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Obama brings message to ECU

3,000 packed Minges Thursday

By Brock Letchworth
The Daily Reflector

Sen. Barack Obama brought his message of hope and change to a packed Minges Coliseum at East Carolina University on Thursday evening.

Speaking to nearly 8,000 people for just more than 40 minutes, with no notes and a conversational style as he strode around the stage, the Democratic presidential candidate criticized the policies of Republican candidate John McCain on several occasions while touting his own solutions for the economy, health care, education and the ongoing war in Iraq.

Saying he began running for president because of what Dr. Martin Luther King called the "urgency of now," Obama told the crowd that the country is at a defining moment in its history.

"We can't afford to wait," he said. "We can't afford to wait to fix our schools. We can't wait to fix our health care system. We can't wait to bring good jobs and good wages right here to Greenville, North Carolina. "We cannot wait to end global warming. We cannot wait to free ourselves from energy dependence. We cannot wait to bring this war in Iraq to a close.

"We cannot wait, and that is why I am running for president of the United States of America."

Thursday's trip was Obama's third to the state this year. The speech came on the heels of Thursday's Obama town hall meeting in Raleigh.

During a private interview before his speech, Obama said he has learned North Carolina is much like the rest of the country in terms of the issues. Segments of the economy are doing well, he said, but many manufacturing jobs have gone overseas. He promised to provide tax breaks for businesses who remain in the country.

The senator also vowed to create a tax code that doesn't give tax breaks to the nation's wealthiest individuals and helps middle-class families. He also said senior citizens in a certain income bracket would not have to pay income tax on their Social Security benefits.

"That is the type of support that I think ordinary families need, not only here in North Carolina, but also across the country," Obama said.

Referencing Vice President Dick Cheney's numerous meetings with oil and gas companies, Obama said it was no coincidence that oil companies such as Exxon Mobil made record profits last quarter, and Americans are paying close to $4 per gallon of gasoline.

"Your voices aren't heard, and your agenda isn't in the mix," Obama said.

"That's what this election has to be about, changing who Washington is accountable to. We can't just have somebody who knows how to play the game in Washington. We need somebody to put an end to the game-playing in Washington."

See SPEECH, A11

SPEECH
Continued from A1
Obama vowed to lower health insurance premiums annually by up to $2,500 per family, and give anyone without health insurance access to a federal plan. He said people would not be excluded for pre-existing conditions, and officials will negotiate for the cheapest available price on drugs. Those changes would come by the end of his first term, Obama said.

The crowd might have been its loudest when the senator spoke about his solutions for education, however. Obama recommended investing in early childhood education and rewarding teachers with higher salaries based on their performance.

Obama also expressed frustration with standardized testing, and said he wants kids to learn art, music, science and "all of the things that make an education well-rounded."

Obama also said he would make college more affordable by offering a $4,000 tuition credit annually.

"That will pay about two-thirds of public college's tuition, but young people will have to give something back in return," Obama said. "It won't be for free. You've got to put some time in community service or national service."

"We'll invest in you. You invest in America, and together we can move this country forward."

Obama also vowed to end the Iraq War in 2009, and eliminate what he termed the mindset that got the country into the war.

"I want to end the fever of fear that has gripped our foreign policy," he said. "I want to restore the power of diplomacy to our foreign policy. I will meet with not only those we like, but those we don't."

Obama praised McCain for his service to the country, but noted the Arizona senator is basically running for President George W. Bush's third term.

"We don't want to be the party of yesterday, we want to be the party of tomorrow," Obama said. "We'll let John McCain look backward. We're going to look forward because the American people are ready to move forward."

Obama didn't reference Hillary Clinton, his rival for the Democratic nomination, until late in the speech. Noting that Clinton had recently called him an elitist, Obama said he wished she had been there to help pay off some of his student loans five years ago.

"For a while, Senator Clinton was teasing me, saying I was always making fancy speeches and peddling false hope," Obama said. "Let me tell you something, hope is not ignoring problems out there and pretending things are OK.

"I know how hard it is going to be to change this country, but I also know nothing in this country has ever happened unless somebody, somewhere in this country was willing to hope."

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Supporters show their devotion to candidate

By Ginger Livingston
The Daily Reflector

Linward Barnhill said he always knew he would live to see a black man become president of the United States. Thursday, he shook the hand of the man he believes will make that dream come true.

Barnhill, 73, a Bethel native, was among the 8,000 who heard presidential hopeful Sen. Barack Obama speak Thursday evening at Minges Coliseum.

He dressed in red slacks and polo shirt decorated in a flag motif for the occasion.

"Today is a day to be patriotic," Barnhill said, dancing briefly to a classic Stevie Wonder tune. "This is the day great things happen. Barack is going to get elected today."

