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Where will Romney find his vice president? Probably on the Hill

By Ben Pershing, Published: April 23

Aside from the more obvious historical firsts that Barack Obama achieved when he was elected president, he also won kudos on Capitol Hill for another reason: He was the first sitting member of Congress to win the job in five decades, only the fourth man ever to accomplish that move.

The fact that Joe Biden went straight from the Senate to the vice presidency drew far less attention, and with good reason — lawmakers actually have a strong track record of winning the No. 2 job.

So what does that mean for Mitt Romney, the presumed 2012 Republican nominee? Will the former Massachusetts governor look to “balance” the ticket with a pick from the Hill?

Coverage of Romney’s selection process has included a host of possibilities: Maybe he’s looking for an ideological counterweight, or reinforcement for his own strengths, or excitement, or a swing-state boost or diversity. You don’t often hear that he’s looking specifically for a member of Congress.

Yet if you believe the latest speculation — and really, why wouldn’t you? — there are at least three lawmakers attracting significant buzz to be Romney’s running mate: Sen. Rob Portman (Ohio), Sen. Marco Rubio (Fla.) and Rep. Paul Ryan (Wis.). A handful of governors also have drawn attention: Chris Christie (N.J.), Bobby Jindal (La.), Susana Martinez (N.M.) and Robert McDonnell (Va.).

History alone suggests that the members have an advantage.

“We’ve had very few senators directly elected to the presidency, but quite a lot to the vice presidency,” said Donald A. Ritchie, the Senate historian.

Three of the last four vice presidents came straight from the Senate — Biden (D-Del.), Al Gore (D-Tenn.) and Dan Quayle (R-Ind.) — and 14 of the last 17 men to hold the office had congressional service on their resumes.

By contrast, only two sitting governors have been picked for vice president on a ticket in the last 40 years: Spiro Agnew of Maryland in 1972 and Sarah Palin of Alaska in 2008. And it’s been more than 70 years since the last time — 1940 — that a winning ticket had no congressional experience at all.
“A lot of times you have a governor who’s running [for president], and they want someone who says they know what’s happening in Washington,” Ritchie said. “They’re supposed to be there in part to balance and show you’ve got some expertise.”

The vice president’s portfolio includes the mostly ceremonial job of Senate president. But many occupants of the office have taken on the substantive task of serving as their administration’s chief liaison to Capitol Hill.

Richard B. Cheney frequently played that role during his eight years in office, and Biden does the same now. Biden negotiated a deal with Republicans on tax-cut extensions in 2010 and played a leading part in all of last year’s contentious negotiations over raising the debt ceiling and cutting spending.

“The United States Senate has been my life, and that is not a hyperbole,” Biden said in his farewell speech to the Senate in January 2009. “It literally has been my life. . . . And I may be resigning from the Senate today, but I will always be a Senate man.”

Senators may have a strong vice presidential track record, but House members don’t.

The last person to go directly from the House to vice president was Gerald R. Ford (R-Mich.), and he was appointed to the job after Agnew resigned. Ford was never actually elected vice president (or president). The last man to be elected vice president straight from the House was John Nance Garner (D-Texas) in 1932.

Some vice presidents have previous House service but held important intervening jobs before entering the White House. They include George H.W. Bush, who served in the House for two terms and went on to be ambassador to the United Nations and CIA director before becoming vice president; and Cheney, who was Defense secretary and Halliburton chief executive between stints in Congress and the White House.

Jody Baumgartner, a political science professor at East Carolina University and author of “The American Vice Presidency Reconsidered,” has built a model to predict vice presidential selection, based on picks since 1960, and his formula gives recent service as a senator significant weight in a candidate’s chance of being picked. (Baumgartner is waiting for a shorter list of candidates before running the model for 2012.)

Baumgartner said it was clear to him why members of Congress weren’t often picked for the very top job.
“Try to explain the nuances of being a member of the legislature in a 30-second spot,” Baumgartner said. It’s not possible, “not in the television age.”

To illustrate his point, he cited Sen. John F. Kerry’s (D-Mass.) much-mocked “I actually did vote for the $87 billion before I voted against it” quote during his 2004 presidential campaign.

So why wouldn’t the same flaw hurt a member of Congress running for vice president?

“Because they just don’t matter” to the final vote, Baumgartner said. “The experience of Sarah Palin notwithstanding, nobody’s really paying that much attention to the second pick.”

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Economics of the NFL Draft: How 1/100th of a Second Made Chris Johnson $53 Million

A mere 1/100th of a second made running back Chris Johnson a millionaire in the NFL Draft.

April 25, 2012

Allen St. John Contributor

Following his senior season at East Carolina University, Johnson was the boy in the bubble coming into the 2008 NFL Draft. If the picks fell right, he might have been taken in the second round on the first day of the draft. If things didn’t play out his way or his stock fell for some reason or another, the NCAA record holder in all-purpose yardage could have easily dropped to the third round or lower, sitting around the television as player after player got picked instead of him.

And then came The Forty. Johnson arrived in Indianapolis for the NFL Combine, where players gather for speed, strength and agility drills. With his dreadlocks bouncing in the breeze, he ran the 40 yard dash in 4.24 seconds. That was—and remains—the fastest electronically-timed 40-yard dash in the history of The Combine. (Faster times by Bo Jackson (4.12) and Deion Sanders (4.21) were hand-timed, which is less accurate than the current method in which the clock is hand started but stopped electronically. Johnson tied Rondel Melendez of Eastern Kentucky, who also ran a 4.24 in 1999, the first year of the current electronic timing system.)

With that warp speed sprint, Johnson caught the attention of NFL GMs and player personnel directors. In five seconds he vaulted himself from a marginal second round pick to a potential first rounder. He was taken with the 24th pick overall by the Tennessee Titans. Had he run a time that was fast, but not record breaking—say 4.26—he probably would have remained a second-day selection, and might not have gotten a full opportunity to shine. “If I had run a 4.30 I would have been upset,” he told me before the draft.

“You’re talking millions of dollars for a tenth of a second,” said his agent Joel Segal, who negotiated Johnson’s five-year, $12 million rookie deal.
Instead, Johnson became a star. In his rookie season, he rushed for 1,228 yards, finished second in the Rookie of the Year voting and was selected to the Pro Bowl. In his second year, he rushed for 2,006 yards becoming the sixth back ever to join the 2,000 yard club, and his 2,509 yards from scrimmage set an NFL record. Before the 2011 season, Johnson held out briefly before signing a four-year $53.5 million contract, with $30 million guaranteed that briefly made him the highest-paid running back in NFL history.

Still, Johnson was the exception. Melendez, with whom he shares the record, was drafted in the seventh round and the wideout never caught an NFL pass. Darius Heyward-Bey, and cornerback Fabian Washington both ran 4.25s, were drafted in the first round by the speed-obsessed Oakland Raiders, and haven’t lived up to expectations.

The secret of Johnson’s success? Work. Track work to be exact. While it’s not widely known, virtually every NFL draft prospect starts training like a track star in January after he hangs up his football cleats. And it’s not only speed merchants like Johnson who are looking to gain attention with record-challenging times. A 300-pound defensive lineman will work every bit as hard, looking to shave a tenth or two off of his best 40 time, hoping to convince GMs and scouts that by running a 5.1, he’s “pretty fast for a big guy.”

Johnson spent eight weeks working with NFL speed guru Tom Shaw, who runs an independent combine preparation camp near Orlando Florida. The camp, which cost Johnson $750 a week, featured two-a-day workouts consisting of everything from resistance runs using parachutes and bungee cords to downhill sprints where Johnson clocked a slope-aided 3.6 40. The biggest difference? Increasing the length of Johnson’s stride. “If you add two inches to each stride, that’s 40 inches at the end of 40 yards, or about two-tenths of a second,” Shaw explained. When Johnson arrived in Orlando, he needed 19 strides to run a 40. He cut that to 18 when he set the record.

And that one phantom step made Chris Johnson an NFL superstar. And a very rich young man.
Confusion at ECU early voting site
By Ginger Livingston
Wednesday, April 25, 2012

Confusion about what identification East Carolina University students needed to register and vote at an early-voting site kept about 20 people from voting on Monday.

