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Chitwood to head surgeons’ group

The Daily Reflector

Dr. W. Randolph Chitwood Jr. was elected president of The Society of Thoracic Surgeons at its annual membership meeting.

The society is a nonprofit organization representing more than 5,400 surgeons, researchers, and allied health professionals worldwide who deal with heart, lung, esophageal and other surgical procedures for the chest. Founded in 1964, the mission of the organization is to enhance the ability of cardiothoracic surgeons to provide the highest quality patient care through education, research and advocacy.

Chitwood, senior associate vice chancellor for health sciences and director of the East Carolina Heart Institute at East Carolina University, is a founder of the East Carolina Heart Institute that is undergoing a $200 million building project. He has been a pioneer in developing new technology for minimally invasive heart surgery. His Robotic Surgical Center has trained more than 350 surgeons from around the world in the robotic surgical techniques which Chitwood developed.

Chitwood also pioneered robotic valve repairs using the da Vinci system and, in 2000, used it to perform the first complete mitral valve repair in North America.

He was the lead investigator of the FDA robotic mitral valve trials.

Chitwood has special expertise in complex valvular surgery including mitral repair, as well as aortic valve and cardiac rhythm surgery. His influence on cardiothoracic surgery has spread worldwide through his many academic visits demonstrating new operations and technology.

During his term as president of the surgeons’ organization, Chitwood plans to take a more active role in international cardiothoracic surgery issues, work on government policy issues, develop additional clinical guidelines and increase efforts to better foster upcoming generations of cardiothoracic surgeons.

“We need to utilize new technology and the impact it has in patient care to increase the interest surgeons have in our specialty,” Chitwood said. “It will also be important in the coming year to think about how we can blend our influence in areas of public policy and new technology with other professional organizations.”

Chitwood has been involved with the surgeons’ organization throughout his career, taking his first leadership role in 1994.

He has been active on a variety of Society’s workforces, particularly those regarding the planning of the annual meeting. He is also active in several other organizations, both here and abroad. In 2003, he was elected to fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons of England and is a former president of the International Society for Minimally Invasive Cardiac Surgery and the Society for Heart Valve Disease. He serves or has served on the editorial boards of the Annals of Thoracic Surgery, the Journal of Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgery, the Journal of Cardiac Surgery, the Journal of Heart Valve Disease, the Asian Annals of Cardiovascular and Thoracic Surgery, CTS Net, The Heart Surgery Forum, Chest and the American Heart Journal.

A graduate of Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia, Chitwood received his medical degree from the University of Virginia and completed his surgical residency at Duke University Medical Center. He then came to the East Carolina University School of Medicine as a professor of surgery, where he started the cardiac surgery program in 1994.
Our Views

With care

Gun proposal needs crafting, approval

Attorney General Roy Cooper helped lead the state’s response to the tragic April shooting of 32 students and faculty at Virginia Tech. His task force offered a number of sensible initiatives that would bolster safety on college campuses, a particularly relevant issue for this community.

Many of the recommendations he delivered last month have already been adopted across the state. But one proposal — the limitation on gun ownership for people with serious, violent mental illness — must be carefully crafted and adopted sensitively to operate effectively.

North Carolina acted swiftly in the wake of the Virginia Tech shooting to examine the adequacy of security in this state. Campus leaders, such as East Carolina Chancellor Steve Ballard and his administration, conducted thorough reviews of their schools. At the same time, the state’s attorney general convened a task force to look at statewide readiness and proposals to prevent a similar tragedy in North Carolina.

Last month, Cooper delivered the conclusions of that work, many of which focus on methods of improving security on campuses and facilitating communication between university agencies. Those were two key areas of concern in the aftermath of the Virginia Tech shooting, and East Carolina is fortunate to have already instituted initiatives like campus threat-assessment teams.

One important provision in the task force report will require a broader legislative effort to enact, and is certain to provoke a host of questions and determined opposition.

In Greenville last week, Cooper argued that the state should limit access to weapons for individuals who are involuntarily committed to psychiatric care, and that the state should provide names of those individuals to the National Instant Background Check system. Such a prohibition would have prevented the Virginia Tech shooter from legally purchasing the two handguns used in the rampage.

