THE DAILY CLIPS

April 20, 2010

News, commentary, and opinion
compiled by the East Carolina University News Bureau from:

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Suzanne Vega to perform at ECU as part of SRAPAS mixer
Wednesday, March 31, 2010
Suzanne Vega has been credited as the Mother of the MP3 since it was her voice that was used as the model for Karlheinz Brandenburg’s compression algorithm.
But that is the least of Vega’s accomplishments.
Vega will perform at 7:30 p.m. April 20 at East Carolina University’s Wright Auditorium as part of the S. Rudolph Alexander Performing Arts Series.
Before the show, four local musicians will get the chance to have their work critiqued by the musician. On April 7, the Tipsy Teapot, 409 S. Evans St., will host a contest to determine who will get the chance to meet with Vega on April 19.
In 1985, singer/songwriter Suzanne Vega released her self-titled debut album. Since then, she’s sold more than 7 million albums.
Twenty-five years after that debut release, Vega has been reinterpreting a majority of her catalog, creating four new thematic albums that will be released over the next two years. The first is “Suzanne Vega Close Up, Vol. 1: Love Songs,” which was released in February.
That album includes stripped-down versions of her hit songs “Marlene On The Wall” and “Caramel.”
For her show on April 20, she’ll be accompanied by Mike Visceglia and an electric-guitar player named Gerry Leonard.
“They are great musicians,” Vega said.
In anticipation of her visit, mixer sent Vega a few questions for her to answer by e-mail:
You cite Leonard Cohen as one of your musical influences. Please describe your first experience of getting to perform with him.
I got to perform with him for the first time last year. It was the only time and it was a great honor for me.
Your book “A Passionate Eye” includes an interview you did with Leonard Cohen in 1992 after the release of “99.9F,” how did that come about?
My record company at the time set it up and I enjoyed it very much.
You’ve participated in every Lilith Fair. How have women in music changed since the first event in 1997?
Unfortunately not as much as I would like. It is still hard for women to get on the radio — they have limits they don’t have for the men.
You’ve worked with Amnesty International, Save Darfur Coalition and Casa Alianza. The first two organizations are quite well known. Casa Alianza, however is not. How did you get involved with assisting street children in Latin America?
I have worked with Casa Alianza since 1993. Mostly I work with Fred Shortland from the UK who had been a child rights advocate for Amnesty. I was impressed with his work and commitment and signed on to help.
In what ways did growing up in Spanish Harlem influence your writing and musical style? It made me open to many different styles of music because we had different kinds of music in the house from jazz to Motown to Bob Dylan.

What music do you like to listen to?
I am listening to M.I.A., Beck, Broken Bells, Laura Marling, Sufjan Stevens. A mixture of things.
Tickets for the concert are $10-$32. Call 328-4788 or visit www.ecu.edu/sradas.
Perdue proposes $19 billion budget

RALEIGH -- Gov. Bev Perdue proposed a $19 billion state budget today that cuts nearly $1 billion in spending by eliminating 600 jobs, mostly vacant, and cutting spending 5 to 7 percent for departments outside of education.

Perdue said her budget proposal reflects the fact that although the economy is improving, a full recovery will take some time.

"This budget helps us set the table for the new normal," Perdue told reporters.

Economic forecasters expect a deficit of at least $800 million and Perdue's budget closes that gap through cuts. She also proposes moving hundreds of millions to increase funding for her priorities, such as her "Ready, Set, Go!" education initiative, which seeks to ensure that all students are performing at grade level and are ready for college or a career.

Perdue also proposed eliminating in-home personal care services, which serves elderly people who have trouble caring for themselves. The cut would save $59.8 million. Perdue proposed replacing the service with a new program for adults with the most intense needs.

Other line items include:

Perdue proposed cutting $20.5 million from prison inmate health care costs by standardizing the rates providers can charge. Previously hospitals and doctors were charging widely divergent rates for procedures.

Perdue's budget restores $14 million in assistance for patients who need help paying for AIDS drugs.

Perdue proposed a half percent one-time salary bonus for state employees to compensate for a pay cut in the last fiscal year. Teachers would get their scheduled step increases that are based on longevity.

Employees who aren't teachers would also receive 32 hours of bonus time off.