A group of students from the campus chapter of the NAACP and Black Student Union went to Minges Coliseum to cast early ballots. The ECU early-voting site only is open this week, and the NAACP, Black Student Union, Democracy North Carolina and other voter advocacy groups are urging students to use the location so election officials will continue to host a site on campus.

DeMonte Alford, NAACP vice president, said it was decided only a few students would cast ballots at one time so the polling place in Room 143 wasn’t overwhelmed.

Alford and NAACP President Dominque Rowe were the first.

North Carolina law doesn’t require voters to present identification to cast a ballot; however, a person registering to vote needs identification with a current name and address.

ECU provided poll workers with names and addresses of students living on campus. However, Alford, who lives on campus, said there was confusion about using the university’s data. Rowe lives off campus, so she was not on the list. Her ECU student identification was not valid because it does not have an address.
Although both students were given opportunities to cast provisional ballots, they turned the opportunity down. Alford said he wanted to see his ballot inserted in the voting machine.

Alford said when the other students learned he and Rowe couldn’t vote, they left, figuring they too would have problems voting.

“It was disappointing, but I have faith we’ll get them back to the polls,” he said.

Alford called Dave Davis, Pitt County’s elections director, to discuss the incident on the advice of a professor and Calvin Henderson, president of the Pitt County chapter of the NAACP.

Alford said Davis resolved the confusion and on Tuesday he brought four students with him to register and vote.

One student listed her Jacksonville address as her current home, so election officials told her she couldn’t vote in Pitt County. After confirming she lived on campus, poll workers allowed her to discard the first form and fill out a second registration card.

A student who registered as an unaffiliated voter asked if she could cast her ballot another time after realizing she was unsure if she wanted to vote in the Democratic or Republican primary.

Alford said he will continue to encourage students to use the early-voting site and expects to bring the students who were with him on Monday back to vote.

“I will be telling them if they live off campus to make sure to they have mail that identifies where they live,” Alford said.

Acceptable identification for registering includes a North Carolina driver’s license, a utility bill, a paycheck or W-2 form, or a bank statement or bank-issued credit card statement.

The Minges Coliseum early-voting site will be open 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. through Friday.

Alford estimates he’s registered about 1,000 voters through voter education efforts sponsored by various student and community organizations. He said he understands why identification is needed for the registration process. He opposes requiring identification to vote, a law passed by the General Assembly last year but vetoed by the governor.
“Voter fraud is so small in North Carolina because there are hefty fines and potential prison,” he said. “I think it’s a myth that it is a huge problem.”

Contact Ginger Livingston at glivingston@reflector.com or 252-329-9570.
On April 12, one of the world’s renowned musical performers, Natalie Cole, daughter of the late and global performer Nat King Cole, graced the stage of East Carolina University’s Wright Auditorium, as an invited performer of the S. Rudolph Performing Arts Series.

It was a crowning moment for eastern North Carolina only to be tainted by the revealing of her “fee” by WNCT Channel 9. It was very embarrassing and downright inappropriate for this incident to occur. In fact, several community citizens acknowledged that they had never heard of other performers’ fees revealed to the public. Some citizens wonder why such a mishap occurred or if it was a mishap.

Yet, some citizens realize that public school and universities are attempting to better scrutinize budget management and be program cost efficient.

However, it does not mean that we have to deny eastern citizens an opportunity to appreciate the arts and cultures, as Raleigh, Durham and Chapel Hill. This behavior was not appropriate and should not be condoned for any artist. Common sense suggests that citizens of North Carolina support transparency; however, fees and budgets should be worked out before taking the stage. We do not do this for our athletics programs. Why should we do it for our arts and culture programs? Are they not equally important?

DONALD E. ENSLEY

Professor Emeritus, ECU

Greenville
District 3 Councilwoman Marion Blackburn holds the peace during a meeting to discuss possible changes to the no-more-than-three-unrelated ordinance at City Hall on Tuesday, April 24, 2012. (Aileen Devlin/The Daily Reflector)

Housing rules draw heated debate
By Michael Abramowitz
Wednesday, April 25, 2012

As Greenville’s City Council approaches a potential crossroads on the issue of the city’s housing occupancy rules, its mixed feelings about the issue were reflected Tuesday by the many residents who shared suggestions on the topic.

A large contingent of Greenville residents, mostly from the Tar River-University neighborhood, gathered Tuesday at City Hall for a town hall meeting hosted by District 3 Councilwoman Marion Blackburn to discuss the “no more than 3 unrelated” city ordinance. The term refers to how many unrelated people can reside within any city dwelling. The ordinance specifies no particular demographic group and areas throughout the city are affected by it. Most affected, however, are owners of stand-alone houses used as rental property and the East Carolina University students who occupy those houses. Equally affected are the single-family home owners that share neighborhoods with rental properties.

A council action item established at its January planning session directed city staff to prepare a report on the subject and present potential alternatives to the ordinance as it stands.

Tuesday’s meeting allowed staff in the Community Development Department to gather residents input.
Blackburn said that she opposed changes, but said she entered into the topic with open eyes and ears. She and attending council members Max Joyner Jr., Calvin Mercer, Dennis Mitchell and Mayor Allen Thomas got an earful from both sides of the issue.

Those in favor of keeping the ordinance as it stands cited trash accumulation, poor tenant upkeep, crowded parking, noise and the eventual creation of crime-ridden slum conditions as the most pressing reasons for preventing occupancy by more than three people.

Those in favor of raising the limit — most calling for a standard of one occupant per available room — said home vacancy and its resultant low rental income are the real contributors to the disproportionately higher crime rates in the TRUNA section of the city. They said higher owner accountability would ensure good tenant behavior and property upkeep.

The staff will continue gathering input and report its findings to the City Council in August, Interim Assistant City Manager Chris Padgett said.

If the council chooses to initiate an ordinance amendment, it would next go to the city’s Planning and Zoning Commission for a recommendation, then back to the council for final approval. Options include no change to the ordinance, tossing it out or issuing special-use permits for higher occupancy on a case-by-case basis.

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President Barack Obama works the crowd after his speech as he visited the campus of UNC in Chapel Hill, N.C. Tuesday April 24, 2012. He spoke to the estimated crowd of over 8000 ticket holders in Carmichael Arena.

**Youth vote still favors Obama, but enthusiasm is waning**

By John Frank - jfrank@newsobserver.com

**CHAPEL HILL** - As they waited for President Barack Obama to speak, Bridget Walsh and Lila Fleishman struggled to find the right word to describe the difference in his first campaign and now four years later.

The UNC-Chapel Hill freshmen were too young to vote in 2008, but they were big Obama supporters, magnetized they say by his star quality.

“Since 2008, I think you can really say it’s ...” Walsh started, pausing to think.

“Fizzled,” Fleishman inserted.

“Yes, since 2008, I think you can really say a lot of it’s fizzled,” Walsh concluded.

Once Obama took the stage, the capacity crowd of 8,000 cheered loudly, but it didn’t compare to his appearance on campus four year ago before a much larger crowd. And interviews with more than a dozen other college students like Walsh and Fleishman indicate that support for Obama, though strong, is infused with less enthusiasm.
With youth voting registration diminishing, the Obama campaign in North Carolina – a major battleground in the 2012 election – faces a tough task as it seeks to capture the fickle youth vote that flocked to the polls in record numbers four years ago. A Harvard Institute of Politics national poll released Tuesday shows Obama with a 43 percent to 26 percent advantage against presumptive Republican nominee Mitt Romney among 18- to 29-year-old likely voters. A recent Public Policy Polling survey in North Carolina found Obama with a 28-point lead in this age group, an improvement from his numbers in the state in November 2008.

The 2008 exit polls indicated Obama took 66 percent of the under-30 national vote. But the voter landscape in North Carolina is changing.

An analysis of state voter registration data from November 2011, showed about 48,500 fewer voters aged 18-25 compared to November 2008, according to a Tufts University report. Obama’s margin of victory in the state is a scant 14,177, and about 80 percent of those lost young voters were registered Democrats.

The Chapel Hill event launched a two-day, three-college tour – with an appearance Tuesday on “Late Night with Jimmy Fallon” included – aimed at rejuvenating these voters’ enthusiasm.

