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City gives Jones an update

By Kathryn Kennedy
The Daily Reflector

Wednesday, August 05, 2009

U.S. Rep. Walter B. Jones Jr., R-N.C., praised Greenville officials for their leadership during a meeting at City Hall on Wednesday afternoon.

City Manager Wayne Bowers and other city staffers presented the Republican congressman an hourlong update on the status of several stimulus projects and grant applications, ranging from transportation initiatives to technology improvements at the Greenville Police Department.

"They are in a position at the federal level to do things for us that we can't do for ourselves," Mayor Pat Dunn said of the city's relationship with congressional delegates. "We don't work in isolation. We don't work in a vacuum. And they're interested in what we're doing at the local level."

The city has received $6.8 million from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Greenville has submitted applications for an additional $5.2 million.

Community Development Director Merrill Flood spoke about the Lead Hazard Reduction grant, which is removing lead-based paint from homes for low- and moderate income citizens.

Flood said a program is set to launch in the next three weeks training contractors to do the work. Those contractors will be required to hire at least one unemployed person.

"That's what we've really got to do in this country is try to create opportunities," Jones said.

"We're actively trying to spend the money fast and create jobs wherever we can," Bowers added.

Bowers and Public Works Director Wes Anderson thanked Jones for his support in acquiring funding for the Stantonsburg Road-10th Street Connector. The project will connect East Carolina University with Pitt County Memorial Hospital through one four-lane thoroughfare. A steering committee still must choose the final plan and Anderson said cost estimates keep increasing.

"Well, if we could ever stop taking care of the world and start taking care of this country, it'd be done a lot faster," Jones said.

Anderson also spoke about plans to move the railroad switching yard outside of the city. Its location causes traffic back-ups on Arlington Boulevard, Howell Street and 14th Street. A connector is scheduled for construction next month so the train doesn't have to stop. The entire facility will relocate in 2010.

"It's been a challenge," Bowers said, "working with three railroads."

Jones said he, N.C. Sens. Richard Burr and Kay Hagan and Congressman G.K. Butterfield, will "continue to do our part."

He also quipped that he was happy he'd lived long enough to see the Fire Tower Road widening finished.

The congressman's visit ended with him seated in a police car, inspecting technology the department purchased recently. Maj. Kevin Smeltzer said the police department improved radio communications county wide, put
computers in all police cars and instituted an improved records management dispatch system.

"I don't know, other than the military, a tougher job than you all have," Jones told Chief William Anderson.

Jones also chatted with city staff about purchasing hybrid vehicles, water resources and youth programs.

"We are hopeful about anything we can do to stimulate the economy," Jones said before departing. "(Greenville is) using this money very wisely. The briefing I got today was very encouraging. The taxpayers' money is being used well."

Contact Kathryn Kennedy at kkennedy@coxnc.com or (252) 329-9566.

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Out-of-state athletes keep tuition break

BY JOSEPH NEFF, Staff Writer

As teachers worry about job security and residents pay a penny more on the dollar in sales tax, one interest group is emerging from North Carolina's new budget unscathed: state universities' athletic booster clubs.

Taxpayers will continue to pick up the tab for granting in-state tuition to out-of-state athletes at a cost of $10 million a year.

"It's unconscionable to be bailing out these booster clubs when we're firing teachers and state employees and cutting mental health programs," said state Rep. Pricey Harrison, a Greensboro Democrat.

Under a law slipped into the budget four years ago, out-of-state athletes are charged in-state tuition. That means that booster clubs that fund the athletic scholarships, such as the Rams Club at UNC-Chapel Hill or the Wolfpack Club at N.C. State, have only to cover the lesser in-state tuition rate. The rest of the cost of the athletes' education is subsidized by taxpayers.

The difference is substantial, according to the legislative fiscal staff.

UNC-Chapel Hill tuition for the coming academic year is expected to be $3,865 for in-state students and $21,753 for out-of-state students. That means a savings of $17,888 for each of the 139 out-of-state athletes at Chapel Hill, or $2.5 million in total.

