's health, automobile and life insurance companies. The Alamance County Democrat

See LONG, B3
LONG

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was elected six times, provid-
ing the human face to a com-
licated industry. He often
fought to keep premium rates
for car insurance among the
lowest in the country.

"He gave his most impor-
tant years to the people of this
state. And that's what life is all
about — serving other people.
And Jim Long did that," At-
torney General Roy Cooper
said.

Cooper wore a red tie in
memory of Long, who al-
ways donned a similar tie in
honor of his father. Secretary
of State Elaine Marshall said
she couldn't find a red tie in
her husband's closet, so she
donned a red scarf instead.

Wayne Goodwin, a for-
mer assistant to Long who
was elected commissioner in
November after Long chose
not to seek a seventh term,
sat in Long's old council seat
Tuesday for the first time. He
said he regrets not being able
to talk with Long as the new
commissioner.

"I'm going to call very
deeply on conversations and
memories and advice that we
had given each other," Good-
win said.

Marshall succeeded Long as
the longest-serving member
of the Council of State, a panel
whose usual role is to handle
routine state business such as
giving final approval to state
land transactions and the is-
suance of new state debt.

The panel's composition
was different Tuesday now
that six of the 10 members are
women. The November elec-
tion of Beth Wood as state
auditor and Janet Cowell had
tipped the scales. But for Per-
due and others, the finality
of Long's departure from the
council hit home.

"In 30 days ... the fabric of
North Carolina changed," the
governor said. "I'm just so tak-
en by this quick tragedy."

Long's family planned two
funeral services — one at 2
p.m. Thursday at Hayes Bar-
ton Baptist Church in Raleigh
and another at 2 p.m. Friday at
The Church of the Holy Com-
forter in Burlington.
Last chance to donate, win a chance at spider immortality

By Josh Humphries
The Daily Reflector

Tuesday, February 03, 2009

The biology department at East Carolina University is offering donors a chance to go down in scientific history.

Today is the last day to donate to support fellowships for students who conduct biodiversity research at ECU for a chance to name a spider discovered by biologist Jason Bond.

To celebrate the 200th birthday of Charles Darwin, the Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences Department of Biology is offering the highest donor a chance to name one of Bond’s spiders.

But Jeff McKinnon, chairman of the biology department, said responses to the offer have been low, and the deadline may be extended.

The department wanted to do something fun on a day that will feature more serious lectures throughout the country, McKinnon said. It’s all part of ECU’s celebration of Darwin’s birthday that will also include workshops, tours and art exhibits.

Individuals or organizations can make donations to support fellowships. The highest donor will get to name one of Bond’s recently discovered spiders, several of which have been named for celebrities including Neil Young, Stephen Colbert and Angelina Jolie.

The name given to the trapdoor spider from California will forever be listed in text and reference books.

“It is an opportunity for immortality,” Bond said. “I don’t know anything that compares to it. Species names are a permanent fixture for as long as humans are on the planet.”

Bond discovered about 25 new species of trapdoor spiders in late 2007 and is in the process of naming them.

The fundraiser is an effort to raise funds for a fellowship in the biology department to allow for more discoveries.

The biology department will hold an open house Feb. 12 to announce the winning spider name and to honor Darwin and his contribution to biodiversity.

Tours of the Howell Science Complex on the ECU campus will be held from 6-7:30 p.m., beginning outside room B103.

Tours will offer participants a chance to see and learn about spiders, fish embryos, bird behavior, greenhouse plants, biotechnology and more.

At 7:30 p.m., Bond will present “Spiders, Biodiversity and the Future of Life,” focusing on biology, the biodiversity crisis and links between biodiversity and human welfare.

But the main purpose of the event is to raise funds for future biologists at ECU and awareness of biodiversity concerns, McKinnon said.

“People are increasingly concerned about environmental issues — and that is excellent — but we are kind of forgetting that at the same time a lot of plants and animals are going extinct,” McKinnon said.
“A lot of them don’t even have names, they have never been looked at by scientists. We want to raise some money for research that will allow us to describe biodiversity, figure out what is out there and ultimately help preserve it.”

The event is free and open to the public.

Biology faculty members also will offer workshops from 4-6 p.m. to elementary, middle and high school teachers on how to teach evolution in the classroom. There are still slots available for the workshops, McKinnon said.