Any effort to pass that legislation is certain to raise the concerns of gun-rights supporters, who argue against even thoughtful limitations on gun purchases. However, a larger concern will be how it affects mental health treatment. Some advocates argue that laws such as that deter treatment, since those in need of care would fear landing in a federal database or having their Second Amendment rights curtailed without sound justification.

The state certainly has a vested interest in keeping guns from those who cannot own or use them responsibly, and this is an inexcusable loophole that must be closed. When the Legislature turns its attention to Cooper’s proposal, it is crucial that lawmakers proceed carefully on this recommendation certain to bolster public safety.
House speaker talks legislation during Greenville trip

By Jimmy Ryals  
The Daily Reflector

A Medicaid trade and a quarter-cent sales tax hike are likely all the state aid that counties will get in building schools, the speaker of the N.C. House of Representatives said Tuesday.

Speaker Joe Hackney, D-Orange, said he doubts the General Assembly will add to a school construction package it passed last session.

"I don't know the answer to that for sure, but I doubt it," Hackney said when asked whether new school facility funding is a possibility.

"The governor has taken a very strong position that the state needs to look after state needs and counties and local governments need to look after their local government capital needs."

That principle isn't absolute, he said, noting that the state routes lottery funds and other money to counties for school construction.

Hackney, who is midway through his first term as speaker, traveled to Greenville to speak with The Daily Reflector about legislative activity.

At commissioners meeting Monday, Pitt County officials were critical of Medicaid relief included in the state's most recent budget. Over three years, the state will take over each county's share of Medicaid costs. In return, counties are foregoing a portion of revenue from the corporate income tax.

The swap won't help counties as much as state officials suggested it would, said Pitt County Manager D. Scott Elliott. Pitt County is expected to receive $2 million in relief in three years, half of what state budget experts projected.

Commissioners said they would discuss the matter with state lawmakers representing Pitt County.

Counties are better off now

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than they were before the relief package passed, Hackney said. He applauded Pitt County officials for their “impressive” local effort to build support for legislation adopted last year that allows counties to hold a referendum on a quarter-cent sales tax increase. Pitt County voters adopted the tax, which goes into effect locally in April.

“That has been asked for for several sessions now and was not forthcoming,” Hackney said. “So, I’m real pleased that we were able to do it.”

Funds likely for dental school

Hackney said the Legislature is committed to building a dental school at East Carolina University, but the funding time line is unclear.

“I hope we can go ahead and fund it at this time, but that remains to be seen,” he said. “We’re committed to the project.”

The General Assembly gave ECU $26 million to operate and build the school last year. The University of North Carolina Board of Governors requested $87 million, the full cost of building the school and up to 10 satellite clinics around the state.

“I’m not in a position to say where we’ll be on the capital at the end of this session,” he said. “But we’ll do some more of it, I’m sure.”

No major ethics moves ahead

Roughly one year after a series of new ethics reforms took effect, Hackney said he doesn’t anticipate any major ethics reforms coming out of the short legislative session.

The Government Ethics Act, which became law Jan. 1, 2007, created the State Ethics Commission to oversee all three branches of government. It mandated greater disclosure of state officials’ financial interests and lawmakers’ contacts with lobbyists.

“I think it’s better, before any dramatic new reforms, to have a full two-year run at it, an election and so forth,” he said, adding that North Carolina has one of the nation’s five best ethics laws.

Hackney called an ongoing investigation of N.C. Rep. Thomas Wright, D-New Hanover, “old business.” Wright has been indicted in Wake County on fraud and obstruction of justice causes for mishandling hundreds of thousands in campaign donations.

A House select committee is considering whether to expel him from the chamber.

Wright’s alleged misdeeds occurred before the lobbying law’s passage, Hackney noted. Hackney has called for Wright to resign.

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Employees, students remember slain mother

By Michael Abramowitz
The Daily Reflector

Friends, co-workers and students who were once helped by the late Kristina Bryan Hobbs at East Carolina University cashier's office struggled Tuesday evening to rise above the pall her death cast over their lives.

A memorial service at Hendrix Theatre in the Mendenhall Student Center gave about 85 of them an opportunity to share their affection and gratitude for Hobbs with her parents, Wayne and Lynn Bryan, who attended the event with other family members.