Legislators took final votes Wednesday on the budget, which includes the higher sales tax and an income tax surcharge on richer taxpayers. The budget also requires significant cuts to programs. Both actions were aimed at closing a revenue shortfall of more than $4 billion.

A News & Observer series in June, "The Generous Assembly," included the tuition break as an example of special-interest legislation that lawmakers were reluctant to touch, even during dire economic times.

Booster clubs have money

The booster clubs are in somewhat better shape than the state, though the most recent tax disclosures don't take into account last year's stock market dive.

According to the most recent tax filing available, from June 2007, the Rams Club had net assets of $47 million. The club spent $2 million on scholarships and $14 million on improvements to athletic facilities. The Wolfpack Club listed its net assets at $77 million in the fiscal year ending in June 2008, tax forms show. The Wolfpack Club spent $5.7 million on scholarships and $7.6 million on improvements that year.

John Montgomery, executive director of the Rams Club, did not return phone calls to his office Wednesday.

The tuition measure has come in for much criticism in the House, whose budget proposal
eliminated the break.

Rep. William Current, a Gastonia Republican, wondered how he would explain the scheme to constituents. "There's not a spot for their kids to go to school, and yet we're giving them to out-of-state kids who are not paying these taxes?" Current asked.

Rep. Phil Haire, a Sylva Democrat, said that schools' athletic rosters were already filled for this year and that it wouldn't be fair to change the rules now. "To cut them off at this point in time, it would have caused difficulties for the schools," he said.

The budget does, however, cut appropriations to the university system by $319 million for the coming fiscal year.

Harrison said booster clubs can thank the Senate for the tuition break: "Their leadership is really dug in."

The biggest backer for the measure is Sen. Tony Rand, a Fayetteville Democrat, a Tar Heel fan and one of government's top power brokers. In an interview last week, Rand said the scholarships benefit all the universities, not just the flagship schools.

Statewide, there are 747 out-of-state athletic scholarships for the coming school year, according to the legislative staff. UNC-Chapel Hill has 139, N.C. State 133, and Appalachian State University has 112. The historically black colleges have a total of 70, less than 10 percent of the total.

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Students will make the grade -- literally

BY ERIC FERRERI, Staff Writer

DURHAM - In one English class this fall, Duke students will grade themselves.

That's the idea behind Cathy Davidson's "This is Your Brain on the Internet" course, an exploration of thought in the rapidly changing age of digital technology.

"Do all the work, you get an A," she writes on a blog explaining her course. "Don't need an A? Don't have time to do all the work? No problem. You can aim for and earn a B. There will be a chart. You do the assignment satisfactorily, you get the points. Add up the points, there's your grade."

That practice, called contract grading, has been employed for decades. Here's the twist: in Davidson's class, students will decide whether the assignments are completed satisfactorily.

Two students will lead each class, selecting readings and writing assignments and evaluating student work. There will be no exams or research papers, unless a student wants to write one, according to Davidson's blog. Students will work together on a final multimedia project.

Grading 'outmoded'

On her blog, Davidson explains why she's eschewing traditional grading for this new method, known as "crowdsourcing," in which a task usually done by one person is instead done by a group.

"After returning to teaching after several years as an administrator, I found grading to be the most outmoded, inconsequential, and irrelevant feature of teaching. Thus for [this class], all students will receive the grade of A if they do all the work and their peers certify that they
have done so in a satisfactory fashion," she writes. "Everyone who chooses to do the work to the satisfaction of his or her collaborative peers in the course will receive an A, but no one is required to do all of the work or to earn an A."

Davidson's approach to this course is unusual, said Todd Zakrajsek executive director of UNC-Chapel Hill's Center for Faculty Excellence. Plenty of faculty members take issue with grading, and some surrender a portion of a class to student evaluation, Zakrajsek said. But Davidson is essentially giving students total control of grading.

Doing so, he says, poses a complicated question.

"If the real essence of a college education is to become a learned individual, grades really are inconsequential," he said. "But we're also using an education to gauge who really is learning."

And it also brings the professor's role into question. Is Davidson's job to simply give students information, or is she a manager, guiding students as they figure out things for themselves?

