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Editorial: Discontent growing over budget
Friday, July 15, 2011

The more North Carolina residents learn about the two-year budget plan approved by the N.C. General Assembly over the objections of Gov. Beverly Perdue, the less they approve of the decisions it contains. Their concern seems well placed as each passing day seems to bring another budget-based disappointment to light, the latest being cuts to popular programs at the Governor's School.

Even at a time of limited resources, when each dollar spent by the state should be used to maximum effectiveness, gutting effective programs like those at the Governor's School represents a tremendous miscalculation. North Carolina should look to expand opportunities for educational enrichment and doing otherwise is a disservice to students, present and future.

Public Police Polling released new numbers this week that show deep dissatisfaction with the budget plan approved in June by the Legislature. Five Democratic lawmakers joined the Republican majority to override the governor's veto, but the $19.7 billion spending blueprint now only enjoys 20 percent approval. The Democratic-based polling firm found that only 18 percent of respondents believe the budget will create jobs.

Time will tell the tale of North Carolina's decisions, but one need only hear from those struggling with sharp spending reductions to know the budget threatens lasting implications. That seems no more true than in the education arena, where administrators have been asked to do more with much less in classrooms from Kindergarten and high schools to community colleges and state universities.

Consider the Governor's School of North Carolina, the successful six-week program of immersion and specialty study that cultivates students' intellectual curiosity and encourages their academic commitment. Focused on a variety of disciplines, including the arts, the program provides a unique learning experience for 600 rising high-school students each year. This budget zeroed out funding for this, the only oldest statewide summer residential program for academically gifted high school students in the nation.

Again, North Carolina must ask itself if that represents the most appropriate course of action for a state that has long distinguished itself by its commitment to education. By eliminating these opportunities for the brightest, it leaves them less prepared to excel in college and less likely to realize their leadership potential after graduation. Sadly, the Legislature's budget inflicts similar harm throughout public education.
Those recent poll numbers show residents are wising up to the nuances of the budget, as judged by their growing discontent. How unfortunate their opposition is only now rising to the surface.
Cloggers and Celtibillies perform Sunday
The Daily Reflector
Friday, July 15, 2011

Music of the western mountains will venture east this weekend when the Celtibillies roll into town to play a one-night show with the local Green Grass Cloggers.

The Celtibillies and the Cloggers will take the stage at Greenville Toyota Amphitheater at the Greenville Town Common for Sunday in the Park at 7 p.m. for a free concert.

Formed in 1994, the Celtibillies began exploring connections between Celtic music and the Appalachian music of their home region of southwest Virginia. The band features Becky Barlow on hammered dulcimer, keyboard and bodhran, Jack Hinshelwood on fiddle, guitar and harmonica, Tim Sauls on banjo, bouzouki, fiddle and guitar and Jeff Hofmann on bass.

The Green Grass Cloggers will dance during the concert. Their dancing is inspired by mountain-style clogging teams and influenced by older flatfoot and buck dancers.

“Something exciting, not seen before at Sunday in the Park — at least in recent history — will be that all of the four-couple dances will be done with two sets. In other words, 16 dancers, not eight,” said veteran clogger Roger Rulifson. “Also, we are attempting a three-set (24 dancers) routine called the ‘Indian.’ It will be interesting to see if we can all squeeze onto the stage.”

Rulifson has been involved with the Green Grass Cloggers since 1993 when he saw a demonstration by the group at a contradance (a country dance in which the couples form lines facing each other.) Rulifson practiced the steps and then performed for the first time at “Down on the Farm” at the Village of Yesteryear. His wife, Gayle, also is a dancer with the cloggers.
The cloggers celebrate their 40th anniversary this year and will perform Nov. 5 as part of East Carolina University's S. Rudolph Alexander Performing Arts Series. The group was founded in 1971 by a group of ECU students.

The Celtibillies appeared at the 37th annual Smithsonian Folklife Festival in 2003 when they were asked to represent the music of the Appalachians. Other festival performances include the Savannah Folk Festival; Williamsburg Scottish Festival; Bele Chere; Virginia Highlands Festival; Blue Ridge Music Center and the Chesapeake Celtic Festival.

Their concerts have also been featured on WBRA Public TV and the nationally syndicated “Song of the Mountains” PBS series. Their recordings have been featured on the “Thistle & Shamrock” program on National Public Radio.

Since 2004, the Celtibillies have been named to the Touring Artist Directory by the Virginia Commission for the Arts which supports excellence in all the arts and is funded by the Virginia General Assembly and the National Endowment for the Arts.
UNC and Duke will read together

BY TAYLOR ANDERSON - Staff Writer

Tar Heels and Blue Devils are teaming up for this summer's reading assignment for incoming students. Both UNC-Chapel Hill and Duke have selected the book "Eating Animals" by Jonathan Safran Foer.

New students are asked to read the book before arriving, then they will participate in small group discussions. Foer himself will speak at both campuses on Aug. 25.

The book tells the story of Foer's back-and-forth struggle with vegetarianism, which came to a head when he became a father. Realizing that he would be responsible for deciding what another person would eat, Foer began an in-depth investigation into the food industry. The book delves into the industrialization of agriculture and the methods used in food production.

