THE DAILY CLIPS

May 12, 2009

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

The Greenville Daily Reflector
The Raleigh News & Observer
The New York Times
The Wall Street Journal
USA Today
The Charlotte Observer
The Fayetteville Observer
The Greensboro News & Record
Newsweek
U.S. News & World Report
Business Week
Time

East Carolina University News Bureau
E-mail to durhamj@ecu.edu  Web site at http://www.news.ecu.edu
252-328-6481 FAX: 252-328-6300
Director: Pitt County is well prepared for swine flu

By Tom Marine
The Daily Reflector

Monday, May 11, 2009

The H1N1 flu outbreak is not expected to reach pandemic levels, but Pitt County is well prepared to battle infectious disease, Dr. John Morrow, Pitt County health director, said Monday.

Speaking at a community forum held at the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University, Morrow and other medical leaders discussed the risks of the virus, public concerns about flu and ways for residents protect themselves.

The H1N1 flu, also known as swine flu, has generated an outbreak of illnesses in the United States by spreading through the coughs and sneezes of people who are sick with the virus, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Web site. As of Monday, 2,600 laboratory confirmed cases of the virus had been detected.

The CDC reports 11 H1N1 cases have been identified in North Carolina, but none in Pitt County.

"A flu epidemic causes a lot of havoc," Marrow said. "I think we are fortunate that we haven't seen that with this current H1N1 virus outbreak."

Morrow said local planning that brings together state and county health departments provides a vital role in surveillance, investigation of potential cases and appropriate treatment. He said residents should continue to treat this outbreak like the seasonal flu, by giving their bodies a few days to work through the disease.

"I'm not as much worried about this swine influenza," said Dr. Paul P. Cook, who works in the Division of Infectious Diseases at the Brody School. "I don't mean to imply that we need to be complacent about this, but I do think it is less likely that this will cause a serious epidemic."

Cook described the process in which viruses are named and classified. He said the H1N1 virus is typical of influenza, in terms of fever, cough and sore throat.

Dr. Keith Ramsey, professor of medicine at the Brody School and medical director for infection control at Pitt County Memorial Hospital, offered some guidance to prevent catching the flu. He stressed the importance of good hygiene, especially with the hands and respiratory system.

"We probably dodged a bit of a bullet here with this particular strain," Ramsey said, referring to the three waves of the 1918 flu pandemic, which killed between 50 and 100 million people worldwide.

Another medical expert noted how the H1N1 flu outbreak — even though it does not appear to have the high mortality rate of other viruses — can be used to revise and refine local pandemic plans.

"This current outbreak is a great test," said Dr. Kristina Simeonsson, a pediatrician in Greenville who formerly worked for the General Communicable Disease Branch of the North Carolina Department of Public Health and Human Services. "It is an excellent opportunity to test these plans that are out there."

As a state, Simeonsson said North Carolina is very well prepared for infectious disease outbreaks. She also commended Morrow and the local health department for its plan.

"We'll probably find more cases because now we're looking for them," she said.

To follow updates on the virus, go to www.ncpublichealth.com.

Contact Tom Marine at tmarine@coxnc.com or (252) 329-9567.
University ties

Comment on this story

Each time officials say they've told the full story about N.C. State University's decisions to hire Mary Easley and then expand her role and nearly double her pay, another chapter unfolds. The latest, detailed in The N&O on Sunday, is a tale of intense entanglements -- personal, political and business -- among key players.

Taken together, they suggest that the hiring of the wife of the then-governor was even less transparent and more problematic than previously understood. It's hard not to worry that those relationships may have compromised N.C. State's independence and integrity.

It would be easier to avoid concern if N.C. State Chancellor James Oblinger were willing to be interviewed about the circumstances in 2005, when Mrs. Easley was hired, and in 2008, when she was awarded a five-year, $850,000 contract for an expanded role at the university. Oblinger, after all, was in charge of the campus in both years.

And yet, as N.C. State Provost Larry Nielsen tells it, both decisions were entirely his own. Although the provost is indeed the university's chief academic officer, that claim strains credulity when it's the wife of the governor you're creating a job for -- as a law professor at N.C. Central, she had appropriate credentials -- and with no public posting. Or when you're expanding the governor's wife's duties and boosting her yearly pay from $90,000 to $170,000.