As he asked the students in the UNC crowd to use Twitter and Facebook to reach out to their elected officials on the topic of student loan interest rates, Obama hit a point he wants to remain true in November: “Your voice matters. Stand up. Be heard. Be counted.”

At the speech in Carmichael Arena, home to the women’s basketball team, students tried to generate chants of “O-bama” but couldn’t spark the energy of the full crowd. The roughly 40 minute speech ended with such loud applause Obama had to shout his final lines, but a brief chant of “four more years” didn’t gain widespread support.

Still, those are the words the Obama campaign wants to hear as it puts a concerted effort into reinvigorating young voters.

**Now he’s the incumbent**

The campaign began voter registration drives on college campuses in North Carolina more than six months ago, and in February, national campaign advisors and actress Gabrielle Union hosted a packed forum at nearby N.C. Central University.
“It may be unrealistic for Obama to expect the same level of engagement from 2008,” explained Ferrel Guillory, a UNC-Chapel Hill professor who researches North Carolina politics. “But clearly his campaign senses in a close election the votes of college kids might make a difference.”

But it’s a double-barreled challenge: energize today’s college students, only a few of whom voted in 2008, and re-energize the former college students who helped put Obama into the White House but now face a get-less-than-you-dreamed job market and heavy student loan debt.

The dichotomy is visible in the Harvard poll, which showed Obama’s lead is 23 percentage points for likely voters age 25 to 29 but only 12 points for those under 24.

“Obama was a new sensation,” Guillory added. “Now he’s the incumbent president. The incumbent president has baggage.”

Republicans suggest young voters are now less enamored with Obama because as they graduate from college they face a dismal job market. About half of new graduates will remain jobless or underemployed.

Garrett Jacobs, the chairman of the UNC College Republicans, said the job market is a major factor prompting some students who once favored the Democratic candidate to consider Romney.

“(Obama) was new. He was novel. He was exciting in 2008,” he said. “Now we’ve seen what he’s done ... and the direction of the country is still not good.”

**Unlike four years ago**

Obama visited the UNC-Chapel Hill campus four years ago this week as he battled Hillary Clinton for the Democratic nomination. He spoke to 18,000 at the Dean Dome, home to the men’s basketball team, a far larger crowd than in Carmichael on Tuesday. Jacobs called it a “very serious sign of decreased excitement” but Obama supporters point to differences in the circumstances.

Damon Neanover, 22, was a freshmen in 2008. “It was a big moment at UNC. The campus went crazy for (Obama),” he recalled.
The political science major from Jacksonville said he remembers students driving rickshaws offering rides to early voting stations and the incessant campaign volunteers working to win voters in The Pit at the center of campus.

The enthusiasm has “definitely died down a little bit,” said Neanover, a 2008 Obama voter. “Initially, he had an aura about him that collectively gathered people.”

In Raleigh, Noah Nunn, a junior at St. Augustine College, said he also senses a change in the presidential campaign this year. But he is trying to tell his friends and other voters his age not to lose interest.

“It’s definitely going to be more difficult this year,” he said. “(Obama’s) advisers will need to be more strategic if they were depending solely on likeability.”
President Barack Obama laughs as he tapes an appearance on the Jimmy Fallon show at Memorial Hall on the UNC campus in Chapel Hill on Tuesday.

**Obama mixes policy and fun in Triangle visit**

By Rob Christensen

**CHAPEL HILL** - President Barack Obama courted college students Tuesday with a mixture of serious public policy about student loans and some humor with late show funny man Jimmy Fallon.

Appearing before 8,000 students at Carmichael Arena, Obama launched a three-state tour to urge Congress to prevent interest rates on many student loans from doubling on July 1.

“We can’t price the middle class out of a college education,” Obama said. “Not at a time when most new jobs in America will require more than a high school diploma. Whether it’s at a four-year college or a two-year program, we can’t make higher education a luxury.”

He turned to humor at an afternoon taping of “Late Night with Jimmy Fallon” at Memorial Hall, when he grabbed the microphone and talked about student loans in a slow jam style – made famous by the love ballads of R&B singer Barry White.
and others. As he talked, bluesy music played in the background, Fallon provided riffs, and a backup singer sang “The POTUS with most-est.”

But Republicans were not amused by the Obama trip.

They argued that the best thing that could happen for young people is more jobs. In a series of news conferences and news releases they said the last four years under Obama’s term had been bad for young people who had not been able find jobs or had to move back in with their parents.

“The country is in trouble economically,” state Republican Party Chairman Robin Hayes said in a teleconference. “The president is running for re-election, coming to Chapel Hill where Gov. (Bev) Perdue was booed by the students because of the lack of jobs. The truth is that one of two students is not going to get jobs when they graduate.”

Tuesday was Obama’s fourth trip to North Carolina in the past six months, a key swing state in the presidential contest. In 2008, college students provide an important ingredient in his narrow victory in North Carolina, providing him with votes and volunteers.

The president, who was in the Triangle for about four hours, was making an ostensibly nonpolitical trip, to talk about the need for Congress to act so that the rates for federal students loans does not rise from 3.4 percent to 6.8 percent this summer.

He said the average student now faces a $25,000 student loan debt, making it harder for younger people to get a start in life.

**Obamas’ had loans, too**

In a possible allusion to his likely Republican opponent, former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, Obama said, “This is something Michelle and I know about first hand. I just wanted everybody here to understand this – this is not – I didn’t just read about this. I didn’t just read some talking points about this. I didn’t just get a policy briefing on this. Michelle and I, we’ve been in your shoes.”

He said that he and Michelle had a “mountain of debt” when they finished college and only finished paying it off eight years ago.
Romney, while campaigning in Pennsylvania on Monday, backed extending the lower interest rates – the same position as Obama. But in a teleconference on Tuesday, his campaign said Obama had the wrong focus.

“The fact that the president has focused so much attention on student loans is a bit ironic,” said U.S. Rep. Aaron Schock of Illinois. “What young people really want is not student loans but a way to pay for their student loans. They want good paying jobs.”

Although the North Carolina stop was not overtly political, it did have a pep rally feel to it. At the end, the students broke into a “Four more years,” chant. Carmichael was packed and Obama met briefly before his speech with dozens of students in an overflow room who could not get in.

Obama noted that he had chosen the Carolina basketball team to win the NCAA championship, and said “who knows if Kendall (Marshall) hadn’t got hurt.”

**Fallon and the Heels**

Later Fallon joked that Obama had pandered so much to the Carolina crowd that he was considering changing his campaign slogan from “Yes We Can” to “Duke Sucks.”

After leaving Carmichael, Obama’s motorcade traveled several blocks to Memorial Hall where he spent almost a half hour taping a Tuesday night show with Fallon before a packed audience.

“I’m President Barack Obama, and I, too want to slow-jam the news.”

Obama did not address two contentious issues – the same-sex marriage amendment on the May 8 ballot, which he has said he opposes, or the sex scandal at state Democratic headquarters.

The Wilmington Star News

– Jim Ware

Published: Tuesday, April 24, 2012 at 3:02 p.m.

Missions of Mercy free dental clinic this week

WILMINGTON - The N.C. Mission of Mercy Dental Clinic will be held Friday and Saturday at Cape Fear Community College's Schwartz Center in downtown Wilmington.

The two-day event will provide hundreds of economically disadvantaged residents access to essential dental services for free, according to a release from the college.

The Missions of Mercy portable free dental program is an outreach program of the N.C. Dental Society. The program is sponsored by the N.C. Dental Health Fund, which provides free dental services to those in financial need with few or no other options.

Dental services include fillings, extractions, dental cleanings and a limited number of front-tooth partial dentures. Missions of Mercy has enough equipment to set up an 80-chair full dental clinic including digital X-ray, sterilization, and all instrumentation and supplies. Clinics are generally set up with 20 to 80 chairs and services are provided for 300 to 1,000 patients over a period of two days.

Volunteers include dentists, dental hygienists, dental assistants, laboratory technicians and scores of professional and general volunteers from across the state. Additionally, the program has a relationship with CFCC's dental department, the University of North Carolina School of Dentistry and the East Carolina School of Dental Medicine through their student volunteer organizations. Dental students participate as volunteer providers during each clinic.

