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City works to address crime problem

Wednesday, July 15, 2009

In the early morning of June 30, two young men were shot and killed in our downtown area by a random act of violence. My heart goes out to their families and friends and to the families and friends of all the victims of violence in our community.

Following these deaths, there has been a public outcry and concern about safety in our city and what the city will do in response. The City Council members and I share this concern.

Murders most often occur over some dispute between those who know each other, so we as a society don't feel threatened when that happens although we are very troubled by it. However, when a killing occurs as a random act like what happened on June 30, this leads to public outrage and fear because we all know this could happen to us. A few days later, a second shooting incident in the downtown brought further attention to this unique area of our city.

My observations of nightlife in downtown Greenville are that there are really two downtowns.

1. The traditional downtown from 5-10 p.m. with restaurants (eating and dining with entertainment), festivals, art walks, umbrella markets, farmers markets, shopping and special events like Freeboot, where little or no increased presence of police is required.

2. The late night/entertainment downtown from 10 p.m. to 3 a.m. with a high concentration of bars (private clubs) in the downtown area (16 in a four-block area) with high alcohol consumption. The city has clearly recognized the need for increased safety measures during the peak hours of operation of the bars (10 p.m. to 2 a.m.) and has for several years provided increased police presence in downtown from 10 p.m. to 3 a.m. Wednesday through Saturday, when bars have the highest number of customers. The city currently spends about $400,000 annually for the increased police in the area during these hours (Wednesday-Saturday).

The city's immediate response since the tragic murders has been two fold.

1. We had a meeting on July 1 with bar/business owners in the uptown district. The city's chief of police, ECU chief of police and the chief Alcohol Law Enforcement agent for Pitt county were present and spoke to the group. They outlined strategies that have been implemented and noted other things that could be done. A good question-and-answer discussion followed the presentations of law enforcement personnel. Following that meeting, representatives from the bar owners, other downtown businesses and city staff met together again on July 8 to prepare more action and proactive approaches.

2. As noted above, we have traditionally increased police presence downtown on Wednesday-Saturday nights. We have now increased police presence and implemented new and additional safety strategies in the downtown area late in the evenings on all seven nights of the week. Specifically, two additional officers have been assigned to the downtown area on Sundays-Tuesdays. Six additional officers have been assigned Wednesdays-Saturdays. The city has also received excellent cooperation and assistance from the ECU police. In addition, the police department has implemented a new late-night traffic pattern in the downtown area on the busiest nights. This was implemented for the first time this past week. Reports indicate that it went well. On July 29, a follow-up meeting of bar/business owners is scheduled to report on progress toward implementing these new strategies.

I believe that City Council members are all committed to addressing the safety issues in the downtown area as
well as we work to create a safer community for all of Greenville.

Crime is not a problem unique to Greenville or the downtown area. It is a national issue and one that touches our entire community. Addressing crime throughout the city is the top priority of the City Council. While addressing crime throughout the city, special emphasis must be directed to the center city in response to these recent events. In August, the City Council will further address the downtown crime issue.

I urge all citizens to support our law enforcement professionals as they work to make the downtown and the entire city a safer place.

Pat Dunn is the mayor of Greenville.
Higher level of thinking

Camp helps students, teachers learn during summer

By Kim Grizzard
The Daily Reflector

Tuesday, July 14, 2009

While many of her co-workers are taking the summer off to spend time at home relaxing with family, Anne Roth is sitting in a classroom with middle schoolers who are learning about polymer compounds and bouncing off the wall.

In a good way.

Roth is a teacher at this week’s Academically and Intellectually Gifted Camp, sponsored by East Carolina University and Pitt County Schools. She is also a student.

The camp, now in its fifth year, aims to take top elementary and middle school students to a higher level of thinking. It also gives those preparing to teach gifted students a lab in which to test their lesson ideas.

"It’s kind of a twofold purpose," said Katie O’Connor, AIG coordinator and an assistant professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at ECU. "We’re serving the needs of the children, and we’re also training teachers."