The purpose of the summer reading program is to get students' critical thinking skills going outside the classroom and to give them common ground for discussion and debate.

"You read the book to gain something from it, but also to gain ideas that you present to others and get their reaction," said Emil Malizia, a UNC professor and member of the selection committee.

Both UNC and Duke had committees separately create short lists drawn from 393 nominated works, then a 21-person joint panel made up of faculty, staff and students chose from among six finalists. The process took four or five months.
Priya Bhat, a student representative on the committee and a 2011 Duke graduate, said incoming students, away from their parents for the first time, are likely to relate to the book because they are making their own decisions and learning to think for themselves.

In years past, UNC's book selections have sometimes sparked controversy. In 2002, the choice of "Approaching the Quran: The Early Revelations," angered many who didn't like the idea of studying the Muslim holy book, particularly so soon after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001. A Christian organization even sued the university.

The next year, the selection of "Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America" infuriated many conservatives who thought students were being indoctrinated with liberal thinking before setting foot in the classroom.

But UNC has never backed down from the program, now in its 13th year. In the eyes of both UNC and Duke, choosing controversial books helps further the purpose of the program.

"It actually is quite fine if not everybody likes the book," said Clay Adams, director of orientation at Duke. "As a matter of fact, it makes for excellent debate. ... I don't know what selection we could possibly find that everybody would agree is excellent."

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**What other schools are reading**

Meredith College: "Enrique's Journey" by Sonia Nazario. This book tells of a 17-year-old boy who struck out from Honduras to find his mother, who had been sending money from America for 12 years.

N.C. Central University: "Scratch Beginnings" by Adam Shepard. It's the autobiographical account of a man who, out of college, struck out with $25 and a few supplies to see whether he could go from homelessness to relative success in one year.

N.C. State University: "The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks" by Rebecca Skloot. It's the tale of an African-American woman whose cells, taken without permission from her cancer-ridden body in 1951, became the means of many crucial medical breakthroughs. (This was one of the finalists for the UNC/Duke collaborative.)

Peace College: "Some We Love, Some We Hate, Some We Eat" by Hal Herzog. Herzog, an animal behaviorist and authority on animal-human relations, explores our relationship to animals and looks at why we feel the way we do about one animal versus another.
Community colleges protest merger idea

BY JANE STANCILL - Staff writer

RALEIGH Community college leaders expressed alarm Thursday over a recommendation to consolidate smaller community colleges with larger ones to save money.

Board members, presidents, trustees and administrators sounded a chorus against the idea put forward last month in an analysis by the legislature's Program Evaluation Division. The report suggested reducing the number of small community colleges through 15 mergers involving 22 colleges to save an estimated $5.1 million a year.

That $5 million is the equivalent of one position at each of the 58 community colleges, or four-hundredths of 1 percent of the $1.3 billion state budget for the system, said Kennon Briggs, executive vice president and chief of staff.

That amount of savings is not worth transforming the system and eroding local support around North Carolina, said Scott Ralls, president of the system.

"Community colleges are much more than places where classes take place," he said. "They're the hubs of leadership; they're the beacons of economic hope, and they're the catalyst for things happening in many communities where they don't see a lot of things positive happening. To take that out of our communities at this point in time for $5.1 million ... doesn't make a lot of sense."

This week, a legislative panel forwarded the proposal to an education oversight committee for further review. Members said the consolidation idea merited a serious look.

Rep. David Lewis, a Dunn Republican, said there was "premature angst" about the issue. Combining the administrative staffs of colleges could allow the state to educate more students, he said.

"I think the people of North Carolina are proud of their community college system," he said. "They feel that way because it provides a valuable service in educating the public. I don't think there's much concern over whether the community college president lives in their county or town."
The report said colleges with fewer than 3,000 students are inefficient. Across the state, costs range from $447 to $1,679 per student at various colleges, depending on their size.

The report recommended that smaller colleges be combined with larger ones to save on administrative costs, so that there would be only one president's salary, one business office, one financial aid office for two sites.

"Sometimes bigger is simply better, and bigger is more efficient," Lewis said. "That's what our research has shown."

**Loss of local support?**

Community colleges are funded with state, federal and local money. But local elected officials will be much less likely to support a college if it is merged with the county next door, said Lyn Austin, chairwoman of Johnston Community College.

"When they talk about merging, or consolidating or restructuring," she said, "what you're doing is changing the heart of what makes this system work."

Joanne Steiner, a board member from Wake Forest, said the savings would not be worth hurting small counties that struggle to attract jobs.

"What does this do to rural economic development? That is just absurd," she said.

Mary Kirk, president of Montgomery Community College, said she's already heard local donors grumble. Montgomery is on the list for possible consolidation.

Some questioned whether the mergers themselves would be as costly as the eventual savings.

Ralls said the process would take time and money in planning, reaccreditation, technology and legal conversion of private foundations connected to the local colleges.

**Focus on efficiency**

The system is "laser-focused" on efficiency and has been throughout an enormous enrollment surge during the economic recession, he said.