Public school districts would have to make their own cuts based on their size. Larger districts will have to cut more.

University campuses will have to cut 4 percent.

Perdue also proposed spending $86 million on programs meant to create jobs.

The recession has led to a high unemployment rate, which means that people are paying less in income tax and businesses are making less money. Those two factors have contributed to continued declines in the revenue the state is collecting.

The legislature reconvenes in May to consider the budget proposal. Both the House and Senate will take
a turn at writing a version and they must agree on a draft. Perdue can then either sign it into law or veto it.

Last year's budget was balanced with a combination of spending cuts and $1 billion in new taxes. This year is an election year and new taxes are unlikely.
Atwater will die behind bars

WINSTON-SALEM -- Demario James Atwater, one of two men charged with murdering UNC-Chapel Hill's student body president, will spend the rest of his life in prison after pleading guilty Monday to federal carjacking, kidnapping and weapons charges.

What remains unclear is whether his death behind bars will be a natural one or whether the state will execute him.

Atwater, whose plea agreement with federal prosecutors allows him to avoid the death penalty in federal court, still faces capital charges in state court of kidnapping and murdering Eve Carson.

A hearing is tentatively scheduled for next week in Orange County Superior Court on the state charges. District Attorney Jim Woodall would not say whether any plea arrangements had been discussed.

Federal prosecutors rarely get involved in homicide cases such as Carson's, and it's not clear why they sought charges against Atwater.

"This may have been a way to secure cooperation to close a case against a co-defendant in state court," said Jim Cooney, a Charlotte lawyer who is not connected to the case.

Laurence Alvin Lovette, 19, also faces state murder and kidnapping charges in the Carson case. Lovette does not face the death penalty because he was 17 in March 2008 when Carson was found shot in a Chapel Hill neighborhood less than a mile from the campus. The U.S. Supreme Court deems anyone younger than 18 at the time of a crime too young for execution.

Atwater's federal plea came just before federal prosecutors and defense lawyers were to begin interviewing potential jurors for a trial that was to begin in May.

Atwater had asked for the federal trial to be moved out of state, saying that he feared the pool of jurors had been tainted by media exposure. But Judge James A. Beaty ruled last week against a change of venue.

Atwater will not be sentenced in the federal case until Sept. 23, according to court documents. But, according to federal prosecutors, Atwater acknowledged by his guilty plea that he would be sentenced to life in prison.

"A life sentence in the federal criminal justice system means just that: life without the possibility of parole or early release," Anna Mills Wagoner, U.S. attorney for the federal district that includes Orange and Durham counties, said in a prepared statement.

Though a judge and Atwater's attorneys were aware of the facts prosecutors had in the federal kidnapping and carjacking case, most of the details were filed under seal in federal court and not available to the public.
'Especially heinous'

In court documents that were public, investigators claimed that Atwater and Lovette kidnapped Carson early in the morning on March 5, 2008, and forced her to withdraw $1,400 from automated teller machines before they shot her numerous times with a .25-caliber handgun and a sawed-off shotgun.

Federal carjacking charges can carry a death sentence if prosecutors show the crime occurred during the commission of a homicide.

In some court documents, federal prosecutors listed aggravating factors that they planned to use in their push for the death penalty, including that the homicide was committed in such an "especially heinous, cruel and depraved manner" that it "involved torture and serious physical abuse to the victim."

Carson family approves

Carson's parents, Bob Carson and Teresa Bethke, released a brief statement Monday after the plea. Prosecutors and lawyers representing the Carson family have acknowledged that they are against the death penalty.

"While we deplore the evil and negligence that led to Eve's death, we agree with the U.S. Attorney's decision to accept the plea agreement," the Carsons' statement said. "We are very grateful for the dedication and hard work that have gone into the investigation and prosecution of this crime."

Wagoner said in a statement that the plea would spare Carson's family the "uncertainty and pain of a drawn-out trial and endless appeals.

"Eve Carson's murder was a senseless, random act of violence," Wagoner said. "We hope this resolution will help the Carson family put this horrendous act behind them, as best they can, and move on with their lives."