Zakrajsek doesn't know Davidson, but read the course description on her blog and came away impressed with how thoroughly the course has been thought out. But he does wonder whether students are qualified to decide whether class work is satisfactory.

"She's not way out on the fringe," Zakrajsek said. "She's just adamant about the fact that she doesn't like grades. [But] I think students need real feedback to know how they're doing in the class. Are students the best to make that determination?"

Zach Perret, a Duke senior studying biology and chemistry, said the new class format may lead students to collaborate more and compete less.

"It's a competitive place," Perret said. "Unfortunately, that culture leads to a little too much competition. It may make it a little more about learning."

Lee D. Baker, dean of academic affairs for Duke's Trinity College of Arts & Sciences, said faculty members are encouraged to try new ways of teaching.

"Cathy Davidson is a seasoned instructor and an innovative scholar," Baker said. "And research suggests that the more students are engaged in each aspect of the class, the more learning takes place."

Davidson's blog post explaining this new course has received more than 1,300 hits since being posted Sunday, prompting stories in the Chronicle of Higher Education and Inside Higher Ed, two trade publications read heavily in academia.

Davidson, who has tenure, is on vacation and difficult to reach. She did leave voice mail for The News & Observer saying in part that she is pleasantly surprised by the attention her blog post about her new course has received. The comment section prompted some teachers to encourage her use of crowdsourcing. Others saw value in professors grading.

In 2003, Alex Halavais used a similar approach for a communications course he taught at the State University of New York's Buffalo campus. He likes the idea of having students evaluate one another's work and thinks they learn more from one another than from a professor.

But in his class of more than 100 students, students created teams and alliances, forging agreements with each other to drive up the grades of each member of a team while driving down the grades of students outside the clique.

"I had failed to anticipate how collaborative they would be," said Halavais, now a communications professor at Quinnipiac University in Connecticut. "Not to do good work, but to get good grades."
Learn more online

On her blog, Cathy Davidson explains her course.

An excerpt:

I loved returning to teaching last year after several years in administration ... except for the grading. I can't think of a more meaningless, superficial, cynical way to evaluate learning than by assigning a grade. It turns learning (which should be a deep pleasure, setting up for a lifetime of curiosity) into a crass competition: How do I snag the highest grade for the least amount of work? How do I give the prof what she wants so I can get the A that I need for med school? That's the opposite of learning and curiosity, the opposite of everything I believe as a teacher, and is, quite frankly, a waste of my time and the students' time. There has to be a better way ...

Read it all here:

www.hastac.org/blogs/cathy-davidson/how-crowdsource-grading

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Biotech Center grants $100k each to UNC, NCSU projects

August 4, 2009 2:55 PM ET

The North Carolina Biotechnology Center has awarded $300,000 in grants to three university-business collaborations — including ones involving the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and North Carolina State University.

The Research Triangle Park-based nonprofit granted $100,000 to UNC’s Scott Randell, an associate professor in the Department of Cell and Molecular Physiology who is working with RTP-based company Entergrion to grow eye cells in test cultures. The cells would be used to test dry-eye treatments.

Christian Melander, an assistant professor in NCSU’s Department of Chemistry, won a $100,000 grant further a joint project with Agile Sciences of Raleigh. The company develops compounds that disperse biofilms; Melander is working to use that technology to develop an approach to help control bacterial spot disease on peaches.

The third $100,000 grant went to Dr. Wayne Casco, vice chairman of the Department of Cardiovascular Sciences in the Brody School of Medicine at East Carolina University. Casco is working with RTP-based company Etegion to assess the ability of freeze-dried platelets to help stop excessive bleeding during open-heart surgery and in patients taking anti-clotting drugs.

The $100,000 awards, called Collaborative Funding Grants and co-sponsored by the Kenan Institute for Engineering, Technology and Science at North Carolina State University, provide funds that public-private teams can use to hire a postdoctoral researcher or technician to work at a North Carolina university under the supervision of an academic scientist on a topic of defined commercial interest.

"In addition to fostering greater cooperation between academia and industry, the Collaborative Funding Grants help new breakthroughs to reach their full commercial potential more quickly," said Cynthia Sollod, manager of the science and technology development program at the Biotechnology Center.