When Obama campaign workers spotted Barnhill's ensemble they immediately invited him to sit behind the senator during his speech. Afterward, Obama shook his hand.

"He shook my hand with a passion," Barnhill said. "I had a deep down religious feeling. It was very cool."

Barnhill and others who attended the rally said Obama's family history, work in community development and talk about problems confronting working Americans made them believe he was offering...

See REACTION, A11

REACTION

Continued from A1

more than campaign slogans.

Anita Wright of Greenville and Bettina Adams-Artis of Wilson said Thursday's rally was an amazing event.

Obama has created genuine passion and a sense things can change, Wright said.

"I've really been watching the news ... and I've never, ever been this interested in politics," Wright said. When Obama spoke about building his campaign on people who made $25 donations, he was talking about her, Wright said.

Adams-Artis said Obama's family background and work in community development made his words about making health care affordable and lowering gas prices believable.

"I think because he's been exposed to that he can truly relate ... and can be trusted," she said.

Lonnell Whitherspoon of Kinston took away similar impressions.

"Where he comes from and rising above the opposition ... he really represents those stuck to the bottom."

As Darren Cotten of Winterville left the Obama rally, he compared it to Saturday's campaign rally for Hillary Clinton that featured her husband, former President Bill Clinton.

"I was on the fence but I'm definitely leaning in (Obama's) direction," he said. "Today really brought home to point that he really is looking out for the best interests of the people and not the lobbyists."

When he talks about trust, Cotten said, you believe him.

"Knowing what I know about both the candidates I believe he definitely is sincere and truly supports the people," Cotten said.

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The committees discussed an expansion of Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium, a new softball complex and, potentially, a new chancellor's residence.

By Josh Humphries
The Daily Reflector

Future construction projects at East Carolina University are keeping officials busy.

The ECU Board of Trustees discussed three construction projects in committee meetings Thursday: an expansion of Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium, a new softball complex and potentially a new chancellor's residence.

Athletic Director Terry Holland told the facilities and resources committee that plans to expand the football stadium by nearly 5,000 for the 2010 football season are under way.

The expansion will include 4,300 seats at the east end zone where the scoreboard is located. Above those seats will be about 500 seats in exclusive suites that will sell for $40,000 per year.

Each suite will hold 16-20 people. The added stands may become the new student section and known as the "purple zone," Holland said, but that plan has not been finalized.

When the construction is complete the stadium will appear as a complete bowl, though the new section will not actually touch the existing structure.

The projects is slated to cost about $24 million and will be financed through the additional sale of tickets and the high-priced suites, Holland said.

"Seats it will free up on the side should drive up Pirate Club donations," Holland said.

The addition will bring the total capacity for the stadium up to 48,000 seats and will allow for 20 percent more season tickets.

The committee also discussed building a first-class soccer/track/softball complex next to Minges Coliseum that will impact 10 sports programs. With the new complex ECU will be able to host conference tournaments in those sports, Holland said.

The plan will be under way by this summer when officials begin moving the current softball fields out to the North Recreational Complex area. The tennis courts near Minges will also be razed for the new complex.

The plan also includes a new auxiliary gym for men's

See TRUSTEES, A11
TRUSTEES
Continued from A1

and women’s basketball and volleyball.

“This will address a lot of Title IX issues we have had — it will set the program up very well,” Holland said.

The committee also discussed the ongoing issue of updating or renovating Chancellor Steve Ballard’s housing.

David Redwine, chairman of the board’s facilities and resources committee, suggested forming a special commission to investigate the options available to the board.

Since fall 2006, the board has considered and rejected a series of proposals to improve on the chancellor’s 503 E. Fifth St. home.

The suggestions have included:

■ Buying a larger house near campus but no suitable properties were available, according to documents given to the board in November.

■ Buying an adjacent property, demolishing it and building an expansion onto the current chancellor’s residence. Officials dismissed the proposal because of likely neighborhood resistance.

■ Building a new house in the Rock Springs area, a suggestion from Trustee Mark Tipton that drew little other support, according to the trustee documents.

■ Giving the chancellor a housing allowance. The University of North Carolina General Administration does not allow such a stipend, Vice Chancellor for Administration and Finance Kevin Seitz said.

■ At then-Trustee Mike Kelly’s suggestion, administrators adopted a plan in May for the university to pay for furnishings in residential areas on the home’s second floor. ECU already pays for furnishings on the first floor, which regularly hosts campus events.

The university also bought a neighboring house, 501 E. Fifth St., with plans of turning it into a guest house.

The full board will consider the proposal today to form a commission to further study the need for a larger chancellor’s house.

The house hosts many functions for the university and is the same as it was when it was purchased in 1948 when ECU’s enrollment was around 1,300 students. The university now has more than 26,000 students.