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Rule Change Takes Aim at Loophole in Title IX

By KATIE THOMAS

The Department of Education will no longer allow universities to rely solely on student surveys to prove they are meeting the requirements of the gender-equity law known as Title IX, a reversal of a Bush administration policy that had been opposed by the N.C.A.A. and women’s sports advocates.

The change, expected to be announced Tuesday by Vice President Joseph R. Biden Jr., is the latest recent step by the department’s Office for Civil Rights regarding antidiscrimination laws in education. In March, Education Secretary Arne Duncan announced that the office would open investigations in about 32 school districts and take a harder look at whether universities and school districts are violating civil rights laws, including Title IX.

In a statement released ahead of the announcement, Biden said: “Making Title IX as strong as possible is a no-brainer. What we’re doing here today will better ensure equal opportunity in athletics, and allowing women to realize their potential — so this nation can realize its potential.”

Tuesday’s announcement is expected to reverse a policy that was seen by gender-equity advocates as creating a loophole in the landmark Title IX law, which guarantees gender equity in educational programs that receive federal funds. Universities had historically been required to comply with the law by showing that women’s participation in sports was proportionate to their enrollment in the university, that the institution was expanding athletic opportunities, or that it was meeting the athletic interests and abilities of women on campus.

In 2005, the Office for Civil Rights amended the policy, declaring that universities could comply with the third requirement if they asked students to complete a survey of their interests. The change also allowed them to equate lack of response with a lack of interest in athletics.
The 2005 rule was never widely implemented, however, because it was opposed by the N.C.A.A., which advised its members to ignore it. Erik Christianson, a spokesman for the N.C.A.A., said the organization would not comment until an official announcement was made.

Women's sports advocates have argued against the use of surveys because they say it is impossible to divorce interest in sports from the opportunities available on a college campus. If a university does not have a gymnastics team, for example, students who are interested in gymnastics will be less likely to apply there.

But others said surveying students made sense. "What better way to assess what sports men and women want to play than ask them?" said Mike Moyer, the executive director of the National Wrestling Coaches Association, which lobbied the department to allow universities to use the surveys. Moyer's group has criticized Title IX for pushing universities to cut men's wrestling programs and other teams with small rosters. He supported the 2005 policy but said he preferred requiring universities to survey men's interests as well.

Tuesday's policy change will allow universities to use surveys, but it will require that they show they are meeting students' interests in other ways — by looking at requests by club teams to be recognized as varsity sports, for example, or by analyzing athletic participation at feeder high schools. The change will also prohibit universities from counting a lack of response as a lack of interest in sports.

Nancy Hogshead-Makar, the senior director of advocacy at the Women's Sports Foundation, said the announcement would signal a change in policy at the Education Department, which had been seen as taking little interest in gender equity in athletics.

"I think clearly that having this be rescinded sends a strong message as to how serious they are going to take women's participation in athletics," she said.
Campus alerts go beyond text messaging

Three years after Virginia Tech massacre, variety of communications used

By Suzanne Choney
updated 8:55 a.m. ET April 16, 2010

Three years after the massacre of 32 students and faculty at Virginia Tech, campuses around the country have beefed up their emergency notification systems, some with more sophisticated and varied programs than others.

Colleges and universities that use text-messaging systems for emergency notification have differing degrees of enrollment by students. "We are almost at 100 percent, and I guess you'd expect us to be that way," said Larry Hincker, Virginia Tech's associate vice president of university relations. "Other universities I've talked to, they're happy if they get 30 or 50 percent enrollment from students" for emergency text messages to be sent to their phones.

Sending text messages — initially thought by some to be the best means to get the word out in an emergency situation — is not the only tech approach being used. Facebook, Twitter and computer desktop alerts, campus television interruptions are also being embraced by schools. Lower-tech means, like public address systems, as well as digital displays spread around the campus and in classrooms, are also becoming more common.

Campus Safety magazine polled "campus protection officials" last spring and found that 87 percent said their schools currently use text messaging for emergency alerts, and that an average of 48.9 percent of students sign up for such programs.

Broader focus now

"Three years ago, the sole focus was on text messaging for emergency notification," said Ara Bagdasarian, CEO of Omnilert, makers of the e2Campus unified emergency notification system, used by more than 750 colleges and universities.