Students who are completing ECU’s AIG licensure program prepare small-group lessons for the four-day camp on subjects ranging from advertising to world health. Students who are in the beginning stages of ECU’s program observe and assist as students from Pitt County’s talented and gifted programs take part in interactive assignments from constructing a geodesic dome to combining chemicals to create a bouncing ball.

“We noticed there was a need for gifted students to have a program, since there is very little state and federal funding,” said Carmen Webb, the camp director and a teacher at Eastern Elementary School.

“It gives students a chance to explore things at an in-depth level,” she said. “It’s not a sit-in-your-seat kind of thing. It’s very rigorous, hands-on lessons.”

The camp, started five years ago with 20 students, has grown to include 84 students from across the county. The program, which expanded to include 14 middle schoolers last year, has since doubled its number of middle school participants.

“In the midst of many budget cuts, we are one program that has been able to have some growth,” O’Connor said. “We are one of the only programs that does a face-to-face component to train our gifted education teachers. We always have a waiting list for our ECU program because teachers, I think, value that piece.”

Teacher Melissa Loftin is in her second summer at camp. Last year, she was among ECU students observing at the various learning stations. This year, she is leading one of the camp’s units on North Carolina’s Barrier Islands.

Loftin is not involved with the Talented and Gifted program at Wintergreen Intermediate, where she teaches fourth grade. But she sees gifted students in her classroom every day.
“I wanted to learn how to better differentiate for my students,” she said.

“Wintergreen has a really high proportion of gifted students. I really wanted to help them out a little bit more in the classroom.”

Roth, who teaches at Hope Middle, has more than 100 students in her school’s TAG program.

Four of them, including rising eighth-grader Darth Voytecki, are attending AIG camp this week.

Darth, who has attended AIG camp in the past, is lucky to have gotten a chance to come back. The popular program has a waiting list of gifted students in Pitt County, so participants are chosen by a lottery system.

“I think it’s cool to learn about new stuff,” Darth said. “In advertising, they actually went to five different companies, and we’re going to make advertisements for them. … It’s not really like school.”

E.B. Aycock Middle School student Maxine Ford agreed.

“You get a different perspective of things,” she said. “In school they wouldn’t let us do that many activities. They would let us do a lot of book work and paperwork. Here you get to do a lot of hands-on things.”

Roth said that while she and other ECU licensure students create real lesson plans, they work to make sure that a day at camp doesn’t feel like a day in the classroom.

“We do a lot of preparation,” she said. “We have been working on this unit for three months to make it as rigorous, as exciting and as educational as possible.

“Here, they don’t have time to be bored,” she said. “It’s fun. Even though they’re learning, they’re having fun.”

Students in Roth’s theater section, “Lights, Literature, Action!” have heard a radio drama presentation, taken a virtual tour of London’s Globe Theatre and are preparing their own movie trailer.

Webb said technology is a major component of AIG Camp, which has the theme “Interactions.” Students in classrooms at Ridgewood Elementary School, where this year’s AIG Camp is being held, are using laptops, smart board, GPS technology and pod casting.

“We really try to make them think and stretch their minds,” Webb said. “You don’t want to repeat what they get in school. You want to work above it.”

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Schnabel joins ECU baseball program

The Daily Reflector

Tuesday, July 14, 2009

Former East Carolina standout Nick Schnabel has been named assistant baseball coach and recruiting coordinator, while also serving as infield instructor, according to an announcement from ECU coach Billy Godwin Tuesday.

Schnabel served as the hitting instructor, recruiting coordinator and third base coach at Liberty University for the past two seasons. The Flames compiled a 68-47-1 overall record, including a pair of appearances in the Big South Conference championship game, during that span.

"Our baseball program is excited about coach Schnabel rejoining the Pirate family," Godwin said. "With his recruiting experience, knowledge of the game, ability to develop players along with his passion and understanding of ECU's history, we believe this addition is going to help us reach our goal of playing in the College World Series in Omaha."

Under Schnabel's tutelage, Liberty hitters ranked among the top three in the Big South in 10 offensive categories.

"I am very excited about the opportunity of returning to ECU," Schnabel said. "Coming back to Greenville and being part of the Pirate baseball family is something I have been thinking about for a while. Coach Godwin and the East Carolina program are well respected around the country and I'm thankful for the opportunity to work alongside such a great staff and help lead ECU to its first trip to Omaha."