Since its founding in 2003 through the end of 2011, the N.C. Missions of Mercy program has held more than 88 two-day clinics across the state. Since its founding in 2003 through the end of 2011, the program has provided more than $14.5 million in free dental care to more than 37,000 Carolinians. The hours of the clinic are from 6 a.m. to 4 p.m. Friday and from 6 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday. Patients will be treated in order of their arrival. Qualified patients should have a family income of 200 percent or below the Federal Poverty Index.
Our student debt bubble

By Froma Harrop

A modern knowledge economy thrives on highly trained workers. The way to get them, obviously, is through education – from basic reading skills for some, to mastery of algorithms for others. It thus would seem a basic public good to provide that learning at little or no cost to students, which most advanced countries do. But America has turned post-high-school education into a taxpayer-subsidized business – a business not unlike real estate at the height of the housing bubble.

Think Americans owe a bundle on their credit card balances? They have $693 billion on their plastic, while they owe over $1 trillion on student loans, according to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

Think health costs are out of control? They rose 150 percent from 1990 through 2011. During that period, the cost of attending a four-year college (not including room and board) soared 300 percent.

There is clearly a disconnect between Americans’ stagnating incomes and the rising costs of educating their children. The education bubble will have to burst. Online courses may supply the hatpin.

For example, venture capitalists are putting millions into Coursera, a company that provides online college courses for free. Founded by two Stanford University professors, Coursera offers classes taught by professors from Stanford, the University of Michigan, the University of Pennsylvania and Princeton. Other startups, such as Minerva and Udemy, are offering similar high-quality education experiences, though generally not for college credit.

Where is the payoff for investors? Through extras that the students may want to buy.

As in the music business, we see an unbundling of product. Rather than buy an entire CD, fans can download this song from artist A and that song from artist B. Likewise, students wanting a solid college education could take this course given at MIT and that course at Michigan. Best of all, they wouldn’t have to cough up the average $119,400 for tuition and fees (many are way higher) needed to spend four years at a private university that sinks millions into presidents’ salaries, profs who don’t teach and charming retreats abroad.

Could this model of learning work for high-school grads wanting a trade?
Many for-profit technical schools aggressively advertise to suck high-school grads into questionable courses for which the students take on unconscionable debt. Up to half of all student loans that go under are held by their dropouts and graduates. (The big players include ITT Educational Services and the University of Phoenix.)

But from the Ivy League on down, postsecondary education feeds off government grants and taxpayer-backed loans. Economists point to these subsidies as an excuse to raise prices. Meanwhile, the lenders, whether government or private student-loan companies, employ famously brutal techniques to collect.

And what’s this doing to our economy? It’s creating a mass of young people sagging under monstrous debt burdens. They are unable to buy a house, much less start a business. If failure to pay back student loans ruins their credit rating, they can’t borrow for anything.

As Mark Zandi of Moody’s Analytics put, ”We are creating a zombie generation of young people larded with debt, and, in many cases, dropouts without any diploma.”

This should sound familiar: Like risky mortgages, risky private student loans have been packaged into securities that are sold to the public. Concerns are growing that a pileup of student-loan defaults could imperil these investments.

Yes, it’s like the housing bubble all over again. And in its quest to help students obtain education from private sellers, the government has helped spike their price. Either the federal government will change the game or online educators will. Both should be giving it a try.

Creators Syndicate
We shouldn’t keep throwing money at our state’s broken education system

By Phil Berger

I can still hear him. “Get an education. It’s something no one can ever take from you.”

How right my father was.

Back then, no one in our family had attended college. And in high school, as I worked part-time jobs to help make ends meet – preparing fast food, delivering papers, stocking grocery-store shelves – I never dreamed my future held a life of practicing law, serving in public office, or seeing my children get their degrees. Education unlocked those doors, as it has for countless other families.

Combine hard-working students with top-notch teachers, and education’s capacity to overcome even the poorest of circumstances is unmatched, and unmistakable.

That’s why – for our future, for our children’s future – we must improve public education in North Carolina.

It pains me to see so many defending an education system that, in so many ways, fails our children. It graduates too few from high school – nearly one in four students don’t finish.

It prepares too few for higher education – one in five high school graduates take remedial courses at community colleges, costing taxpayers nearly $100 million annually. And it teaches too few the basics – nearly 66 percent of our children can’t read proficiently by fourth grade, the critical point when reading becomes essential for learning.

Many never catch up.

To fix these failures, teachers unions and misguided politicians must stop pretending higher taxes and more spending are silver bullets. Democrats tried it, spending more and more over the past decade. The result: the education bureaucracy grew. Student achievement didn’t.

We must fundamentally reform the system. Embracing this challenge, the General Assembly’s leadership this past week filed the Excellent Public Schools Act.

Here are a few of the bill’s highlights:
Fourth grade is typically when students stop learning to read and start reading to learn.

Those who can’t make this foundational shift are far less likely to finish high school. The Excellent Public Schools Act ends the irresponsible promotion of third-grade students who aren’t reading at grade level, and creates new reading-intensive instruction. These changes allow us to build upon the progress made in last year’s bipartisan budget, which funded more than 1,000 additional teachers in the early grades.

We know students with the best teachers learn more. Our bill requires local school leaders to craft plans to pay teachers based on merit and effectiveness. Our bill will also establish a North Carolina Teacher Corps program – modeled on Teach for America – that will give recent college graduates and mid-career professionals a direct path to teach in disadvantaged areas.

Administrators not only should reward excellence – they should be empowered to remove the handful of underperforming teachers from the classroom if they don’t improve. By granting job security to all who teach a few years, the current system rewards mediocrity and punishes excellence. Under our plan, teachers will have annual contracts renewed based on performance.

Right now, you probably can’t tell if a school is failing or succeeding. They should be graded A-F, just like you were when you attended school. The transparency will help officials and parents challenge complacency and encourage improvements.

North Carolina has a prime opportunity to help lead the charge for more parental involvement and educational freedom, fairly-compensated teachers, and greater accountability for our schools.

Getting an education changed my life. Now, as a father and grandfather, I’m determined to ensure every child in North Carolina has the same opportunities I had. The Excellent Public Schools Act is the education reform our children deserve, our parents expect and our state desperately needs.

Phil Berger, a Republican from Eden, is N.C. Senate Pro Tem.
What’s best for N.C.’s schools?

By Gov. Beverly Perdue

With the flood of new technology, our children are growing and learning in a world that is advancing right in front of our eyes. The age of laptops, tablets, social media, and instant information is changing the way we work. Likewise, we must constantly re-evaluate how those tools can help us transform the way we educate our children.

North Carolina has a historic tradition of investing in public schools. We have supported education as the best means of meeting the workforce demands of the modern world and of preparing our children for success. Today, North Carolina is among a handful of states with the most dramatic progress in improving high school graduation rates over the past decade; and last summer our high school graduation rates rose above the national average for the first time. These improvements were made possible by investing in education.

But due to the outmoded thinking of some politicians, North Carolina is in danger of standing still at the starting line in the new global sprint for success. In their last budget, the Republican-controlled General Assembly made deep and unnecessary cuts to North Carolina schools.

There is no question that we have to continue improving and transforming education in North Carolina. But any politician that says we have to choose between reforms and investments is offering a false choice – it is essential that we do both.

Leaders in the General Assembly have made harmful cuts that are starving our schools of needed resources. Some politicians may try to distract attention from their support for harmful cuts by pointing to “reform,” but merely paying lip service to reform without offering a plan to invest more resources is using reform as a fig leaf and rings hollow.

This year, after the General Assembly’s cuts, our classrooms have 915 fewer teachers and more than 2,000 fewer teacher assistants than they did last year.
Superintendents across the state are forced to choose between investing their scarce dollars in teachers, or in upgrading technology for students. Overall, there are nearly 5,000 fewer people working in education in North Carolina than there were last year. At the same time, because of population growth, we have more children in our schools every day and fewer qualified adults to teach them.

One of the ways we’re pursuing reform is investing in innovative tools for teachers. Just recently I was in Pitt County where I saw the “Reading 3D” program in action. This program puts technology to work in classrooms and allows teachers to quickly and accurately measure student performance. The program empowers teachers to provide the right individualized reading instruction. This, in turn, helps ensure that even more children are able to read by the end of grade 3. The innovation isn’t free, but the return on a good investment like Reading 3D is incalculable.