The celebration of Darwin’s birthday will kick off Friday with the opening reception for a Darwin exhibit from 6-9 p.m. at Emerge Gallery. The display continues through Feb. 21.

“There has long been a connection between art and science,” said John Stillier, professor of biology and exhibit coordinator. “Art is often an expression of the natural world, an expression of the beauty and the wonder that people have toward nature.”

Darwin, the scientist best known for developing the theory of evolution by natural selection, was an artist in his own right. He used drawings, in the absence of photography, to depict the world around him, Stillier said.

Gallery hours are Tuesday through Friday, 10 a.m. to 9 p.m.; Saturday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.; and Sunday 1-4 p.m.

For more information, contact the Department of Biology at (252) 328-6718 or by e-mail at biology@ecu.edu.

Contact Josh Humphries at jhumphries@coxnc.com or (252) 329-9565.

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Q: I made a New Year's resolution to lose weight. I have been trying to go it alone without much luck. Is there an affordable program in town? — F.K., Greenville

A: Eat Smart, Move More, Weigh Less was created with people like you in mind. Susan Reece from the Pitt County Extension office is once again teaming up with ECU Family Medicine to teach it starting Feb. 11. It meets every Wednesday for 12 weeks at 11 a.m. in the Family Medicine Center. I think it is a great program where you learn to eat mindfully. I have to confess I may be a bit biased because I was part of the team that developed this program for North Carolina. If you need more information, call Kay at 744-5463 or e-mail cravenk@ecu.edu.

Wear red

I hope every man and woman who reads this column will wear red on Friday. It is the National Wear Red Day to support Women's Heart Disease Awareness. You can wear a dress or shirt or tie or blouse or ball cap, or sweater or the special red dress pin. Just wear red to support women.

And, if there is a way school kids could wear just a little something red without violating their uniform policy, they could support their moms and grandmothers. If not, maybe they could wear something red after school. I hope that in addition to wearing red, you will take the opportunity to eat something heart-healthy on Friday.

Select the heart-healthy option off the menu at your favorite restaurant or café. Look for foods in the store that have heart-healthy claims. Consider eating fish for your entrée. Be adventurous and try a fish you have never eaten before. Select one that is high in omega-3 fatty acids. Try tuna, salmon, pollock, catfish, trout, herring, sardines, cod or blue fish. Fish is a good source of lean protein, usually lower in saturated fat and higher in omega-3s than poultry or meat.

And, please try not to fry the fish. Frying destroys many of the heart healthy properties. But, if you must, fry it in just a touch of heart-healthy oils like canola or olive or sunflower.

If you are thirsty, try a glass of green tea for its EGCG content. Some experts recommend that drinking 12 ounces of green tea a day is a heart healthy act. But please, don’t load the tea up with sugar. Remember that achieving and maintaining a healthy weight is a powerful way to combat chronic diseases. Before you drink green tea, if you are taking a blood thinner, ask your doctor if it will negatively interact with your medicine.

During the month of February there are many local and national events to highlight the fact that heart disease is the No. 1 killer of women. Women fear cancer, especially breast cancer. But heart disease is a killer. The good news is that eating healthy and being at a healthy weight is a great way to prevent both breast cancer and heart disease.

Eating healthy is one way both men and women can prevent or delay heart disease and live healthier, fuller and longer lives. We have a great new resource in town where we can experience wonderful tasting heart-healthy foods — the new Café at the East Carolina Heart Institute at Pitt Memorial Hospital. The café’s menu makes it easy to eat healthy without having to spend a lot of time trying to figure out what fits in a heart-healthy diet.

Over the last year, I was pleased to be part of a team at PCMH that helped design an eating experience that would be both pleasurable and healthy. At the café, which is open to the public, the portion sizes are in
keeping with the number of calories appropriate for meals for most adults. I enjoyed a breakfast of whole wheat French toast, turkey sausage, an interesting juice and a great cup of coffee last week. I am looking forward to going back at lunch time and try a great salad or the pizza baked in the stone oven.

And one day when I am in a hurry I will grab one of the boxes of sushi made right on the spot. The sushi chef has a great smile and wonderful talent.