Lynn Bryan offered her thanks to those who came and to the many students and strangers who sent their sympathies and remembrances to the family since her daughter's death on Jan. 9 at the hand of her husband, who shot and killed her, then himself, according to police.

"Remember her in your own lives, take what you learned from Krissie and live it forward. We will never forget the love you showed her," Bryan told the gathering.

Dee Bowling, an accounting supervisor who worked with Hobbs during her two and a half years at the university, hosted the event with Kandus Simmons, a student who was befriended by Hobbs.

Bowling described Hobbs as a caring and thoughtful co-worker with a compassionate heart and a "5,000-watt smile" who helped students facing financial aid problems with genuine care.

"I knew we had found a rare jewel," Bowling said of Hobbs' arrival at ECU.

Simmons struggled through tears to speak to the attendees, needing Bowling and a friend to physically support her.

"Kristina meant so much more to me than just another face or just another employee. I found so much comfort in her patience and calmness coupled with her ability to work quickly and precisely, smiling as she went along. She truly was an angel on Earth," Simmons said in halting words.

Bowling and Simmons, brought closer through the tragedy of their shared loss, told the gathering that a memorial fund has been established for Hobbs' daughter, Sophie, and the Bryans, who are raising their granddaughter.

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Hobbs' favorite songs were sung by co-workers and commemorative poems written by students were read aloud, followed by Bible verses and a moment of silence in the light of glowsticks that were distributed among the attendees.

"Thank you for the love you've poured out," Lynn Bryan said. "We will never forget the love you showed Krissie."
Medical experiments targeted blacks, author says

By Jimmy Ryals
The Daily Reflector

Nazi medical experiments on Jews may carry more infamy, but the United States has its own history of abusive experimentation, an author said Tuesday at the Brody School of Medicine.

From the pre-Civil War period through the late 20th century, researchers have regularly exploited blacks to advance medicine, said Harriet B. Washington, the author of “Medical Apartheid: The Dark History of Medical Experimentation on Black Americans from Colonial Times to the Present.” Largely forgotten, forced experimentation on blacks reflected the broader society and reinforced assumptions that blacks were inferior or sub-human, she said.

“Medical researchers are no better or no worse ethically than the majority of the American population,” she told more than 70 students and faculty members at East Carolina University’s medical school. The Student National Medical Association and Brody administrators invited her to speak on campus.

The most egregious example in America was the Tuskegee experiment, in which researchers studied roughly 400 men who had untreated syphilis. From 1932 to 1972, physicians studied how the disease affected black men without treatment.

Among the research team was Dr. Thomas Parrin, who hoped to eradicate syphilis. With the mid-1950s discovery that penicillin effectively treated syphilis, Parrin — then the U.S. surgeon general — could have halted the Tuskegee study but didn’t, Washington said.

Black exploitation should shadow the work of other well-regarded medical figures, Washington said. Dr. James Marion Sims, widely credited as the father of gynecology, developed Caesarian sections and ovarian surgeries by forcing captive slaves through experimental procedures without anesthesia, she added.

Sims, Parrin and others “epitomize a fact that we’ve successfully been able to hide from ourselves: that one can be both healer and abuser, Washington said.

This history of abusive medical experimentation on blacks is important because it helped shape some modern-day health disparities, Washington said. It contributes to black iatriophobia.

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Nbia, or fear of physicians. Multiple studies show blacks seeking treatment less often than whites, she said.

That wariness is “actually a sadly rational and logical response to the history,” Washington said.

Washington’s comments resonated with one Brody student.

Adnan Mustafa, a third-year medical student, said he’s troubled by the fact that medical students practice their skills on an overwhelmingly impoverished patient population.

Mustafa said he’s wrestled with the issue throughout medical school, but it became more pronounced when he began giving pap smears and pelvic exams — intrusive procedures — during an obstetrics and gynecology rotation. Patients may not be aware they’re helping train students.

“It’s not that we’re lying,” he said. “It’s that they have no choice.”

Washington had no handy solution for Mustafa. She suggested finding ways to repay the favor.

At one northern medical center, she said, students drove poor patients to and from treatment appointments, she said.