Nielsen, however, may have felt he was doing Oblinger a favor by having the buck stop on the provost's desk. The Easleys' close relations with McQueen Campbell, an N.C. State alumnus whom Easley named to the campus Board of Trustees in 2001 and reappointed in 2005, must have posed both promise and pitfalls for top administrators.

Campbell, a hard-charging businessman (the governor noted his "aggressive personality") is an Easley pal and benefactor. He provided Easley with free flights on planes he owned, made generous campaign contributions, played a role in a coastal property transaction with the couple and boasted of his influence with state government. Campbell certainly enjoyed entrée to Easley that could benefit N.C. State. But could he engineer the reverse -- a benefit from the university to the Easleys?

As a trustee, Campbell was accustomed to working with Nielsen. And Nielsen, who had been named interim provost with the understanding that he would not even be a candidate for the permanent job, wound up as the long-shot winner. Oblinger expanded the search to include the interim provost just a few days after Nielsen hired Mary Easley. Oblinger then chose Nielsen for the post.

All this must have gratified Campbell, who voted last year to support Mary Easley's expanded job and raise. Nielsen, however, denies that any trustee tried to influence him. Campbell insists he had nothing to do with Mary Easley's hiring. Although the timeline is suggestive, there's no proof of improper influence.

It is perfectly clear, though, that with all the personal, political and business connections
between the Easleys and Campbell, the hiring and raise were no ordinary matters. Yet they were handled with far less than the transparency, and openness to competition, that good sense would dictate. UNC System President Erskine Bowles, who last year found there was "not a shred of evidence to suggest N.C. State was under any political pressure," should re-evaluate his stance in light of documented connections between Campbell and the Easleys.

Mike Easley is no longer governor, but Mary Easley continues to draw her N.C. State paycheck. This is not a dead issue.

**All rights reserved. This copyrighted material may not be published, broadcast or redistributed in any manner.**

Read The News & Observer print edition on your computer with the new e-edition!

© Copyright 2009, The News & Observer Publishing Company

A subsidiary of The McClatchy Company
Duke elevates Sanford program

BY JOHN MURAWSKI, Staff Writer

Comment on this story

DURHAM - Duke University's trustees voted Saturday to elevate the 38-year old Sanford Institute of Public Policy into the university's 10th school, placing it alongside such Duke schools as business, law and medicine.

As the Sanford School of Public Policy, the program will be more autonomous and will be able to raise its own money to expand, said director Bruce Kuniholm, who will be dean of the school.

In the university system, a school is the largest unit, headed by a dean, and is made up of departments. For example, Duke's school of arts and sciences includes several dozen departments, such as English, history and biology.

As one of the nation's first public policy study programs, the Sanford Institute is already one of the biggest and most prestigious, according to rankings by U.S. News & World Report and the Chronicle of Higher Education. It competes for honors with Harvard University's John F. Kennedy School of Government and Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs.

The evolution of the institute into a school was four years in the making, Kuniholm said. Duke University officials had agreed on the change on the condition that the institute demonstrate its viability by raising $40 million. But $36 million raised during a severe recession was enough for the trustees.

"We've got a big fundraising machine in process," Kuniholm said.

The Sanford Institute will officially become the Sanford School on July 1. Its faculty has grown 50 percent in the last four years to 51 professors, and its endowment is more than $100 million. It was created in 1971 by Terry Sanford, former North Carolina governor and then-Duke president.

As a school, it will build on its strengths in such areas as environment, energy policy, global governance, health policy and social policy, its officials said.

Each year the program awards about 185 undergraduate degrees and 85 graduate degrees. It also offers joint degrees in law, business, divinity, medicine and environmental policy.

Faculty members include James Joseph, a former U.S. Ambassador to South Africa, and Philip Bennett, a former managing editor for The Washington Post.

john.murawski@newsobserver.com or 919-829-8932

Read The News & Observer print edition on your computer with the new e-edition!
Part 1:
Published: May 09, 2009 03:25 AM
Modified: May 09, 2009 03:29 PM

Overton provided flights to help causes.