We are also achieving transformation by preparing high school students for life after high school, whether that is a career or college. This year, we launched North Carolina’s Career & College Promise Program, which allows eligible high school students to earn college credit or career training credits while still in high school. Regardless of a student’s plans after high school, Career & College Promise provides focused preparation at no cost to the student.

We have been so innovative in education, in fact, that our state has earned two competitive education grants from the federal government – under the Race to the Top program.

Politicians that pit investment against reform, as though they’re mutually exclusive, are offering a false choice. If we don’t focus on making additional investments and smart innovations in education today, both our workforce and our education system will become obsolete. If we don’t stay ahead of the curve, North Carolina will be a dial-up state in a broadband world.

Perdue, a Democrat, is governor of North Carolina.
Subsidize Students, Not Tax Cuts

In 2007, President George W. Bush signed a bill that cut in half interest rates on subsidized student loans until 2012. Those low rates will expire on July 1 — going back to 6.8 percent from 3.4 percent — and, to prevent college from becoming even more unaffordable for millions of students, the obvious move is to renew them. But nothing is that easy or sensible anymore in Washington, where House Republicans are far more interested in cutting taxes, largely for the rich, than they are in helping low- and middle-income students get a college education.

House Republicans say the country cannot afford the $6 billion a year that it costs to pay for the lower rates. The Ryan budget, recently approved by the House, would allow the rates to double, and, at the same time, would cut taxes by $10 trillion over a decade. Representative John Kline Jr., the chairman of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, said keeping the rates low would mean “piling billions of dollars on the backs of taxpayers.”

Instead, Republicans would rather pile that burden on the backs of taxpayers-to-be, specifically the 7.4 million students who now have federally subsidized Stafford loans and the millions more who will need them. At a time when many graduates are desperate for jobs, the interest rate increase would add an average of $1,000 a year to their debt. Already, many Republican lawmakers around the country have made it clear that they don’t even want students to vote, imposing identification requirements that would keep students away from polling places.

In the first of several speeches about the cost of higher education, President Obama urged students on Tuesday to demand that Congress renew the rates. “At this make-or-break moment for the middle class,” he said at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, “we’ve got to make sure that you’re not saddled with debt before you even get started in life.”

Nothing is more important to this country’s future than ensuring a good education for coming generations. The issue also plays directly into Mr. Obama’s own need to re-energize younger voters, who turned out in
overwhelming numbers for him in 2008 but seem far less enthusiastic these days.

Once the White House began its effort, Mitt Romney broke with House Republicans and said Monday that he supports renewing the loan subsidies. As usual, though, that also meant breaking with himself, since he had fully embraced the House budget and never expressed any reservations about the student loan provisions. Indeed, only a few months ago, he argued repeatedly in interviews that student subsidies were a bad idea that encouraged colleges to raise their tuition.

Mr. Romney, along with the Senate Republican leader, Mitch McConnell, said that the $6 billion cost of the subsidy should be offset with cuts to other programs, but predictably neither man said where those cuts should come from. The White House and Democrats have proposed raising the money by ending a loophole used by high-paid employees of S-corporations to avoid paying full payroll taxes.

The Republican response to that idea is also predictable. This is a party that shows time and again that it wants to protect only those who have made it, not help those struggling to get started.
Cooper Union Will Charge Tuition for Graduate Students

By RICHARD PÉREZ-PEÑA

After months of agonized debate about its 110-year-old tradition of free education, Cooper Union will begin charging graduate students next year while maintaining, at least for now, its no-tuition policy for undergraduates, the college’s president said Tuesday.

Cooper Union, in the East Village, will also expand its graduate and other programs to generate more income as it searches for a way out of a deepening financial hole. Jamshed Bharucha, who became president last July, said in October that the institution had no choice but to consider making students pay, prompting a storm of protest from some students, alumni and faculty, who saw the idea as a violation of Cooper Union’s core principles.

The plan announced on Tuesday stopped far short of broad-based tuition, which might have been the simplest and surest route to financial stability. It also fell short of meeting the fiscal target that Cooper Union set last fall. In an interview, Dr. Bharucha made it clear that the college may yet have to be more aggressive about raising revenue.

“This hybrid model is exciting because it gives us a chance to do new things and not just hunker down,” Dr. Bharucha said. But, he added, “There are risks for this strategy, and there are those who worry if it will work.”

Undergraduate students who begin college in September 2013 will not pay tuition during their four years at Cooper Union, Dr. Bharucha said, but so far, the institution has made no commitments for those who follow them. At least some students who begin graduate school that year will pay tuition, but how much remains to be decided.

Cooper Union will also start new programs as soon as 2013, like a master’s degree program combining the school’s strengths in technology and design, or online programs, to increase both enrollment and revenue. Dr. Bharucha acknowledged that the plan called for “a very accelerated time scale,” adding that the college was already in discussions with the State Board of Regents, which must authorize any new programs.

Friends of Cooper Union, a group opposed to charging tuition, will hold a long-planned forum on Thursday to explore alternatives, and some of its
leaders said they were taken aback that the college would proceed with its plan before hearing them out.

“There are a lot of good ideas that haven’t had their audience,” said Henry Chapman, a 2010 graduate in art who is one of the group’s organizers. “What they’ve proposed goes against the school’s identity. It’s risky, and the fear is, in two or three years, they’ll say, ‘We tried this, it didn’t work, and now we have to charge undergraduates.’”

But some Cooper Union alumni and staff members hailed the idea of a graduate program melding art and engineering. “It’s really an impressive vision,” said the architect Daniel Libeskind, a 1970 graduate, adding, “We have a boom in technology that is changing the art world, changing architecture very dramatically.”

Thomas Micchelli, chairman of the school’s Faculty-Student Senate, agreed and expressed cautious approval for the administration’s plan over all. But Mr. Micchelli, who served on a task force that helped draft the plan, added, “Whether it will solve the financial problems remains to be seen.”

Cooper Union has about 1,000 undergraduate students in schools of architecture, art and engineering, and fewer than 100 in master’s degree programs in architecture and engineering. It is routinely rated among the elite colleges in those fields, making its policy of giving every student a free education all the more remarkable. (Technically, the college has a tuition price of $37,500 a year, but it gives each student a full scholarship to cover that cost.)

The tuition policy is part of a strongly liberal tradition. From its earliest days, Cooper Union accepted women and minorities, and last fall, many of its students participated in the Occupy Wall Street protests.

The institution was founded in 1859 by Peter Cooper, a wealthy industrialist, primarily to provide a free education to working-class students. Cooper Union officials said the college had not charged any students in degree programs since 1902, a policy made possible by large gifts left by Cooper and others.

Last fall, Dr. Bharucha said that the college had to reduce its annual operating deficits by more than $20 million by 2018.

The new plan “gets us a good distance toward this target,” but not all the way, he said. And at a school that has already endured multiple rounds of budget cuts and a hiring freeze, the plan relies on still more cutting,
including a 7 percent reduction of the operating budget in the coming academic year.

Cooper Union uses its $600 million endowment to cover operating deficits. Its assets include the land under the Chrysler Building in Midtown, on which it collects $7 million a year in rent (the amount is scheduled to rise to $32.5 million in 2018). This year, the college has stepped up its alumni fund-raising, an area where it had been relatively weak, and contributions have increased by almost one-third. Students have also organized a donation drive.

Dr. Bharucha said that the college also needed to be more aggressive about making money from its work in technology, which includes starting businesses and licensing patents, but that the efforts could take many years to pay off.
President Obama is feeling the love.

“I love you back, I really do!” he calls out to thousands of young people packed to the rafters. When one shouts, “We believe in you!” he yells back, “I believe in you!” When he emphasizes a point, he calls out, “Can I get an amen?”

For a president facing a tough re-election and a stubborn economy, there is no better amen corner, no more invigorating audience, than on campus. For a few exuberant moments, it can feel like 2008 all over again, when the youth vote actually showed up and helped propel an unlikely outsider to the White House.
But the cheers Mr. Obama heard on Tuesday as he opened a two-day, three-college swing masked a more daunting reality as he seeks to mobilize young voters to his side once again. Mr. Obama is no longer the avatar of promise and possibility; he is the incumbent presiding over an anemic job market awaiting future graduates. He is a figure of compromised ideals asking for forbearance as he seeks to live up to the sky-high expectations he inspired the first time around.