"Subsequently, there has been more of an expansion to sending out messages to multiple different kinds of communication end points, even though text messaging is still the most reliable, best way to get out mass messages in a very expedient fashion. And students have their cell phones with them all the time."

Students often don't sign up for text-message alerts because of privacy issues, but more likely because of "apathy," said Bryan Crum of Omnilert. "It's not a fear of opting in, of giving up personal information," he said. "It's just a lack of interest."

And, "a faculty member who's teaching cannot check their cell phone because they're teaching class, so they need to be able to hear (news) over the public address system, or see the information on a digital sign in their classroom," Crum said. "Visitors walking across campus need to hear an alert or read it on a sign."

Don't rely on a single technology

Those are among the reasons for having "multiple communication methods by which people can receive alerts," Crum said. "Before it was just about text messaging, but now there are digital signs, PA systems, and even computer desktop pop-up alerts that will interrupt you while you're writing your paper."

"The one thing I tell my colleagues at other schools is, you better not rely on a single technology," said Hincker. "There is a cottage industry of mobile notification services that sprang up from Virginia Tech's tragedy. But you better not rely on one single technology. The reason is, as we saw even in our case, those systems can get loaded very quickly."

"If you have an emergency, you're going to get one, maybe two shots, to use those systems," he said. "And
then after that, they're going to degrade because everyone is going to start using those phones to call other people," tying up the network.

Criticisms about notification
An investigative panel criticized the university's communications failures and other problems that allowed nearly two hours to elapse between the first gunshots in a classroom after 7 a.m., April 16, 2007 and campus-wide notification using e-mail. Virginia Tech student Seung-Hui Cho killed 32 students and faculty before taking his own life that morning in the deadliest shooting rampage in U.S. history.

The panel concluded that lives could have been saved if alerts had been sent out earlier and classes canceled after the first burst of gunfire. In January 2009, when a graduate student used a kitchen knife to decapitate another student at a cafe on Virginia Tech's campus, the university's text message and e-mail alert system was put to a test. More than 60,000 messages were sent about 40 minutes after the slaying, which happened around 7 p.m.

"Some students said they didn't get a message until 40 minutes later," after the first messages were sent, Hincker said. "But it was about 40 minutes after the event before I sent a notice ... Some people expect a university to send a campus notice out as soon as they get a 911 call; that's just simply unreasonable."

In the 2009 case, "the murderer was in custody, but we still sent out a notice to the university community to apprise them of the event, but there was no threat to the university campus," he said.

Northern Illinois University shootings
A recent report by Northern Illinois University about the February 2008 shootings that took the lives of five students and injured 21 people praised the school's handling by authorities and communications to students and staff.

The university, as many others, consulted Virginia Tech officials after the 2007 tragedy. About 14 minutes after the shooting started at Northern Illinois University, warnings were sent by campus e-mail and posted on the school's Web site.

"I think they've done an excellent job. They had prepared and learned the lessons from Virginia Tech. It could have been far worse," Mary Kay Mace, the mother of one of the victims, told the Elgin Courier-News recently.

Since the shooting, the university has installed a new text message notification system, and also reworked its policies for who can get the word out — which needs to be as broad a base of people as possible, said Hincker of Virginia Tech.

Involving more staff
"There's another lesson for us all," he said. "You need to have a lot of people that can do this ... We now have more than 30 people at the university who are trained on our emergency notification system. The bulk of them now are in the (campus) police department. They're the ones who are staffed 24 hours a day, so if there is a notification that absolutely has to go out immediately, that's the place where you know you have 24/7 coverage."

The International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators, in a report, also encourages schools to determine "who has the authority to activate the notification system."

A "universal messaging system," such as e2Campus, Crum says "eliminates all the human bottlenecks, the office politics, the bureaucracy that might occur otherwise — 'Oh, Bob's on vacation, and the temp doesn't know how to update the Web site,' or 'Fred's at lunch, so nobody can start the PA system.'"

Hincker says Virginia Tech is paying about $35,000 a year for its notification service with Everbridge, a California company. The university will also spend nearly $750,000 for 500 digital signs that will be posted in classrooms and around campus.
Cost for text-messaging and other emergency notification systems is definitely a factor for many schools, and one of the top "barriers" cited by those in the Campus Safety magazine survey. Another is text message system enrollment by students.