Easley put McCrae on two state panels.
SHAWN ROCCO, Staff Photo by Shawn Rocco

Carter was Easley's fraternity brother.
Easley's secret flights skirted the law

A group of affluent supporters flew the former governor where he wanted to go; the expensive trips, to fundraisers and vacations, were rarely reported.

BY J. ANDREW CURLISS, STAFF WRITER
Comment on this story

First of two parts

While he was governor, Mike Easley turned a small group of influential North Carolina businessmen into his own private air service, an arrangement Easley kept secret.

Starting in 2003, Easley took at least 25 flights on private jets, some in apparent violation of campaign laws and ethics rules, documents and interviews show. Some flights were free. The value of others exceeded campaign contribution limits.

Records show that the businessmen who flew Easley took him around the state and to such places as Atlanta, Richmond, Washington and Florida. Easley, a Democrat who left office in January, appointed some of the benefactors to boards that oversee state transportation networks, the state's largest universities and other state functions.

A review of state flight logs, records of private and political travel, Easley's campaign reports and previously unavailable "governor's event" forms from the state Highway Patrol raise questions about the privileges Easley accepted while he was a candidate and governor.

A cornerstone of modern election law is that candidates disclose what they take in and spend, allowing the public to see who is bankrolling candidates, and ensuring that limits are not exceeded. Corporations in North Carolina are banned from giving, and individuals are limited to $4,000 per candidate during an election cycle.

"It is very troubling to hear of the possibility of significant violations," said Bob Phillips, who heads the nonpartisan advocacy group Common Cause North Carolina, which has been active in seeking campaign reform and lobbying for openness. "Think about how many millions of dollars he raised ... and there's this get-something-for-free attitude."

Violations of the campaign-finance laws can result in civil or misdemeanor criminal penalties.

Records and interviews suggest more flights took place than those shown in documents provided to the newspaper after negotiations with the Highway Patrol, custodian of the records because it provides security for the governor.

Significant amounts of time are missing in the patrol documents -- including the entire year of 2005. E-mail messages, interviews and other documents refer to flights for which no other records have been produced.
Easley, who has taken a job at the McGuire Woods law firm and is a national spokesman on education initiatives for the foundation of Bill and Melinda Gates, would not agree to be interviewed.

His campaign lawyer, John Wallace, declined interview requests. Wallace also represents the state Democratic Party on campaign issues.

Just last month, Easley revised years of campaign filings to show that his election committee had been provided a sport utility vehicle at no cost. The action followed reports in The News & Observer that Easley's son, Michael Jr., was driving a GMC Yukon owned by Robert F. Bleecker, a Fayetteville-area auto dealer. Federal investigators have contacted Bleecker, and State Board of Elections officials are looking into the use of the car.


Easley and his administration resisted, saying the records' release would compromise the governor's security even after the travel was long completed. A provision in state law allows officials to shield from the public any documents that contain "specific details of public security plans."

Gov. Beverly Perdue ordered the Highway Patrol to release travel and other records.

Much of the travel shown in the new records relates to flights for Easley’s 2004 re-election campaign. But the records show that Easley was using private planes as recently as March 2008, when he flew with NASCAR owner Rick Hendrick to Key West, Fla., on a Hendrick team jet.

Flying adds up

Charter air service is expensive and adds up quickly, generally costing $900 to $1,300 an hour for the type of jet required for Easley, which included pressurized cabins and two pilots. The jets, owned by the businessmen through limited liability companies, were usually six- to eight-passenger planes.

Some donations to Easley were funneled through the state Democratic Party, which is not subject to contribution limits. But under state election laws, a donor cannot give to a specific candidate through a political party.

The new records show that Easley was the beneficiary of such contributions. The records also detail travel that neither Easley nor the people who flew him could disclose publicly because the value of the trips would have exceeded campaign contribution limits.

Some examples from the flight and campaign records:

Cameron McRae, a Bojangles' franchiser from Kinston, contributed money to the Easley campaign that was publicly disclosed but then provided some flights that weren’t. Combined, McRae’s donations exceeded limits. Easley appointed him to the state Board of Transportation and the Global TransPark Authority; McRae was also subject to disclosure rules.