“It’s definitely not the same as it was in 2008,” said Ariana van den Akker, a 22-year-old senior at the University of North Carolina, the president’s first stop on Tuesday. “You saw it a lot more on campus then. I feel like the reality of the economy has set in. If you look at the pictures of when he visited in 2008, when he was looking at the Democratic bid, I think a lot more people were excited then than now.”

College students face an intimidating job market. Nearly 54 percent of graduates under 25 years old last year were unemployed or underemployed. “They bought into the message of hope and change four years ago; now they think it’s time for something new,” said Beaumont Allen, a spokesman for a Republican youth group called Concord 51.

That does not mean that young people are shifting in large numbers to Mr. Romney. A new Web-based survey by Knowledge Networks for Harvard University’s Institute on Politics found that Mr. Obama leads Mr. Romney 43 percent to 26 percent among those 18 to 29 years old, six points higher than last winter.

But surveys and interviews suggest that enthusiasm for the president has waned, and his challenge will be rousing young people to actually turn out. Among 18- to 34-year-olds surveyed by land line and cellphone by NBC News and The Wall Street Journal, 45 percent expressed high interest in the election, compared with 63 percent in April 2008.

That remains critical in swing states like those Mr. Obama visits this week, North Carolina, Colorado and Iowa. In such states, the Obama campaign has recruited students as volunteers with the possibility of becoming paid field organizers as it focuses on 15 million people, 6 million of whom are registered, who were not old enough to vote last time.

The policy focus of Mr. Obama’s swing — termed an official trip, financed by taxpayers — is the cost of federally subsidized student loans. Interest rates for 7 million students are set to double to 6.8 percent on July 1, and the president has called on Congress to prevent that. It was an issue stoked by Democrats to put Mr. Romney on the defensive.
Mr. Romney tried to defuse the issue on Monday by supporting an extension of the interest rates because of “the extraordinarily poor conditions in the job market” under Mr. Obama.

Democrats said Mr. Romney’s position contradicted his support for the budget by Representative Paul D. Ryan, Republican of Wisconsin, and his previously expressed skepticism about “taxpayers having to subsidize people who want to go to school.”

Without naming Mr. Romney, Mr. Obama mocked his statement. “Everybody will give lip service to this,” he said. “You’ll hear a lot of folks say, ‘Yes, education is important — it’s important.’ But it requires not just words but deeds.”

Senator Harry Reid of Nevada, the Democratic leader, plans to introduce a bill on the interest rates, and Democrats said it would offset its cost by preventing some individuals from paying taxes as corporations.

Senator Mitch McConnell of Kentucky, the Republican leader, said Mr. Obama was trying to distract from economic policies that had made it harder to find jobs. “I’m sure he’ll give a very rousing speech, full of straw men and villains who stand in the way of their dreams,” Mr. McConnell said. “I’m sure he’ll also express his strong support for things that all of us agree on. But what he won’t talk about is the extent to which the decisions he’s made are limiting their opportunities in the years ahead.”

Some students were willing to give Mr. Obama the benefit of the doubt. Alex Zaczek, 26, a junior at the University of Colorado, Boulder, who volunteered for Mr. Obama in 2008, credited him for affordable loans.

Taia Butler, a freshman, said many students were excited by Mr. Romney because he was wealthy and unlikely to be corrupted. But she said women’s rights would determine her vote.

Still, dismal job prospects hung over the campuses. “It’s just so scary to hear my classmates who are so smart having trouble finding a job,” said Becky Bush, 20, a junior at North Carolina. “Whether it’s the president’s fault they can’t find a job, I don’t know. I do know he’s making a conscious effort to fix that.”

Reporting was contributed by Dan Frosch from Boulder, Paul Cuadros from Chapel Hill, N.C., and Joe Doakes and Jennifer Steinhauer from Washington.
Group Says It Has Ceased Bomb Threats on Campus

By JENNIFER PRESTON

As students headed to final exams at the University of Pittsburgh this week, with many exhausted and frustrated by more than 100 bomb threats that have disrupted classes and emptied dorms, they were hoping there would be no further evacuations now that a group has announced its bomb threat campaign is over.

Calling itself the Threateners, the group claimed responsibility for dozens of bomb threats delivered by e-mail to Pittsburgh-area news outlets since March 30. Last weekend, in an open letter to the university’s chancellor, the group said it would stop if the university withdrew its $50,000 reward for information leading to the arrest of the people behind the threats.

In early April, on the advice of law enforcement officials, the university had refused to negotiate with what appears to be the same anonymous group, university officials said. However, on Saturday, the offer of a reward vanished from the university’s Web site.

Officials said no threats had been received since Saturday morning, offering respite during the final week of school. Bomb-sniffing dogs had been on the scene since Feb. 13, when the first threat was found scribbled on a wall in a women’s restroom in a chemistry building.

The Threateners, in an e-mail sent to the campus newspaper, The Pitt News, and addressed to Chancellor Mark A. Nordenberg, claimed responsibility only for e-mail threats since March 30.

Robert Hill, vice chancellor for public affairs, would not comment about the university’s decision to withdraw its reward offer last weekend. Earlier in the month, Mr. Hill had said in a written statement that the university was “urged to avoid any form of negotiation with anonymous correspondents claiming responsibility for the criminal acts.”

After the reward was withdrawn, a second e-mail from the Threateners sent to the campus newspaper said, “The university authorities at Pitt have withdrawn the $50,000 reward they offered, and, as our only demand has been met, our campaign is over.”
While the unceasing bomb threats prompted some students to abandon their dorms and classrooms and head home early this semester, university officials vowed to keep the campus open and operating, turning to Twitter and other social media tools to inform students of the threats and when buildings were clear for them to return.

Professors abandoned attendance policies and gave lectures online. Facebook pages and Google spreadsheets offered off-campus accommodations for students weary of being evacuated from their dorms. Some ousted from their dorms in the predawn darkness were greeted by administrators with blankets, cots and free food at the student union center and a basketball gym.

Michael Macagnone, editor in chief of The Pitt News, said the threats had led to a surge in school spirit. “From what I have seen, this has brought the Pitt community together,” he said. “The connections have always been there, with Facebook and social media. But this has been a shared experience by everyone on campus.”

Mr. Macagnone’s newspaper received both e-mails from the Threateners, which he forwarded to the police, he said. In his article and in an interview, he said the group had given only a vague reason for being opposed to the university’s reward. “The idea of the reward angered them,” he said.

Mr. Macagnone also said the e-mails from the group noted that none of the people who had been previously identified as “persons of interest” in the federal and campus police investigation were involved in the group.

A spokesman for the United States attorney’s office in Pittsburgh declined to comment on the federal grand jury investigation into the bomb threats.

A transgender couple, who have been protesting the administration’s policy governing the use of men’s restrooms and locker rooms at the university’s Johnstown campus, said they were told they were “persons of interest.” In an interview, Katherine Anne McCloskey, 56, and Seamus Johnston, 22, said that F.B.I. agents showed up at their home last Wednesday in Cambria County and confiscated their computers.

Mr. Johnston was expelled in January after confrontations with university officials over the use of the men’s restrooms. Both he and Ms. McCloskey denied any role in the threats. They said they had appeared before the grand jury.
Last week, the F.B.I. seized a computer server from a Brooklyn computer cooperative that describes itself as offering online services, including the ability to share e-mail anonymously, to mostly progressive groups.

For now, the mystery remains as graduation approaches on Sunday.

The university announced Tuesday night that security measures would be put in place.

“Everyone wants to know who is responsible for putting us through this,” said Kourtney Bernecker, 19, a sophomore who is majoring in political science and philosophy. “I lost tuition money because I had to skip classes because of evacuations. Those are lectures that I missed. But the professors worked hard to make it work for us. I think that whoever did this would feel badly if they saw that it has made us all stronger.”
Study of Fighters Shows Brain Changes Are Seen Before Symptoms

By TIMOTHY PRATT

LAS VEGAS — One of the questions Dr. Charles Bernick and his colleagues ask boxers who come to the Cleveland Clinic’s Lou Ruvo Center for Brain Health here is, “How many times have you been knocked out cold or gotten a concussion?” Most say, “never.”