"We could not have taken on 28 percent more students in three years with 21 percent less per student funding coming from general fund sources if we weren't paying attention to efficiency," he added.
The merger is a long way from happening, though. And despite support from several lawmakers this week, Senate leader Phil Berger said Thursday that he thinks consolidation is a bad idea.

"I am concerned about any proposal that would take the administrative control and the lead personnel of a community college out of that community," said Berger, an Eden Republican. "I don't think that model fits what we in North Carolina have come to understand as our community colleges. That's my position on it."

**How this all started**

The 2009 budget bill, passed under the leadership of Democrats, directed the legislature's Program Evaluation Division to study efficiencies for the community college system.

The report, released in June, also recommended that the colleges join forces to save money on purchasing - something that has the support of system leaders.

Lewis, the lawmaker, said the report kicked off a worthwhile discussion. "I think it's certainly a good start," he said of the findings.

"Honestly, I think the report didn't go far enough," Lewis said, adding that colleges could also share academic deans, vice presidents and other staff.

College leaders said their strategy will be to activate county commissioners, business leaders, mayors and students to fight the merger proposal.

"Ours is a system not of franchises around the state. Ours is a system of community colleges where community is the most important word in our name," Ralls said.

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NCAA puts Georgia Tech on probation

Associated Press

The NCAA put Georgia Tech on four years of probation, fined the school $100,000 and stripped its ACC title game victory from the 2009 football season on Thursday for violations that also included problems in the men's basketball program.

Georgia Tech did not lose scholarships and was not ruled ineligible for postseason games in either sport, but the basketball team had the number of recruiting days and official visits reduced for the next two seasons.

The NCAA vacated the final three games of the football team's 2009 season - a loss to rival Georgia, the Atlantic Coast Conference championship win over Clemson and the Orange Bowl loss to Iowa - for using an ineligible player. It was the Yellow Jackets' first season under coach Paul Johnson.

The NCAA said Georgia Tech should have declared receiver Demaryius Thomas ineligible after he accepted $312 worth of clothing in '09 from former Yellow Jackets quarterback Calvin Booker, who was working for a sports agent at the time. But the investigation took a harder turn against the school when athletic director Dan Radakovich broke NCAA rules by alerting Johnson that Thomas and safety Morgan Burnett would soon be interviewed.

It seemed obvious to the NCAA that Thomas and Burnett were told to prepare answers to questions they would be asked during the interviews. In its 26-page report, the NCAA wrote that it decided not to make a finding of its interview with Burnett after he "consistently denied" accepting free clothing. The NCAA committee on infractions wrote, however, that a violation occurred in regard to Thomas.

Radakovich defended his decision to tell Johnson that Demaryius Thomas and Burnett would be interviewed and added that he didn't agree with the findings.

"I think that's where they feel (the investigation) started," Radakovich said. "I've been working with coaches for 25 years, and I think it's important that you have a relationship with coaches. And while in this particular circumstance I should've picked up the telephone and made a call - and I probably could've convinced the (NCAA) individual that this was important
for me to do. I've worked with other investigators who wouldn't have had a problem with that, so I think that's part of the other growth and understanding process you go through when you have these issues at hand."

The basketball violations involved a youth basketball tournament held on campus in 2009 and again in 2010.
A new study by an outspoken critic of academic grade inflation finds that 43 percent of all letter grades issued by professors today are As. Stuart Rojstaczer has spent years amassing evidence of grade inflation, an on-again, off-again trend he traces to 1940.

By Rojstaczer’s reckoning, the A has emerged in the new millennium as the most popular grade — it eclipsed the B in prevalence around 1998. His study, published in the journal Teachers College Record, reveals a slow but steady transformation of grades and grading in academia.

Consider: In the World War II era, roughly 35 percent of grades were B, and an equal share were C. Just 15 percent were A. A slightly lower share were D, and 5 percent were F.

And today? Nearly half of grades are A. The bland B has held steady at 35 percent. The C has declined just as sharply as the A has ascended, and it now accounts for just 15 percent of all grades.

To put it another way: 50 and 60 years ago, B’s and C’s made up the vast majority of all grades. Today, the most common grades by far are A’s and B’s.

What is going on? Rojstaczer and co-author Christopher Healy suggest that the motive is a “consumer-based” approach to higher education: Particularly in private colleges, professors grade high to keep students satisfied with their collegiate experience.

They track grade inflation alongside the rise of faculty evaluations by students. Faculty who grade well get better reviews from their student “customers.” Those evaluations, in turn, determine faculty pay and promotion.
The authors contend that colleges are effectively losing their standards. There is no distinction any more between good and excellent performance; students at the average college will get a high grade no matter how much classwork they complete or how well they score on their tests.

Over the past few decades, they write, “America’s institutions of higher learning gradually created a fiction that excellence was common and that failure was virtually nonexistent.”

They theorize that the promise of an easy A might, in turn, prompt students to spend less time studying and working on class assignments, another well-documented trend over the past 50 years.

Absent firm oversight, they write, “meaningful grades will not return to the American academy.”