McQueen Campbell, a Raleigh real-estate broker, acknowledged in interviews that he provided free travel for the governor. One trip was a fishing outing to Fort Lauderdale, Fla., given when Easley was required under ethics rules to disclose gifts of at least $200. Easley didn't disclose the trip. Some of Campbell’s flying of the governor was accounted for in campaign reports, but not all.

Easley twice appointed Campbell as a trustee at N.C. State University, where he became chairman.

Rusty Carter, a Wilmington packaging company president and college fraternity brother to Easley, flew the governor to an Outer Banks event a couple of weeks before the 2004
election, records show. The listed purpose: "Fundraiser for Governor Mike Easley." But public campaign records show Carter also donated $4,000 to the Easley campaign on Oct. 6, 2004. That means the value of his flight, which took place Oct. 22, 2004, and has not been disclosed, would have exceeded allowable limits.

Easley twice appointed Carter as a trustee at UNC-Chapel Hill.

Cress Horne, owner of a helicopter company known for filming movie scenes, flew Easley from Southport to Monroe to Raleigh for a campaign fundraiser in 2003. The fundraiser was organized by state Board of Transportation member Larry Helms; there are no records of payment associated with the flight. Horne also gave Easley's campaign $4,000, the legal limit. Easley appointed Horne to the state Aeronautics Council.

V. Parker Overton, a developer and retired founder of a water sport company based in Greenville, flew Easley to a Democratic governor's policy conference on Nov. 13 and 14 in 2003 at Ponte Vedra Beach, Fla. Easley didn't pay for it, Overton said. He does not serve on any state boards. He said he agreed to provide the flight as a way to curry good will that might help places he cares about: East Carolina University, N.C. State University or Eastern North Carolina.

"If the governor calls you up and needs the plane, you do it," Overton said. "I'd do it for [Gov. Beverly] Perdue if she called or that fellow she beat ... Pat McCrory."

Overton had already provided $3,000 in money and in-kind contributions to Easley, which would have placed him near the limit for contributions. A month after the trip, records show he funneled another $6,000 through the state Democratic Party for "in-kind" travel.

Overton said he didn't know how the trip was accounted for by the Easley campaign: "I just flew him down there and back."

Dell Murphy, a farmer and son of pork baron and N.C. State booster Wendell Murphy, flew Easley to Washington, D.C., and then Atlanta within a week in late 2003, according to the state records, although The N&O could not confirm the Atlanta flight. Both trips were labeled fundraisers. The travel was not listed in Easley's year-end campaign finance report.

In February 2004, Murphy is listed as giving $4,100 in travel services to the state Democratic Party. On the same day, another aviation donor, Thomas Segrave, provided $4,317 in travel services to the party. That totals $8,417, with both donations exceeding limits if they went directly to Easley.

About six weeks later, in April, the state party reported providing travel for Easley. The amount from the party to Easley that day: $8,417.

"We will definitely be looking into all of this," said Kim Strach, who oversees campaign finance enforcement for the State Board of Elections.

Easley's campaign also used state planes for political travel and paid rates of more than $1,700 an hour.

All along, Easley could have paid the fair market value for the private air services from his campaign treasury. His campaign still has about $400,000 on hand.

Soaring above limits

Campbell and McRae were tapped to fly Easley most frequently, the records show.

A jet owned by McRae, whose interests include land development and ownership of the Kinston Indians minor-league baseball team, was scheduled to fly Easley at least five times, though it appears planes belonging to others were used for some of those flights.
McRae’s jet flew Easley at least twice from mid-2003 until right before Easley was re-elected in 2004, according to the records.

Both Easley and McRae, as public servants, were subject to state laws that require disclosure of such travel. But neither disclosed the value of the flights McRae provided. If they had, McRae would have exceeded the maximum contribution of $4,000 in each election cycle.


Records show McRae gave Easley the maximum $4,000 on June 30, 2003. But he had also provided at least two flights in the previous two months, according to the flight records, although McRae’s lawyer says there was one flight. The Easley campaign paid a McRae company $400 for travel later that year.