“I also suggest you ask the people in the area what they need, rather than telling them what they need,” she said.

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Donor tries to revive Oral Roberts U

New leader gave school $70 million

BY JUSTIN JOZAPAVICIUS
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

OKLAHOMA CITY — As a kid, Mart Green made 7 cents for every picture frame he glued together for his father’s arts and crafts business. But before he went out and bought baseball cards with his money, the 9-year-old gave 10 percent to charity.

“That was just culture for me,” Green says. “It wasn’t even something you debated or thought about. It was just natural.”

Today, Green is 46, and he is still giving. This time, it’s $70 million of his family’s fortune to rescue Oral Roberts University, the evangelical Christian school engulfed in a spending scandal and burdened with tens of millions of dollars in debt.

In return for the donation, Green becomes chairman of the university’s new board of trustees. He hopes to restore the public’s trust in the 5,700-student institution.

Green started when he was 19. Green announced the donation in November, five days after televangelist Richard Roberts stepped down as president amid accusations he misspent school funds to live in luxury.

Up until then, Green had no connection to the school and hadn’t met either Richard Roberts or his father, Oral Roberts.

Green, an evangelical Christian and member of the Assemblies of God, says he decided to step in for the sake of the alumni, faculty and students.

“When Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart had their situations, a lot of people suffered,” Green says, referring to the two TV evangelists caught in sex scandals.

“When the Catholic priests had their situation, a lot of people suffered. If ORU goes down, it affects all the Christian colleges.”

One of his first tasks will be finding a new president for the university, which is saddled with about $45 million in debt and more than $60 million in deferred maintenance costs.

Green’s involvement sounds like a huge financial gamble — not unlike the time his father decided to close Hobby Lobby stores on Sundays for religious reasons and forgo millions in sales.

Green dropped out of now-defunct Tomlinson College in Cleveland, Tenn., to go into business but now finds himself the chairman of a university. He is a fast talker who friends say still gets butterflies in his stomach when he speaks in public.

He did not set foot in a movie theater until 2001, when he saw Jim Carrey’s “The Majestic,” about the magic of an old movie theater. He now owns a movie company, which has produced films about missionaries in Ecuador and AIDS in Africa.
Pension records open, says Cooper

Attorney general reverses office's stand

BY DAN KANE
STAFF WRITER

Attorney General Roy Cooper on Tuesday reversed an earlier opinion from his office and said that information on state employees' pensions should be made available to the public.

"North Carolina has some of the strongest public records laws in the nation, and the interpretation of those laws should favor openness," Cooper said in a statement.

The opinion pertained to a state law enacted last year to make public all forms of state and local government employee compensation. The law also included language that Cooper's office initially interpreted to mean that information on the pensions for those employees was to be kept private.

It became an issue last month when the State Treasurer's Office, which oversees the state's retirement system, declined to make public the potential pension for state Rep. Thomas Wright, a Wilmington Democrat facing criminal fraud charges.

Cooper on Tuesday, responding to a request by two Senate leaders who were involved in writing the new law, released a second opinion on the pension inform-

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ation. State Sen. David Hoyle, a Gaston County Democrat, had sponsored the law. Senate Majority Leader Tony Rand, a Fayetteville Democrat, made substantial changes to it.

Hoyle and Rand told Cooper's office that there was no intent to make the pension information private. State Sen. Richard Stevens, a Cary Republican, said last week that he amended the legislation, but only to prevent the public from learning whom one chooses as a beneficiary or how state employees invest their 401(K) benefits.

Chief Deputy Attorney General Grayson G. Kelley wrote in the latest opinion that the first opinion was based upon the law stating that compensation information had to be made public by the "employing entity." Therefore, an agency that held such information but did not employ the worker — in this case the Treasurer's Office, with regard to pensions for all state employees — would be prohibited from releasing it.

"We cannot conclude that the General Assembly intended such a result," Kelley wrote.

State Treasurer Richard Moore, who is seeking the Democratic nomination for governor, did not support keeping that information private. On Tuesday afternoon, his staff began handling requests for pension information.

Spokeswoman Sara Lang said that Wright's pension, if he were to have left the legislature on Tuesday, would be $892.20 a month when he turns 60 in 2015. It could be less if he is found guilty.

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