Then the doctors ask, “How many times have you felt dazed and stunned?” Most say, “many times.”

This is part of the Professional Fighters Brain Health Study, now a year old and with results from 109 fighters — more than have ever been compiled in a single research project. The principal finding: “There are detectable changes in the brain even before symptoms appear,” like memory loss or other changes in cognitive function resulting from repeated blows to the head, Dr. Bernick said.

The physical changes, detected by M.R.I. scans, are a reduction in size in the hippocampus and thalamus of the brains of fighters with more than six years in the ring. These parts of the brain deal with such functions as memory and alertness. While those who had fought for more than six years did not exhibit any declines in cognitive function, fighters with more than 12 years in the ring did. Thus, Dr. Bernick’s group concluded, the lag between detectability and physical symptoms probably occurs sometime during those six years.

Dr. Bernick will present these findings on Wednesday in New Orleans at the American Academy of Neurology’s annual meeting, and the potential significance goes well beyond the health of boxers. The idea that an M.R.I. could help identify a degenerative brain disorder before a patient reports cognitive problems could help a broad range of people, from young athletes and combat soldiers to others who have been subjected to repeated blows to the head, neurologists say.
There may also be implications for understanding Alzheimer’s and other diseases among otherwise healthy elderly people, but these issues remain subjects for further study, said Dr. Jay L. Alberts, director of the Cleveland Clinic’s Concussion Center. The Ohio-based clinic is the parent institution of the Las Vegas center.

“Everyone knows repeated blows to the head are not good for you,” Dr. Bernick said. “But nobody knows how you evolve from getting blows to developing long-term degenerative diseases. Now we have some sense of sequence.”

Like many doctors who study athletes’ brain injuries, Dr. Bernick has concluded that much of the research has focused too narrowly on infrequent, hard blows to the head rather than more constant lesser blows.

In other words, “We may not need to focus so much on concussions,” Dr. Bernick said. “It could be that sustaining thousands of blows that don’t knock you out could be more important” to assessing the long-term health of your brain.

Dr. Bernick’s results rest on the Las Vegas center’s ability to gather a large sample of professional boxers and mixed-martial artists, to classify them according to the amount of time they have spent in the ring, and to cross-reference M.R.I. images of their brains and results from cognitive tests.

“It’s the first study of its kind,” said Dr. Robert Stern, director of the Alzheimer’s Disease Clinical Core at Boston University School of Medicine, who was not part of the research team. “It’s the first time we have a large group of athletes who have their brains hurt on a regular basis, with M.R.I. images, cognition tests, and a longitudinal aspect,” added Dr. Stern, who plans to conduct a similar study of former National Football League players.

Though Dr. Bernick intends to continue his study of boxers for at least five years, he said the preliminary findings were worth the attention of the neurology association’s annual meeting, as “nobody has the numbers we do.” And he hopes, eventually, to help inform decisions made by boxers and state boxing commissions, as well as sports medicine generally, when it comes to preventing neurodegenerative conditions.

Dr. Alberts of the Cleveland Clinic in Ohio said that brain damage caused by strong concussive blows versus lesser, but more frequent, hits was “a distinction that people are talking about, but at the moment we have no data, just a lot of hand-waving.” He said the study of boxers should help change that.
At the Las Vegas center, only three years old, there are plans to include hundreds more boxers in the next five years. For now, the brain images of 109 fighters are grouped according to the length of time each participant has fought: less than 6 years, 6 to 12 years, and more than 12 years. The number of fights is also taken into account.

Given that Las Vegas is billed as the “fight capital of the world,” Dr. Bernick seems to be guaranteed a steady stream of new patients.

“It’s exciting,” he said, “to be in a field that people know so little about.”
Starr advocates for renewed focus on ‘soft skills’ during third book club

By Michael Alison Chandler

Before retiring, former Montgomery superintendent Jerry Weast mapped out seven steps, or “keys,” to college readiness meant to be a road map to higher education for families.

The milestones include:

1. Advanced reading in grades K-2
2. Advanced reading MSA in grades 3-8
3. Advanced math in grade 5
4. Algebra I by Grade 8, C or higher
5. Algebra 2 by Grade 11, C or higher
6. Score of 3 on AP exam or 4 on IB exam
7. Score of 1650 on SAT or 24 on the ACT

During his third and final book club on Tuesday night, current superintendent Joshua Starr said he’s “become convinced” that it’s important to go beyond these (important) basic competencies to be successful in the world today.

To illustrate his point, he selected Tony Wagner’s “The Global Achievement Gap: Why Even Our Best Schools Don’t Teach the New Survival Skills Our Children Need” for discussion.

Wagner argues that schools today, with their focus on memorization and testing, are becoming obsolete, because they are not teaching the critical thinking and communication skills needed in today’s economy.

The Harvard scholar lists his own “seven survival skills” for future graduates:

1. Critical Thinking and Problem-Solving
2. Collaboration Across Networks and Leading by Influence
3. Agility and Adaptability
4. Initiative and Entrepreneurialism
5. Effective Oral and Written Communication
6. Accessing and Analyzing Information
7. Curiosity and Imagination

Despite all the hype over 21st-century skills, few of today’s standardized tests are designed to capture these skills and they are often downplayed in the classroom, Wagner argues.

Starr said they are often thought of as “soft skills,” but they remain fundamentally important. He and a panel of educators and business and community leaders discussed the book and a range of issues, including how to train teachers who have been expected for the past decade to teach to the test, what rigor should look like, how much homework kids should have, and whether Advanced Placement classes do a good job of challenging students to think differently versus simply challenging them to learn more stuff.

It was the last book club in a series designed to share Starr’s educational philosophy.

The first book, “Mindset” by Carol Dweck, introduced the idea that intelligence is malleable, and students can become smarter through hard work.

“Drive,” by Daniel Pink, is about motivation and emphasizes, among other things, that people find motivation by working together on teams.

The third book then looks at how public schools are preparing students for the 21st century.

While he brought the series to a close, Starr offered some summer reading assignments.

“Managing Transitions: Making the Most of Change”
Author: William Bridges Publisher: De Capo, 2009

“Education and the Cult of Efficiency”
Author: Raymond Callahan Publisher: University of Chicago Press, 2009

“Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap—and Others Don’t”
Author: James C. Collins Publisher: Random House Business, 2001

“The Flat World and Education—How America’s Commitment to Equity Will Determine Our Future”
Author: Linda Darling-Hammond Publisher: Teachers College Press, 2010
“Mindset: The New Psychology of Success”
Author: Carol S. Dweck Publisher: Ballantine, 2008

“Death by Meeting: A Leadership Fable ... About Solving the Most Painful Problem in Business”
Author: Patrick Lencioni Publisher: Jossey-Bass, 2004

“Drive: The Surprising Truth about What Motivates Us”
Author: Daniel H. Pink Publisher: Riverhead, 2009

Author: Diane Ravitch Publisher: Basic, 2010

“Change Leadership: A Practical Guide to Transforming Our Schools”
Author: Tony Wagner Publisher: Jossey-Bass, 2006

“The Global Achievement Gap: Why Even Our Best Schools Don’t Teach the New Survival Skills Our Children Need—and What We Can Do About It”
Author: Tony Wagner Publisher: Perseus, 2008
The case against lowering student loan interest rates

By Daniel de Vise

All of a sudden, the arcane topic of student-loan interest rates has surged to the top of the news cycle. President Obama has placed the issue front and center in his reelection campaign, urging Congress (from various college-campus podiums) to preserve legislation that caps interest rates at 3.4 percent on the main federal student loan program.

Few higher education leaders have anything bad to say about the president’s push. So I took note of this comparatively critical essay from Neal McCluskey, an education scholar at the libertarian Cato Institute.

Here it is, republished from the Cato@Liberty blog.