In 2004, McRae gave more to Easley. Records show he gave Easley nearly the maximum donation by providing catering services for a fundraiser on Aug. 25, 2004 at his home in Kinston. Easley’s campaign reported catering from McRae worth $3,547.

But McRae also provided an undisclosed charter flight for Easley that day, flying the governor from Raleigh to Kinston and back.

Records show that McRae gave $1,250 to the state party a few months later, in October. McRae’s lawyer said that although the payment to the party was accounted for as a general donation, it was meant for the Aug. 25 flight provided to Easley. Contributing to the party specifically for Easley would violate election law.

When he filed disclosures in 2005, McRae did not list any flights. Those statements were required after scandals in recent years led to reforms aimed at transparency for the actions of government officials.

By jet and helicopter

Campbell acknowledged in an interview that he flew Easley often without getting paid.

To refresh his memory, Campbell said, he reviewed the governor’s campaign reports, which show Campbell getting reimbursed for travel twice. He said that was less than the actual travel, with most unpaid trips happening in the 2000 campaign when Easley was still the state’s attorney general.

"After going through that ... I wanted to find out what my responsibility as a donor was," Campbell said. "And as I understand the law and had it explained to me, the responsibility lies clearly with the campaign and not with me."

One free flight Campbell provided Easley as governor was for a fishing trip to Fort Lauderdale, Fla., in fall 2005, Campbell said. He would not disclose more, saying only that the governor called him and asked whether he wanted to come, so he agreed to take his plane. Campbell said Easley stayed at a private residence, but he would not disclose the owner.

Campbell said he flew Easley to Manteo on the Outer Banks once for a private event. Records show he flew Easley by helicopter in 2006 to a political event at a cottage at Lake Waccamaw. Campbell said he brought actor Andy Griffith to the inaugural in 2001 as a favor to Easley.

He was not paid for those, he said.

Easley signed sworn forms saying there were no gifts in those years.

State flight records list a half-dozen other flights in 2003 and 2004 where Campbell took Easley to fundraisers, including one in Richmond and a tour to several cities days before the
election. There are no payments from Easley's campaign to Campbell in those two years.

Campbell did receive two checks from Easley's campaign, totaling more than $11,000. But both were sent in 2005, well after the campaign. The law requires disclosure of campaign flights in the year flights take place.

Asked how many times he flew Easley, Campbell said it was more than a dozen.

"I know it wasn't a hundred -- but outside of that, I'd hate to guess," he said.

We've flown many times

Campbell also helped first lady Mary Easley once she started a job at N.C. State, where she coordinated a speakers series.

Records show Mary Easley asked Campbell to fly U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, a South Carolina Republican, to Raleigh in October 2006. A year later, she asked him to get PBS broadcaster Charlie Rose to campus. Campbell submitted invoices showing the flights were worth $11,165. But he waived most of the charges, accepting payments from N.C. State for $3,261.

As Graham's schedule was coming together, an aide told Campbell that the senator would have to pay him the equivalent of a first-class fare from Washington, as federal rules require. Campbell wasn't sure what to do, according to an e-mail he wrote later to Mary Easley.

"She mentioned that they would have to pay me," Campbell wrote to Mary Easley. "Didn't know what this meant or how to handle. ... I just didn't discuss it further after she mentioned this." Graham cut him a check, but it didn't cover the full cost of his fuel.

In October 2007, Mary Easley sent an e-mail message to one of Rose's aides, arranging for Campbell to fly the broadcaster from New York. She mentioned the Easleys' experiences with Campbell.

"Michael and I," she wrote, "have flown with him many times."

Sunday: The Easleys and McQueen Campbell benefit from one another.

acurliss@newsobserver.com or 919-829-4840

Read The News & Observer print edition on your computer with the new e-edition!

**Reporter J. Andrew Curliss on radio**

N&O reporter J. Andrew Curliss will appear Monday morning at 7:10 on WPTF-680 AM to discuss his two-part series, "Executive Privilege."