Liberty reached the 30-win plateau for the fifth consecutive season in 2009, finishing with a 33-21 record. During his initial season, Schnabel helped the Flames to a 35-26-1 record.

Schnabel came to Liberty after two seasons as an assistant coach at the U.S. Military Academy. He served as the team's hitting instructor, while working with the Cadet infielders and overseeing the club's defensive alignment. Schnabel gained a reputation as a tireless recruiter, leading Army's national recruiting effort with an emphasis on the East Coast.

A 2000 graduate of East Carolina, Schnabel began his coaching career as a volunteer assistant in charge of the infield and assisted with hitting instruction at ECU in 2004. That season, East Carolina won a school-record 51 games and competed in the NCAA Super Regional in Columbia, S.C.

The following summer, Schnabel was named an assistant coach at Chipola College in Marianna, Fla., where he filled the roles of infield instructor, assistant hitting instructor and academic monitor. The Indians captured the Panhandle Conference championship and finished second in the state of Florida.

As a player at ECU, Schnabel was namedCAA Defensive Player of the Year in 1999 and helped the Pirates to consecutive league championships and No. 1 NCAA Regional seeds in 1999 and 2000. Schnabel began his collegiate career at Ohlone College in Fremont, Calif., where he was a first-team all-conference performer and preseason Junior College All-American.

Following graduation, Schnabel spent four years in the Montreal Expos organization.

— ECU Media Relations
**NCSU to probe Mary Easley's job**

**BY JAY PRICE, Staff Writer**

In their first meeting since publicly announcing that Chancellor James Oblinger had quit and former state first lady Mary Easley would be fired, N.C. State University's board of trustees named a committee to investigate the scandal over Easley's hiring.

The Easley controversy also cost former Provost Larry Nielsen and former trustees Chairman McQueen Campbell their posts.

The new trustees chairman, S. Lawrence Davenport, proposed the committee minutes after being elected. He charged the new panel with figuring out what had gone wrong and what things, such as university policies, should be changed to prevent similar problems.

"We've got too much going on here and too much at stake to be as laid back as we have in the past," Davenport said after the meeting. "We're going to look back and see what went wrong and we're going to try to, no we ARE going to fix it."

Davenport named five trustees to the group and said afterward that he had deliberately picked three, a majority, who were new appointees to the board.

"They didn't have a dog in that fight, so they can be objective and lay it on the line," he said.

In a meeting in which NCSU leaders were simultaneously trying to clean up some of the remaining mess from the scandal and also push past it, interim Chancellor James Woodward appealed to Easley not to file a grievance over her firing, as her lawyer has said she will do.

"What I would hope is the governor and Mary Easley would decide not to do further harm to this university by pursuing the grievance process, but that is their right," he said.

True to his reputation for quick action, Woodward reeled off a list of projects he said the university needs to tackle quickly. That list includes an overhaul of its fundraising system, which he described as "inadequate and highly decentralized." He also said the university needs to retool its efforts to build a chancellor's residence and a student center.
The residence won't be built in time for Woodard's use, but it could be an important recruiting tool in the hunt for his replacement.

That hunt kicked off Tuesday when the board approved a 19-member search committee.

Trustee and former state Lt. Gov. Bob Jordan said the search committee would move quickly, beginning with a meeting this morning. He made it clear, however, that the trustees were in no rush to lose Woodward.

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Employees jump at Duke offer

BY ERIC FERRERI, Staff Writer

DURHAM - Nearly 300 Duke employees have grabbed an early retirement offer, the university's first attempt to slash payroll without laying off workers.

Duke offered the deal to 825 employees and 292 accepted, a 35 percent yield that's far higher than the 10 to 20 percent officials had targeted, said Kyle Cavanaugh, Duke's vice president for human resources.

The incentive plan's success doesn't guarantee that Duke won't have to lay off workers at some point. Duke eventually wants to trim its total payroll by about 1,000 workers in an effort to cut $125 million from its annual operating budget.