If you haven’t tried sushi before, here’s a great chance to buy a small box and share it with your co-workers. If you aren’t ready to try the sushi with eel quite yet, start with one that has vegetables or meat. Sushi does not mean fish. Rather, it is a Japanese vinegar rice that is usually topped with other ingredients, including fish, various meats, and vegetables.

At the ECHI café, all the chefs prepare foods using methods like broiling and steaming that promote foods’ natural flavors. There are plenty of fruits and vegetables and salads to choose from. That’s good because the results of recent studies tell us that the best way to get the antioxidants your body needs is by eating whole foods. Taking dietary supplements just does not work as well as consuming flavorful fruits and vegetables.

So plan a meal at the ECHI café and try some tasty, heart-healthy foods and beverages. It’s open seven days a week. Breakfast is from 6-10 a.m.; lunch is 11 a.m.-2 p.m.; Grab & Go is available from 2-4 p.m.; and dinner is served from 4-8 p.m.

Professor Kathy Kolasa, a registered dietitian and Ph.D., works with the Family Medicine Center, Brody School of Medicine at ECU. Contact her at kolasaka@ecu.edu, or C/O The Daily Reflector, P.O. Box 1967, Greenville, NC 27835.

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UNC-Greensboro drops laptop requirement

The Associated Press
Comment on this story

GREENSBORO - A North Carolina university has dropped its requirement that all students have a laptop computer because there isn't enough financial aid to help pay for them, a newspaper reported Wednesday.

Officials at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro said the decision was the result of a slumping economy and university system budget cuts, the News & Record of Greensboro reported.

"In this environment of significant cuts we had to take a hard look at a number of things we were doing," said David Perrin, provost and vice chancellor for academic affairs.

"By doing away with the grants we found we could save $700,000 a year. Our intention is to use those funds to protect other things."

Perrin said the university can't afford to give financial aid for the computers and dropped the requirement for undergraduates rather than impose a financial burden on needy students.

The school had required laptop computers for all students since 2005.

An official said the university could save $700,000 a year by dropping laptops. Some departments like the business school still will require laptops and the school will offer discounts to help those students.

Last year, the university upgraded its campus wireless network to give students and faculty better service.

Laptops remain a fixture of campus life.

"We actually learned from our students that most of them will come to campus with a laptop whether or not it's required," Perrin said.

Senior Tony Mullins said he never comes to school without his laptop, partly because the wireless service is good. Guests at the school can use the system for free with a valid e-mail address.

"Honestly, if you live off campus like I do, it's a lot easier to have your computer on campus than to try to get into one of the computer labs," Mullins said. "They're always just completely packed."


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Related Content
UNC-Charlotte athlete dies after hoops game

BY CLEVE R. WOOTSON JR., The Charlotte Observer

Comment on this story

CHARLOTTE - A UNC-Charlotte track-and-field athlete died Monday night after going into cardiac arrest during a basketball game, the university announced Tuesday.

Steven Archer, a sophomore who competed in the long jump, transferred from Delaware State in the fall and walked onto the track team. His top distance of 7.01 meters at the Liberty Open placed him ninth on the university's top-10 list.

"He loved our sport and worked hard to make a place for himself in it and was well on his way," said 49ers track and field coach Bob Olesen in a statement.

Memorials and funeral arrangements have not been finalized at this time.

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Fat, calories lead to insulin resistance

From Staff Reports
Comment on this story

A diet overly rich in calories and fat causes an instant imbalance in the body's muscle cells that becomes insulin-resistant over time, scientists at East Carolina University report in a study.

The findings help explain why people who diet and exercise can reverse insulin resistance, perhaps quite quickly.

"Up to this point, most people have assumed that insulin resistance is a disease that requires quite a bit of time to develop, and on the flip side, quite a bit of time to reverse," said Darrell Neufer, research contributor and professor in ECU's Department of Exercise and Sport Science and the Department of Physiology. "That may not be the case."

The current study provides new insight into the intricate cellular balance that occurs as the body processes food. When someone eats more food than muscle cells need, the cells respond by sending out a signal that they can't take up any more fuel. That cellular signal is actually a chemical gatekeeper, which blocks insulin from doing its job of unlocking the cell to receive more energy -- glucose. If this pattern continues for weeks and months on end, insulin resistance is diagnosed.

For a link to the study, go to www.newsobserver.com and click on the science blog.

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