Easley: Campaign used car

Feds probe project where Easley bought lot

Car dealer who helped Easley talks to feds

Easley pays for 2 cars

Rand's car lent from dealership

Easley, Rick Hendrick gain from friendship

Friends give Easley a sweetheart deal (Archive)
Related Content

- Records suggest more unreported flights
- State paid $72,000 for state troopers' rent in Southport
- Flight itinerary memo for Oct. 22, 2004 (PDF)
- Flyer and flight itinerary memo for Nov. 13-14, 2003 (PDF)
- Flight itinerary memos for December 2003 (PDF)
- Fundraiser memo and flight itinerary for Dec. 8, 2003 (PDF)
- Flight itinerary memos for May 1, 2003, and Aug. 25, 2004 (PDF)
- E-mail message about Easley's flight (PDF)

© Copyright 2009, The News & Observer Publishing Company
A subsidiary of The McClatchy Company
At UNC campuses, no money for roof repair, new sprinklers

Submitted by eferreri on 05/07/2009 - 14:46
Tags: Campus Notes | Erskine Bowles | UNC system | University of North Carolina

As has been the custom in recent months, a monthly budget briefing for members of the UNC system's Board of Governors was, shall we say, a less-than gleeful affair.

The board got its latest rundown of money cut from its current state appropriation — $203 million, if you count Gov. Beverly Perdue's new half-percent pay cut for state workers — as well as what the next year might look light.

Here are a few highlights. Or, if you prefer, lowlights.

The $167 million that UNC campuses have cut from the current year's operating budgets includes $32 million at UNC Chapel Hill, $31 million at N.C. State and $5.4 million at N.C. Central University.

Initiatives not receiving funding this year include: academic and student support; library resources; start-up money for new research labs, and equipment upgrades.

Also, there is no money for repairs and renovations this year. That's a major issue for university system leaders who don't want to fall back into the same sorry situation they found themselves in towards the end of the 1990s — decades of deferred maintenance — that made the $2.1 billion bond program necessary.

"We're deferring a lot of problems here by not having the resources to expend on them," said Rob Nelson, the UNC system's vice president for finance.

Roof repairs and renovations are apparently in high demand now, with such projects nixed on 12 of 16 campuses including UNC-CH and NCCU. Fire safety improvements like sprinkler system installation and structural facility repairs are also being delayed.

"This is a big deal," said Erskine Bowles, the UNC system president. "We have all these great buildings and we're not maintaining them. We'll pay for it down the road."
Teacher Retirements Might Swamp Schools
A wave of retirements could create a severe teacher shortage in just a few years, a new study says

By Zach Miners
Posted May 8, 2009

The next generation of American students might be in for a rude awakening over the next decade. More than half of today's veteran teachers—1.7 million—could be gone because of retirement, taking with them a mountain of teaching expertise developed over many years of hands-on instruction. What's equally troubling is that schools might not be able to rely on new teachers to fill the gap: The percentage of new teachers who leave the profession within five years continues to climb. At least that's the gloomy forecast given by the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, a Washington-based education advocacy organization.

According to a report recently issued by the nonprofit group, which advocates for innovation and improvement in teaching, the nation is facing the largest teacher retirement wave in history, with more than 50 percent of teachers and principals being baby boomers.

The bulk of the NCTAF statistical analysis is based on data from the U.S. Education Department's National Center for Education Statistics, which shows that in the 2003-2004 academic year (the most recent year for which the data are available), about 48 percent of the K-12 public school force, or roughly 1.55 million teachers, was age 45 or over. Given that the average age of retirement is 59, and assuming many of those teachers will remain in teaching, by the 2017-2018 year—less than 10 years from now—all of those teachers will be eligible for retirement. Combine that figure with the number of teachers who leave the profession for reasons other than retirement and the one third of new teachers estimated to leave the profession within three years of starting, and the number of departing teachers is even higher.

Every state could be affected, NCTAF researchers say, but 18 states and the District of
Columbia already are near the tipping point. The situation is most severe in West Virginia, where almost 70 percent of the teaching force is estimated to be 50 or older.

But the problem isn't simply that more teachers are retiring. It's also the schools' failures to harness and institutionalize the teaching expertise of experienced educators so that new teachers don't have to start from scratch. "We're going to lose experienced veteran teachers who could act as mentors to the younger teachers," says Elizabeth Foster, NCTAF's director of strategic initiatives. "These are people who have tried-and-true methods of classroom management. . . . Right now, we have no way of capturing that knowledge and passing it down to the new teachers."