Sometimes I wish politicians were more like good parents. I know that doesn’t sound very libertarian — the last thing we want is for politicians to become humanity’s moms and dads — but there’s at least one thing good parents do that most politicians constantly avoid: say “no.”
When kids want their food pyramids to have a base of candy, center of ice cream, and peak of ice cream with candy sprinkles, good parents say “no.”

When young ‘uns want to show off their mumblety-peg skills with the Bowie knife they found in dad’s old camping gear, good parents say “no.”

And when the children want to borrow the family sedan for a little off-road speed competition, good parents say “no.”

Of course, saying no all the time doesn’t make life with the kiddos easy or fun. The kids get angry. Mom and dad fume. “I hate you” may even be uttered. But refusing to help the children seriously endanger their arteries, digits, or worse – even if it makes the parents’ life tougher – is what good parenting is all about.

If only our politicians would exercise the same restraint.

But they don’t, with the latest case-in-point being the drive to keep interest rates on subsidized federal student loans at super-low levels. It will be the centerpiece of a three-state presidential tour beginning today.

Currently, interest rates on subsidized loans — loans on which Washington pays the interest while a borrower is in school and for a six-month period after graduation — are at 3.4 percent, a surface-skimming level reached after the College Cost Reduction and Access Act of 2007 cut rates in half over a five-year period. Rates are scheduled to return to 6.8 percent in July.

The argument proffered for keeping the rates at 3.4 percent is that interest rates generally are at historic lows, and 6.8 percent would simply be too high. Much more important, though, seems to be the political reality: President Obama appears intent on currying favor with both college students and, frankly, any voters looking at exorbitant college prices and asking, “How the heck am I going to pay for that?”

But it’s not just the current president who appears to be playing politics. Mitt Romney, the presumptive GOP challenger to Mr. Obama, yesterday also urged Congress to freeze the rate at 3.4 percent.

This certainly looks like election-year politics, and no doubt the unusual focus on student loan rates — not exactly a political thriller — stems from that. But the reality is that policymakers have been lavishing cheap money on students for decades because it helps keep relations cordial with the kiddos. The ultimate result, however, hasn’t been greater college affordability, but damage inflicted on millions of Americans.
First and foremost, all the cheap aid has enabled colleges to raise their prices at breakneck speeds, rendering the aid largely self-defeating and college pricing insane.

Second, giving dirt-cheap ducats to wannabe students — no matter how poorly prepared they are, or how little they actually want to tackle college work – has resulted in massive overconsumption and noncompletion of postsecondary education, and left millions without the earnings-upping degrees they need to pay their college debts. At four-year institutions, more than 40 percent of first-time, full-time students fail to complete their studies within six-years, and in community colleges almost 80 percent don’t finish in three years. Most who aren’t done in those time frames will never finish.

Finally, there’s the cost to taxpayers. Overall, federal student loans originated in just 2010-11 involved $104 billion in taxpayer money, and if those loans don’t get paid back, or interest rates are slashed, it is taxpayers who will take the hit. That, of course, seems unfair at any time, but making it even worse is that the nation is facing a nearly $16 trillion debt. But good luck getting the politicians to pin down the cuts that will offset the billions of bucks that will be lost if student loan rates are kept at 3.4 percent. Sure, you’ll get uber-confident promises that the move won’t cost taxpayers “one nickel,” but you sure won’t find anything concrete in the legislation that would keep rates low.

Federal student aid is, frankly, a classic example of garbage parenting. No matter how much damage the policies inflict, the politicians do anything they can to stay best friends with the kids.
Obama and Romney discuss student loans to reach college voters

By Jenna Johnson

As another class of college seniors prepares for graduation and another wave of high school students prepares to take its place, President Obama and Mitt Romney are aggressively marketing themselves to 20-something and teen voters who are worried about what happens after graduation.

Will they find an adequate job? Will it pay enough to cover their monthly student loan payments? Will they have to move back in with their parents? Or hide out in grad school? Will things get better by graduation day?

Nearly four years ago, young voters played a major role in electing Obama to the White House. And now everyone is wondering how teens and 20-somethings will vote this time around — that is, if they vote at all.

The issues that college students are passionate about vary from campus to campus, region to region, and major to major. Something that is consistent: student loan debt. At least two-thirds of students at four-year universities take on debt to pay for school, according to FinAid.org, and the total amount of outstanding student loan debt passed the $1 trillion mark last year.
Obama and Romney have both supported extending the College Cost Reduction and Access Act, which is set to expire this summer and lowered the interest rate on federal student loans from 6.8 percent to 3.4 percent. It’s unclear what Congress will do, and the Post has reported that many Republican lawmakers have balked at the $6 billion price tag attached to a one-year extension.

This week Obama is set to visit three large state universities over two days to promote the act, discuss college affordability and urge students to lobby their members of Congress. During the president’s first stop at the University of North Carolina on Tuesday, he talked about his own student loan debt and told students to use the Twitter hashtag #DontDoubleMyRate. (Obama also appealed to the hearts of Tarheel basketball fans by reminding everyone that was the team he picked to win his March Madness bracket.)

Meanwhile, Romney has also been appealing to young voters and recent college graduates who are faced with a bleak job market.

“I think young voters in this country have to vote for me if they’re really thinking of what’s in the best interest of the country and what’s in their personal best interest, because the president’s policies have led to extraordinary statistics,” Romney said during a press conference on Monday.

In addition to the 20-somethings who were old enough to vote during the last election, there’s a new wave of college voters who were under 18 in 2008. Senior White House officials told The Post on Monday that a key goal of Obama’s re-election campaign is to register as many of these young voters as possible.

These 18 to 21-year-old voters are also of special interest to the College Republican National Committee, which is preparing to send dozens of staff members to hundreds of campuses at the end of the summer to train students to campaign and sign up new voters, national chairman Alex Schriver told me this morning.

Schriver said many of these first-time voters have likely watched the struggles of their older brothers and sisters, some of whom might be unemployed or underemployed and living back at home. For them, the worries are greater than just student loan debt.

“They are worried about how they are going to be able to pay the bills, to support themselves,” said Schriver, who graduated in late 2010. “It’s jobs, jobs, jobs.”
The first annual AT&T Nation's Football Classic fell short of economic expectations, The Washington Examiner has learned, but organizers say they are confident the event has a bright future.

The event at RFK Stadium featuring historically black colleges and universities drew 18,000 attendees and generated nearly $3.5 million in spending over the Sept. 10 weekend last year, according to Events DC. At least 1,100 hotel room nights were also sold.

When the game, in which Howard University defeated Morehouse College, 30-27, was announced last year. Events DC executives had predicted the weekend would generate $6 million in local spending.

### By the numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College game</th>
<th>Direct spending</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>Estimated hotel room nights</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2011 Nation's Football Classic</td>
<td>$3.5m</td>
<td>18,409</td>
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<tr>
<td>Howard vs. Morehouse</td>
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<tr>
<td>2010 Military Bowl*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maryland vs. East Carolina</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009 EagleBank Bowl</td>
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<tr>
<td>UCLA vs. Temple</td>
<td>($7.7m gross impact)</td>
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"This was a first-time event, and the most you can really do is guess," Erik Moses, Events DC senior vice president and managing director, told The Examiner on Tuesday. "We ended up closer to $3.5 [million] that's trackable and we feel comfortable with that."

The District's other college football game at RFK, the Military Bowl, had a similar start in 2008. No numbers are available for the inaugural year, but direct spending more than doubled from $5.8 million in 2009 to $13.3 million in 2010, The Examiner first reported.

The 2010 game's numbers were boosted by the fact that East Carolina University fans travel well and University of Maryland players stayed in the District all week, officials said at the time.

But unlike the bowl game, which is all about football, the Classic is more of a cultural event.

"[For example] in the black college world, the marching band, they're kind of the stars," Moses said. "That dynamic is one that you can't fully appreciate until you're living it."

He added that Howard and Morehouse work as a draw because many Howard alumni live out of town and will travel for the Classic. Also, D.C. is second only to Atlanta -- where Morehouse is located -- in number of Morehouse alumni.

This year's game was moved up to Labor Day weekend in an effort to keep business in the District on a weekend where locals typically desert the city for one last round at the beach. Moses said he hopes to include a federal jobs fair among the weekend's kickoff events.

Tickets went on sale Tuesday and are discounted to $15 through June 30.