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Keep momentum going in fight against childhood obesity

If you read, heard or watched the news last week, you got reports from the Center for Disease Control’s Weight of the Nation conference held in Washington, D.C. The high costs of obesity made the headlines. The frightening news about the continuing prevalence of childhood obesity and its effects on the quality and quantity of life our children will have also made the headlines. President Bill Clinton’s keynote address to this conference made the headlines, too.

I had the privilege of participating in this conference and presenting the North Carolina Eat Smart Move More clinical tools. I had facilitated a group of physicians from the ECU Brody School of Medicine, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Duke University and Wake Forest University Medical School in developing the tools you can find at www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com. These tools are designed for health-care providers to use in their offices to help them identify and then treat childhood overweight before it becomes a devastating medical condition for children.

Most of the meeting, though, was about prevention rather than treatment. I heard reports of work similar to projects many have worked on in Pitt County.

Professionals from Pitt County Schools, ViQuest Center, ECU Pediatric Healthy Weight Research Center and Treatment Center, the county parks and recreation and health departments, health ministries from churches like Cornerstone Missionary Baptist, the Boys and Girls Clubs, the food banks, the PCMH pediatric obesity case management program, and from programs like Food Literacy Partners and KIDPOWER — just to name a few — have successfully demonstrated ways to both prevent childhood obesity and slow its growth among youth in our community.

These groups have been able to do this important work, in part, because of the philanthropy of the Pitt Memorial Hospital Foundation, the Duke Endowment, the Kate B. Reynolds Foundation and the Blue Cross and

See KOLASA, D3
We need new ideas and new energy in the fight against childhood obesity in eastern North Carolina.

support nutrition education in the classroom. We need to figure out how to support our proven work in treating kids who have already become overweight. We need to keep adding to the miles of walking and biking trails that have been created in the county.

If you have ideas or would like to join in this effort, please drop me an e-mail at kolasaka@ecu.edu. We need partners from all sectors of Pitt County.

If I sound like I am on a soapbox today, perhaps I am. I can't count how many speeches I have given in the last 10 years about prevention and treatment of childhood obesity. In every speech, no matter if I was addressing a physicians’ group, a local service club or an education group, I have encouraged each person to define their role in fighting this epidemic. Now I ask all of you to think how we can ensure that our kids achieve a healthy weight.

Clinton told us that changes must be made in “what goes on at home, in the neighborhood, in the schools and in the community.” From where I sit, the costs of not doing so are unacceptable because of the illnesses and unhappiness that obesity causes an individual, not to mention the huge health care costs to our nation.

Professor Kathy Kolas, a registered dietitian and Ph.D., works with the Family Medicine Center, Brody School of Medicine at ECU. Contact her at kolasaka@ecu.edu.
Wine course

A six-week course on "The Art and Science of Wine: An Introduction" will be presented by East Carolina University's associate professor of hospitality management James A. Chandler as part of ECU's Golden Gourmet Culinary Series. The six sessions will help participants understand wines and how they compliment foods.

Sessions will be held from 5-8 p.m. Fridays from Sept. 18-Oct. 23. The first two classes will focus on white wines, session three will be about sparkling wines, and sessions four through six will highlight red wines. In each class, participants will learn how to analyze the characteristics of four wines based on several qualities.

Chandler will prepare foods to accompany the wines for each class.

Classes will be held in the ECU Golden Corral Culinary Center, Thomas W. Rivers Building, Room 151.

Cost is $95 per class, with a 10 percent discount for participants registering for three sessions and a 15 percent discount for participants registering for all six sessions. Registration deadline is on the Tuesday before each class.

Participants who complete all six sessions will receive a certificate of completion.

To learn more or to register for a session or for the series, call 328-9198 or visit the Web site www.cpe.ecu.edu.

The Golden Gourmet Culinary Series is sponsored by the East Carolina University Department of Hospitality Management.
The fog that follows chemotherapy

By JANE E. BRODY
New York Times News Service

Thursday, August 06, 2009

Editor’s note: This is the first of two columns on cognitive problems from chemotherapy. Next week: coping with the effects of chemo brain.