The report asserts that "wholesale replacement of accomplished veterans with inexperienced beginners is a bad bet" because of the massive amount of money and effort wasted in the constant process of hiring and replacing beginning teachers.

The consequences of teacher turnover are particularly dire for high-poverty schools that are struggling to close the achievement gap minority and disadvantaged students face, the report says. When teachers resign or retire there, they leave behind a host of problems for the teachers who take their place, it says.

Many education experts and professional organizations agree that the NCTAF report shines a critical light on the issue, but some say the group is overstating the problem.

"The NCTAF claim that in less than 10 years more than half of our current teaching force could be gone is overestimated," says Katherine Merseth, director of the teacher education program at Harvard's Graduate School of Education. "We've heard these clarion calls in the past," she adds, referring to the teacher shortage that occurred in the 1960s, which was followed by a surplus the following decade, and then the campaign in the 1980s to recruit and hire 2 million teachers. "It waxes and it wanes," she says.

James Cibulka, president of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, says that looking at the situation purely from a "We must fill these positions" viewpoint misses the bigger picture.

"The problem might go away if our goal is only to put a live body in the classroom," he says.
"Many of the school districts in the 1960s created full-time substitutes that didn't have the qualifications to teach. I don't think that that is how we can afford to staff the nation's schools in a global economy. It's absolutely critical that K-12 students receive the best possible learning opportunities."

NCTAF nevertheless states that this is a once-in-a-century opportunity to reinvent education.

"We're going through a massive shift in the demographics of the workforce, and at the same time we've moved into a 21st century economy," says Tom Carroll, NCTAF president and author of the report, Learning Teams: Creating What's Next. "Students need new skills, and we have this massive, one-time infusion of funding from the stimulus bill. This is the classic crisis that is an opportunity to redesign the workforce."

Some are arguing, however, that the same 21st century economy, given its current downturn, will most certainly lessen the number of teachers retiring over the next few years, mitigating the doom-and-gloom scenario offered by NCTAF officials. The organization conducted the survey portion of its research in November 2008.

"People simply aren't retiring now," says Harvard's Merseth. Indeed, of teachers responding to the NCTAF's national survey of 400 teachers and 95 principals who had been considering retirement in the next five years, 36 percent said they've put their plans on hold.

But a soft economy is no excuse not to act, NCTAF and other experts maintain.

"We're at a critical stage in helping to support our whole education system," says Megan Hookey, interim vice president of the National Retired Teachers Association, a subdivision of the AARP. "The need to support new teachers is essential so that today's students do not miss out on strong learning opportunities."

So what specific changes are education wonks proposing to "redesign the workforce"? The chief proposal of the NCTAF analysis is an idea that many others in the field, regardless of where they stand on the impact of teacher retirement trends, agree is a very good one: cross-generational learning teams. In essence, learning teams—which are being used in
some form in a handful of districts around the country—refer to collaboration that unites veteran teachers and beginners with other educators and with outside industry partners and community members. The idea is to foster a sense of teamwork and leverage the best of each generation’s skills so that they can be adopted and developed by others. In the case of a massive teacher retirement coupled with high turnover rates, the approach could help new teachers learn vital skills while also giving them a built-in support network for the future. The American Federation of Teachers, the nation’s second-largest teachers union, supports the concept of learning teams.

The learning teams concept also makes sense given the temperament of the people who would be participating. "Educators, and specifically retired educators, are known for giving back," says AARP's Hookey. "Whether they work directly with young students or whether they work with fellow colleagues, there is a role for retired educators. And I believe there is an absolute willingness from retired educators across the country to continue to give back in ways that help support our young people."

Tags: retirement | teachers | education

Copyright © 2009 U.S. News & World Report LP All rights reserved.
The spirit of greatness

2 April 2009

Felipe Fernández-Armesto recognises the strength of the US is in its people

I have seen the future. It works. And the US continues to dominate it.

I saw it, improbably, in Greenville, North Carolina, where the University of East Carolina is celebrating its 100th birthday this year. The university is of a kind unthinkable outside America. It is an unpretentious place, dedicated to the service of a local and regional body of students, 27,000 strong. Most of them have modest means and choose to pay subsidised fees close to home rather than invest in the expensive prestige of some high-rolling private college.