"The most important thing to me is redundancy, having several means of getting the word out," said Hincker. "Any university that goes out and buys a text messaging system and thinks they're prepared for emergency notification is deluding themselves."

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April 18, 2010

Doctors Hear Many Questions About Health Law

By JOHN LELAND

Dr. Roger W. Evans, a cardiologist in Wichita, Kan., is used to answering patients’ questions about their hearts. But lately, he said, he has spent half his time answering a succession of different questions — about the health care law.

Donald Moore, 75, one of those patients, expressed his uneasiness about the law recently: “The fact is that I don’t understand it, and no one else I talk to understands it. Every day, you read something different in the paper.”

Mr. Moore’s latest concern was a “rumor that the new health care procedures are going to be monitored and managed by the I.R.S.”

“That’s a turnoff right there,” he said. “How much is true, how much is fiction, out here no one knows.”

Most of the health care law, which President Obama signed last month, has yet to take effect, but for many doctors it is already having an impact.

“We’ve had to add an hour or two to the day because patients want to talk about it,” said Dr. Evans, who travels around the state and said questions often left him scratching his head. “I see 30 to 50 patients in a day, and it is the subject of conversation more than half the time.”

After months of public wrangling and brinkmanship in Washington, the nation’s doctors now find themselves having to answer questions about a 2,400-page law that many do not understand themselves, and which they may have opposed. “Not only is the public confused, but so are our members,” said Dr. Lori J. Heim, president of the American Academy of Family Physicians, which supported the bill. “There’s been a lot of misinformation out in the media. We’ve been trying to get to them simple answers — what does this mean for my practice, what
does it mean for my patients, what does it mean for the future?"

Some doctors said their patients were pushing for surgery now, for fear that it will not be covered in the future or that they will end up on a waiting list. "It's ludicrous to be coerced to perform surgery because of fear of noncoverage in the future," said Dr. Eustaquio O. Abay II, a neurosurgeon in Wichita. "I refuse."

Dr. Abay said he had tried to read the law, but gave up because it was all legal jargon to him. "They think we have all the answers, but we don't," he said of patients.

While many doctors say they are not besieged, the queries have been particularly robust in states where the plan was unpopular, Dr. Heim said.

Joseph R. Baker III, president of the Medicare Rights Center, a nonprofit organization that operates a hot line for patients with questions, characterized the volume of calls about the bill as moderate. But he said the level of confusion was high, comparable to that created when Medicare added prescription drug coverage in 2004.

Often, Mr. Baker said, callers have been getting their information from media commentators or doctors who opposed the legislation. "They're being told by their providers, 'Now I won't be able to take Medicare patients,'" he said.

"People call us confused, panicked, anxious," he said. "And in most instances, we say there are some benefits in the short term, like closing the doughnut hole," as the gap in Medicare prescription drug coverage is known, "and that the things that might have a negative impact, like lower reimbursement to providers, will happen over a number of years. Usually that calms people down."

The questions do not always reflect the actual provisions of the law. The major changes for this year, including coverage on their parents' policies for adult children under age 26, rarely come up, said Dr. Melissa Gerdes, a family practitioner in Whitehouse, Tex., who said it was not unusual for her patients to discuss politics in the examining room. She said that only one patient had asked about the new law's provisions on the doughnut hole, and that she could not recall any patient who had inquired about coverage for adult children.

"The big one I get is, 'Are you going to be able to keep seeing me?'" Dr. Gerdes said. (She tells them she will.)

At Dr. Alieta Eck's free clinic in Somerset, N.J., where all the doctors donate their time, Dr. Eck said many of her patients were excited about the new program. "People say, 'I can't wait for Obamacare,'" said Dr. Eck, who has been outspoken in her opposition to the program.
“They’re already getting free care.”

Dr. Eck said that her office had not been overrun with questions about the bill, but that during visits at her paid practice, “most patients are fearing that everything’s going to cost them more.”

For many doctors, the big frustration comes when they do not know what to say to their patients.

“Quite honestly, I don’t know how to answer their concerns,” said Dr. Deborah A. Sutcliffe, a solo practitioner in Red Bluff, Calif. “Sometimes they’re more informed than I am, sometimes they’re not. I haven’t read the damn thing.”