The committee wants to get representation from several university groups to discuss the options for improving the housing for the chancellors because there are many factors to consider, Redwine said. The board must consider community support for the idea, location, costs and alumni reaction.

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More than 50 firefighters battle to contain blaze at historic site

By Michael Abramowitz, Josh Humphries and Ben Deck
The Daily Reflector

Fire consumed an abandoned, historic warehouse in the center of Greenville on Thursday, the same night presidential hopeful Barack Obama came to town.

More than a half dozen trucks and 50 firefighters responded at 5:30 p.m. after a police officer spotted smoke, authorities said at the scene Thursday night. Turn-of-the-century timbers in a building that stood in what once was the heart of Greenville erupted into flames that shot more than 100 feet into the air.

The smoke plume was visible from Wintergreen school, 5 miles to the south, and the Pitt County Fairgrounds, 5 miles to the north.

The blaze was contained but still burning furiously two hours later.

The fire nearly destroyed what was left of the landmark, which preservationists hoped to salvage for a focal point of west Greenville and center city revitalization.

Lines of water trained on the plant's iconic smokestack and water tower kept the structures from falling on Thursday.

"I'm devastated," said Tom Taft, a Greenville lawyer who purchased the facility in hopes of developing it. "My project manager said the early estimation is nothing is salvageable."

The building had been built by the same contractors and at the same time period as the Rocky Mount Imperial site, which has been restored, Taft said.

"I had my financing lined up," said Taft, who said he was in discussions with people about historic preservation tax credits, prospective tenants and roofers. Schematics for the area from Atlantic to Pitt were being worked up, he said.

Located in "Tobacco Town" off Dickinson Avenue, the three-story plant of the former

See FIRE, B3
FIRE
Continued from B1

Imperial Tobacco Company of Great Britain and Ireland Ltd.,
was once the largest buyer of tobacco on the Greenville market
for the export trade, according to research written by local
historian Roger Kammerer.

Most of the structure was built in the early 1960s. The
company left Greenville in 1973, leaving behind the building
covering two city blocks.

Greenville voters in 2004 approved a pair of $5 million bond
issues for the redevelopment of west Greenville and the center
city. Many hoped the tobacco facility would be a star attraction
of the effort.

"It would just be the center point for that district, and a
destination place for eastern North Carolina," historian
Kammerer said Thursday. "Even with it gone, I understand
that all that area has already been bought up by developers."

The plan for restoring the larger district sounds like it
still could be very active, Kammerer said.

People involved include doctors, ECU faculty, local
businesspeople, "a swath of the local community," he said.

"People who like old things."

The next step, he said, wait and see if other owners are still
willing to go forward. "There's more buildings to be saved," he
said, "but this was the grandest of them all."

The fire's cause was unknown Thursday, although of-
officials considered it suspicious. An investigation will move
forward once flames are extin-
guished, Chief Mike Burton of Greenville Fire-Rescue said.

The fire, coupled with demands placed on authorities
by the visit of Obama, required cooperation of many agencies
to coordinate response. While Greenville Fire-Rescue fought
the fire with all its units, departments from Red Oak, Sta-
ton House, Eastern Pines and Winterville helped cover the
city's vacant stations and battle the blaze, Burton said. A tank-
er from Pitt County Schools also carried fuel to the trucks,
whose motors must keep running while they pump water.

Extra officers called in to help police handle crowds and
traffic associated with Obama — more than 8,000 people
turned out for the event about a mile away at Minges Coliseum
— allowed police to manage traffic and another crowd that
grew near the fire.

"It didn't impact the coverage of the Obama event or
this," said Greenville Police Department spokesman Cpl.
Kip Gaskins. "With the mutual aid agreements that we have,
and the extra manpower that we had, they were able to cover
both events at the same time without any difficulty."

Crowds gathered nearby as flames and smoke billowed from
every window of the structure
along with explosions of steam
as firefighters water poured
water on the fire.

William Clark, who has
lived in Greenville his entire
life, was among them, watch-
ing from the corner of Pitt
Street and Dickinson Avenue.

He said he remembers when
the area around Dickinson
was thriving with at least
three tobacco warehouses in
the area. He used to drive a
truck from Williamson to the
Imperial Tobacco Company in
the 1950s, he said.

He saw the smoke from Me-
morial Drive and went to the
area to see what was happen-
ing.

More than 100 people came
and went near the corner
where he was standing over
the course of an hour. Many
were students from East Car-
rolina University.

Lauren Holt, a freshman at
ECU, saw the smoke as she left
yoga class at the ECU Recre-
ation Center. She said people
in the building were talking
about the fire and trying to fig-
ure out what was going on.

"People were talking about
it in class and getting distrac-
ted," she said.

Taft was at the Obama event
while the building burned.

"Greenville lost an im-
portant historic structure," he
said. "Probably the most im-
portant remaining historic
structure."