But like all such institutions in the US, the university commands so much loyalty and gratitude from former students and so much pride and passion from local people that it attracts plenty of financial support. Almost any university in Europe would envy its well-tended greensward, its handily equipped classrooms, its formidable professional schools in medicine and applied arts, and its internationally celebrated programme in maritime studies. It has funds for bringing in special lecturers from all over the world. I met a former colleague from Oxford who was there as a visiting professor.

In short, the university exemplifies the great, enduring virtue of the US: the high priority that states and communities give to research and education. Europe will never outclass the US in knowledge and innovation while we remain benightedly stingy with our universities and restrict them to a fraction of the funds and a shadow of the independence that American institutions enjoy.

Beyond the campus of the university, I saw evidence of the durability of American greatness in the town of Greenville, and especially in the free local newspaper, lovingly produced by residents for fellow citizens, The Greenville Times. Civic-minded clubs and businesses support it with their advertising: the "authentic Italian" restaurant, the pooh parlour, the gardeners' co-operative, the college football team, the antiques shop, the golf-mad country club, the lunch counter that serves the renowned regional speciality, spare-ribs barbecued in vinegar.

Greenville epitomises small-town America. Students account for almost half the population of 60,000. In the old days, tobacco made the place prosperous. Today the elegant town houses of the early 20th-century nicotine barons still line the campus, but student fraternities now occupy them. There is no obvious outlet for Greenville’s energies, apart from the university, now that tobacco has gone up in smoke.

The town’s main advantages are its tranquillity and the presence of the university, which guarantees a modest level of employment and a stimulating level of cultural amusement. Lectures as well as musical and theatrical entertainment bring enthusiastic audiences to the campus.

In the absence of prosperous industries and natural resources, Greenville people rely on mutual help to see them through hard times. Our European image of the US as a Lone Ranger nation full of self-reliant individuals is mythical - based on John Wayne movies and Raymond Chandler novels. The idea that the dynamism of unrestrained capitalism makes America work is Republican Party propaganda.

My own observations, for what they are worth, reveal neighbourliness and solidarity as the essential US virtues. People know each other. They congregate and socialise in churches, clubs, colleges and baseball grounds. The heroes they most admire are not sociopaths such as Sylvester Stallone’s character in Rambo or Paul Kersey, the vigilante-hero of the Death Wish movies, but "rich men living peacefully": philanthropists rich in civic munificence, who endow hospitals and universities and art galleries and orchestras. Gunslingers on Main Street and mavericks in the corrals are conspicuous in American history precisely because they were rare. Solid citizens preponderate in the collaborative worlds of wagon trains and stockades.
In The Greenville Times, I read about what matters in America. The annual Fishing Festival is due in mid-April, complete with orchestras and folk bands and a troupe of Mexican dancers (for Mexican migrants are now numerous in the region). Clowns will entertain the children. Local artists - most of them trained at the university - will exhibit their wares. The Environmental Department of the state Government will exhibit a scientific aquarium full of the fish the anglers crave. Several columns of the paper deal with a heroic dog who died rescuing his master, a victim of a bombing in Iraq. The town orchestra, we read, which is 40 years old this year, is to benefit from a dinner organised by local enthusiasts and eaten to the accompaniment of music of the 1950s of every kind, from reverential to rock. The university music school will perform Madame Butterfly. A report on the activities of the Keep Greenville Beautiful society praises a recently deceased pillar of the organisation, one Lorena Pruitt, whose faithful work for town and church will be celebrated in a commemorative garden, which her fellow members will plant in her honour.

This is the spirit that will keep America great. However disastrous the wars, however corrupt the politics, however iniquitous the excesses of Wall Street, however hopeless the economic crisis, while Lorena Pruitt has devotees and successors, and while universities such as East Carolina keep up their good work, the US will remain a superpower of sorts and a moral example to the world.

Postscript:

Felipe Fernández-Armesto is William P. Reynolds professor of history, University of Notre Dame in the US. He is also Prince of Asturias professor of history, Tufts University in the US.