"We're certainly not out of the woods yet," Cavanaugh said. "But this is a great step forward."

The jobs left vacant by the early retirements will be eliminated. In the future, hires will be more closely scrutinized, Cavanaugh said, requiring approval by top administrators.

Duke offers two retirement plans -- a pension plan and a fixed contribution, or 403(b), plan. The retirement incentives program was offered to employees in the pension plan who were at least 50 with at least 10 years of service at Duke.

The offer: Retire now and get an additional five years of service and five years tacked on to your age for the purposes of pension payout, which is based in large part on an employee's age and years of service.

It was a particularly good deal for workers whose length of service was near the 20-year mark. For example, if an employee had 17 years of service and took the early retirement package, the bump from 17 to 22 years of service would bring with it a 20 percent increase in pension payout, Cavanaugh said.

The retirements will save Duke about $15 million annually, Cavanaugh said. Duke is considering a similar incentive offer for workers in the fixed-contribution retirement plan, but the details have not yet been worked out. The university also has instituted a pay freeze for workers earning more than $50,000 a year.

Judy Mack wasn't in it for the money. At 57 and with 31 years of service under her belt, Mack figured on working at Duke's Medical School Bookstore for about eight more years before retiring.

The incentive plan gave her the push she needed. In retirement, Mack, who lives in Durham, plans to volunteer more and take college courses, with an eye toward becoming a child advocate.

"The money was helpful, but this was sort of like a calling, a mission," Mack said. "I wanted to do something before I leave this earth. It seems like I've been working all my life."
Primary commitment

In a few weeks, I will begin the journey of becoming a physician at the Brody School of Medicine of East Carolina University. I am interested in primary care and would like to stay in North Carolina to practice. I am not as concerned with my future salary as I am with my ability to deliver quality care and to save my own sanity.

The inequitable fee-for-service model of reimbursement not only hinders primary care physician salaries, it also places incredible strain on their workload and job satisfaction. Like many drawn to primary care, I want to form relationships with patients. I want to be proactive in preventing illness, sensitive to complicated socioeconomic issues that hinder wellness and be thorough and thoughtful in the diagnosis and management of disease. How can this be done when visits are shortened to 15 minutes to compensate for the lack of reimbursement and to cover administrative costs? I am not interested in being a factory line physician who is burdened by the financial bottom line and haggling with insurers; I want to take care of people to the best of my ability.

Health care reform will require changes on multiple fronts, and there must be a concerted, dedicated effort to change the way primary care is delivered and reimbursed.

Ashley Hink,
Raleigh

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Obama pledges aid for 2-year colleges

$12 billion aims at jobs preparation

BY DARLENE SUPERVILLE, The Associated Press

WARREN, Mich. - Conceding that unemployment will get worse before it shrinks, President Barack Obama on Tuesday unveiled a $12 billion plan to help community colleges prepare millions of people for a new generation of jobs. Challenging critics, he said he welcomed the task of turning the economy around.

"I love the folks who helped get us in this mess and then suddenly say, 'Well, this is Obama's economy,'" the president told an outdoor crowd at Macomb Community College, veering off his scripted words. "That's fine. Give it to me. My job is to solve problems, not to stand on the sidelines and harp and gripe."

Obama brought his message to a state reeling from the loss of auto jobs. Michigan's unemployment rate is 14.1 percent, the nation's worst.

"The hard truth is that some of the jobs that have been lost in the auto industry and elsewhere won't be coming back," Obama said. "They are the casualties of a changing economy."

To that end, he proposed an "American Graduation Initiative" to bolster the two-year community colleges that serve millions of students as a launching point for careers or a step toward expanded higher education. The idea is to train people for jobs, such as those expected in the clean energy industry, when the economy turns around and begins to create jobs again instead of shedding them.

Under the plan, competitive grants would be offered to schools to try new programs or expand training and counseling.

High dropout rates would be addressed by designing programs to track students and help them earn an associate's degree or finish their education at a four-year institution. Money would also be spent to renovate and rebuild facilities, and online courses would be developed to help colleges offer more classes.