As more people with cancer survive and try to return to their former lives, a side effect of chemotherapy is getting more and more attention. Its name is apt, if unappealing: chemo brain.

Nearly every chemotherapy patient experiences short-term problems with memory and concentration. But about 15 percent suffer prolonged effects of what is known medically as chemotherapy-induced cognitive impairment.

The symptoms are remarkably consistent: a mental fogginess that may include problems with memory, word retrieval, concentration, processing numbers, following instructions, multitasking and setting priorities.

In those affected — and doctors at this point have no way of predicting who might be — it is as if the cognitive portion of the brain were barely functioning. Symptoms are most apparent to high-functioning individuals used to juggling the demands of complex jobs or demanding home lives, or both.

The chemo brain phenomenon was described two years ago in The New York Times by Jane Gross, who noted that after years of medical denial, "there is now widespread acknowledgment that patients with cognitive symptoms are not imagining things."

Some therapists have attributed the symptoms of chemo brain to anxiety, depression, stress, fatigue and fear rather than direct effects of chemotherapy on the brain and hormone balance. Yet when such factors dissipate, the symptoms may not. Recent studies that took other influences into account and analyzed how patients’ brains worked before and after cancer treatment have shown that cognitive effects of chemotherapy are real and, for some, long-lasting.

There are now two new books on the subject: "Chemobrain" (Prometheus Books), by Ellen Clegg, an editor at The Boston Globe, and "Your Brain After Chemo" (Da Capo Press), by Dr. Daniel H. Silverman, a leading researcher in the field, and Idelle Davidson, a health journalist and former breast cancer patient. Silverman heads the neuronuclear imaging section at the University of California Los Angeles Medical Center.

Clegg's book, the more technical of the two, delves into details of research and may confuse readers about the validity of her subtitle, "How Cancer Therapies Can Affect Your Mind." The more user-friendly book by Silverman and Davidson, subtitled "A Practical Guide to Lifting the Fog and Getting Back Your Focus," acknowledges the controversy but cites both anecdotal and research reports showing that the problem exists independent of other factors that can beset cancer patients.

Barbara D. Wick, an insurance consultant in the Chicago suburbs who has been in and out of treatment for ovarian cancer for six years, says her cognitive problems have subsided somewhat since her last round of chemotherapy ended six months ago. Among the symptoms she experienced were these:

Inability to focus on anything with any complexity or depth.
Inability to retain information, especially names.
Difficulty retrieving words and substituting wrong words ("chicken" for "kitchen").

Difficulty analyzing anything other than simple questions.

Inability to follow instructions when cooking or knitting, for example.

In their book, Silverman and Davidson quote a photographer treated for breast cancer at age 34, who said: "Task completion is where I'm most affected cognitively. It's as if the follow-through feature has been removed from my brain."

Another patient, Patrick, a diagnostic radiologist treated for non-Hodgkin's lymphoma at age 58, had to quit his job when he realized he was making mistakes. "I would lose my place and have to go back and start over with an exam," he said. "I tried to explain a procedure to a patient and I got very confused."

At the supermarket, Patrick and his wife put groceries in the car, then he drove off without her. He forgot pots on the stove until the smoke detector went off. Upset by the loss of his former self, he contemplated suicide. After psychiatric treatment, the depression lifted, but the confusion did not.

Some experts think some anti-cancer drugs could have direct toxic effects on neurons, although most drugs do not penetrate the blood-brain barrier. Some evidence from animal and human studies suggests that cancer treatment can cause biochemical or anatomical changes in the brain, or both.

Silverman reports that metabolic imaging studies have shown that "people exposed to chemotherapy have impaired brain function in certain regions compared to others who have not been exposed."

Controlling for brain function before cancer treatment begins can help determine cause and effect. In one study, cancer patients took a battery of neuropsychological tests before starting chemotherapy, three weeks after completing treatment, and again one year later.

Although a third of the patients had signs of cognitive impairment before therapy began, the number jumped to 61 percent after treatment, and half remained impaired a year later.

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