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Speaking out

Larger effort needed to fight violence

A group of citizens in west Greenville declared themselves fed up with violence in this community as they marched in a demonstration of peace and solidarity on Wednesday. Though small in number, they were a snapshot of the city's population and reflected its diversity.

Their agitation should be shared across the city, just as their call should echo in a unified and urgent voice. Greenville cannot continue to tolerate the level of violence here, and must press for progressive action to improve public safety here.

Last week, gunfire rang out near the Lucille Gorham Intergenerational Center, piercing the normal midday activity along West Fifth Street. The facility, a recent addition to the neighborhood that has quickly become a treasured resource, was locked down in response as law enforcement flooded the area in search of the suspects. Police continue to investigate the incident.

Violence so near to a community center and in close proximity to children outraged residents in the west Greenville neighborhood. There is, sadly, a history of violence there, despite the active efforts of community leaders and the determined work of law enforcement. A new police substation on Fifth Street has not stemmed the violence, though the department's commitment to a policy of community policing has earned public support.

The unfortunate truth is that Greenville, as a large and growing city, will experience violent crime. But the level of violence seems disproportionate with the relative size of the community. Remember it was only eight years ago that the city led the state in murders and aggravated assaults per capita.

Greenville police have taken a more successful stance against violence under the leadership of Chief William Anderson. Officers have conducted outreach with residents, particularly in high-crime areas, and have partnered with business leaders and members of the faith community to forge a closer relationship against criminals. These are positive steps and deserve residents' support.

But clearly more must be done if Greenville hopes to lower the number of violent criminal acts here. Residents and the City Council agree that public safety should be the top priority of local government, but addressing violence demands greater resources for the police department. It needs stronger partnerships with schools, churches, businesses, elected officials and residents. And it needs outrage — a determined willingness to stand up against the criminal element active in this city.

While only 25 people marched on Wednesday, they must be joined by thousands more and fueled by a united resolve to end violence in order to make progress.
Former ECU PA voice dies

WINTERVILLE — A man who had a lasting effect on East Carolina University football games passed away on Wednesday.

Mr. John C. Moore, Jr., 60, of Winterville, formerly of Tarboro, died at his residence after a long battle with cancer.

Moore worked at East Carolina University for 18 years as the football stadium public address announcer, where he coined the phrase, "... where it is a first down, Pirates!"

He was born March 2, 1948, in Edgecombe County.

Moore was a veteran of the U.S. Army, where he served during the Vietnam War.

He attended Atlantic Christian College, now Barton, and spent the majority of his life in broadcasting.

Moore began his career at WCPS Radio in Tarboro.

He also worked for WNCT Radio and TV in Greenville for many years, where he hosted the daily radio show "On The Farm".

Moore received numerous awards, while working at WNCT and was also a sports enthusiast, especially baseball.
BRIEFS

FROM STAFF REPORTS

WAKE COUNTY

Bowles will speak at NCSU graduation

RALEIGH — This year’s commencement address at N.C. State University will come from Erskine Bowles, president of the University of North Carolina system and onetime chief of staff to President Clinton. The ceremony is at 9 a.m. May 10 at the RBC Center.

At the ceremony, three people will receive honorary degrees: Pat Mora, an award-winning poet and children’s writer; C.D. Spangler, former president of the University of North Carolina system; and Richard Robb, businessman who has served on many corporate and nonprofit boards.

For more information, visit www.ncsu.edu/Registrar/graduation/index.html.
UNC students seek anti-sweatshop rule

Sit-in focuses on clothing with logo

FROM STAFF REPORTS

CHAPEL HILL — A group of UNC-Chapel Hill students held a sit-in at the administration building Thursday, demanding the university sign an anti-sweatshop policy for its licensed clothing.

About a dozen students spent the afternoon in the lobby of South Building outside the chancellor's office. They spread protest signs and pizza boxes on the floor. About 10 planned to spend the night.

"We're going to put our lives on hold until these workers' rights are respected," said Salima Mirza, a senior history major who organized the sit-in.

A similar protest was held last week at Appalachian State University. Six students there were charged with disorderly conduct and trespassing.

The UNC-Ch students asked that the university join the "Designated Suppliers Program." They said that would ensure clothing with the UNC logo would be made in factories where workers earned a living wage. Students said they have also petitioned UNC system President Erskine Bowles, asking him to put all UNC schools on the program.

In a statement, UNC-CH said it is committed to improving conditions for workers and is a member of two labor monitoring organizations. It said an advisory committee to Chancellor James Moeser had explored joining the designated suppliers program beginning in 2005 but didn't reach a consensus.

University spokesman Mike McFarland said Moeser met earlier this week with a group of students, including those organizing Thursday's protest, for 90 minutes. The university said it was working with nine other major universities to develop enhanced monitoring for smaller merchandise suppliers.