The White House says the cost would be $12 billion over 10 years; Obama says it would be paid for by ending wasteful subsidies to banks and private lenders of student loans.

Molly Broad, the former UNC system president who is now president of the American Council on Education, said that Obama's proposal "will go a long way toward meeting our nation's work force needs at this critical time when the economy is struggling."

But Republican Sen. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, a former education secretary, said Obama's plan is a "typical proposal" that sounds better than it is. "When our biggest problem as a country is too much debt, he's taking the entitlement spending he claims to be saving from the student loan program and adding it to the debt," Alexander said.
What's behind budget holdup?

Many agencies and employees are on pins and needles while legislators wrangle over a resolution.

BY BENJAMIN NIOLET, Staff writer

RALEIGH - Taxpayers, teachers and local governments are waiting to see how the state budget will hit, hurt or help them.

They will have to wait longer.

The fiscal year began 15 days ago, but state government is running on a temporary spending plan that expires today. House and Senate Democrats, who control both chambers and write the budget, can't agree on how to balance the state budget, and the legislature is likely to adopt another temporary spending measure and extend the deadline.

Budget negotiators have agreed on very broad terms. They expect to spend $18.9 billion this year, including some $990 million from new taxes.

But that's where the agreement ends. The stickiest point concerns the proposed tax increase. The word from the negotiating table is less than ebullient.

"There are times when it looks like we're making progress, then there are times when it doesn't," Sen. Dan Clodfelter, a Charlotte Democrat, said Tuesday. "If you'd asked me yesterday, I would have said we were getting close."

Here's what you should know about your elected representatives and their work on the budget:

Houses divided: Democrats generally agree that tax increases are needed to avoid what they say would be devastating cuts to education and social services for children and the state's poor.

Republicans say higher taxes will hurt the economy and put more people out of work. "This is going to be a significant bite on the working families of this state," said Rep. Nelson Dollar, a Cary Republican.

Republican lawmakers say the state has not yet shed all unnecessary spending and has plenty of room to cut. They say the Democrats have exaggerated the size of the budget deficit to whip up support for a tax increase.

Wasn't the federal government supposed to help? The federal stimulus package included billions to help states deal with the recession. North Carolina will have $1.3 billion in federal dollars to spend. Much of that money comes with limitations and requirements on how the state can use it. In two years, though, that money will be gone.

Three tax plans: House and Senate tax plans share plenty of similarities. Both would apply the sales tax to new items such as movie tickets, digital downloads or repairs.
• The House plan would increase the sales tax rate and require many online retailers to withhold sales tax. It would also raise the income tax on the state’s wealthiest residents and extend the franchise tax to limited liability companies.

• The Senate plan would apply the sales tax to many more services while lowering the tax rate. It would close loopholes in the corporate tax code while also decreasing that rate.

• Gov. Beverly Perdue, a Democrat, has proposed a menu of options including raising the sales tax temporarily, a proposal that has been met with predictable skepticism.

On the chopping block: Regardless of the size and shape of the tax increase, spending cuts are guaranteed.

The House, Senate and governor have all proposed various reductions, such as hiring fewer teachers and increasing class size, cutting back on health care for poor children and transferring some expenses to local governments. No category of state spending will be immune to the budget cuts.

Should we worry? State budgets are routinely adopted after the fiscal year has started, but this year presents unusual problems. School systems and local governments don’t know how much money they will get from the state. The agency that runs the state court system doesn’t have any guarantees that it can make payroll next month.

Every day that goes by costs the state as much as $5 million in budget cuts or uncollected new taxes, Perdue says. Depending on who you are, that’s either a problem or a blessing.

Rep. Paul Stam, an Apex Republican, calls the delay of new taxes “a silver lining to the dark cloud.”

Staff writer Kevin Kiley contributed to this report.

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Racial Gap in Testing Sees Shift by Region

By SAM DILLON

WASHINGTON — Historically, the achievement gap between America’s black and white students was widest in Southern states, where the legacies of slavery and segregation were reflected in extremely low math and reading scores among poor African-American children.

But black students have made important gains in several Southern states over two decades, while in some Northern states, black achievement has improved more slowly than white achievement, or has even declined, according to a study of the black-white achievement gap released Tuesday by the Department of Education.

As a result, the nation’s widest black-white gaps are no longer seen in Southern states like Alabama or Mississippi, but rather in Northern and Midwestern states like Connecticut, Illinois, Nebraska and Wisconsin, according to the federal data.

In interviews, top education officials in several states expressed disappointment at the magnitude of those gaps.

“This won’t be a total surprise,” said Roger D. Breed, Nebraska’s education commissioner, “but it’ll be a shock to Nebraskans that the gap here is as big as it is.”

Officials of the National Center for Education Statistics, which produced the report, told reporters in a conference call that the report offered no hypotheses to explain the evolution in black-white achievement, only statistical comparisons that could spur further research.

Experts said it was impossible to gauge from the report whether the federal No Child Left Behind Law, one of the main goals of which was to reduce the achievement gap, had had an impact.

The study plotted the evolution of average scores of black and white students on the series of federal tests known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress that were administered every two to four years in both math and reading from 1992 to 2007. Nationwide, the average math score in 1992 for white fourth graders was 227 on a 500-point scale, compared with an average score of 192 for black fourth graders that year, resulting in a black-white gap of 35 points.

By 2007, the most recent year included in the new study, the average math scores for white fourth graders had risen to 248, but the average scores for black students had risen to 222, thus narrowing the black-white gap to 26 points, about the equivalent of two and a half years of schooling.

By 2007, the state with the widest black-white gap in the nation on the fourth-grade math test (not counting the District of Columbia) was not in the deep South, but in the Midwest — Wisconsin. White students there scored 250, slightly above the national average, but blacks scored 212, producing a 38-point achievement gap. That
average score for black students in Wisconsin was lower than for blacks in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi or any other Southern state, and 10 points below the national average for black students, the study indicated.

Wisconsin was the only state in which the black-white achievement gap in 2007 was larger than the national average in the tests for fourth and eighth grades in both math and reading, according to the study.

Kati Haycock, president of the Education Trust, a nonprofit group in Washington that works to close achievement gaps, said principals in Wisconsin were “stunned” when shown the results.

“Black kids in Wisconsin do worse than in all these Southern states,” and the reason, Ms. Haycock said, was that Wisconsin educators “haven’t been focusing on doing what’s necessary to close these gaps.”

Patrick Gasper, a spokesman for the Wisconsin Department of Education, said, “We know that we have a pronounced achievement gap and that we have to continue focusing our efforts on eliminating it.”

The public schools in Milwaukee, the city with Wisconsin’s largest African-American population, have missed federal achievement targets for five years straight, Mr. Gasper said. Tony Evers, Wisconsin’s new education superintendent, delivered his inaugural speech on July 6 in Milwaukee instead of the state capital, Madison, to emphasize the urgency of new approaches, Mr. Gasper said.

In Nebraska, black student achievement is lower than anywhere in the old South, the federal report indicates. In eighth grade math, for instance, the average score among Nebraska’s black students in 2007 was 240 on a 500-point scale, compared with the national average for blacks of 259, according to the federal data. The average score for black eighth graders was 246 in Alabama, 251 in Mississippi, 258 in Louisiana, and 261 in Georgia.

The average score for white eighth graders in Nebraska in math was 291, almost exactly the national average, resulting in a black-white gap there of 51 points, far larger than in any other state, according to the report.

Mr. Breed said he and other Nebraska officials had gotten word about the findings several days ago.

“We’d kind of had a heads-up that it would not be good news for Nebraska,” he said. “It’s not great to be in the group that has a large gap, but it is what it is — and it’s not acceptable.”

Connecticut is another Northern state where achievement gaps are larger than in states across the South, the federal study shows. That is partly because white students in Connecticut score above the national average, but also because blacks there score lower, on average, than blacks elsewhere.


“I’ve been an African-American male for 60 years, and lived in nine different states, North, South, East and West,” Mr. Smith said. “Certain things are consistent: inequitable distribution of teachers, inequitable funding of schools, institutional racism. That is consistent across the board, so if you expect to find a different gap in North or South, you’re not going to find that.”