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Colleges say skip if you have flu

Virus could spread rapidly

BY ERIC FERRERI, Staff Writer

In returning to campuses this month, Triangle college students are getting an unusual message from university leaders: Don't go to class.

Not if you have flu-like symptoms, anyhow.

For months now, campus officials have been preparing for what they consider inevitable: the arrival, in droves, of students with the H1N1 virus, the pandemic formerly known as swine flu.

"When you have 8,000 students living on campus ... you have lots of conditions ripe for spreading communicable disease," said Jerry Barker, who directs N.C. State University's Student Health Services. "We're trying to make faculty aware that sick students should not come to class."

The H1N1 symptoms -- stuffy or runny nose, body aches, fever, sore throat, chills -- are similar to those of the common seasonal flu. But the H1N1 virus is new, largely unknown and has no vaccine, though drugmakers are scrambling right now to create one.

This week, a government health panel announced that the virus could claim 90,000 American lives this year. That would be more than twice as many deaths as the seasonal flu causes annually.

Though students have just returned, several local universities have already encountered H1N1; the virus hit summer camps or athletic squads. At Duke, dozens of football players were treated for H1N1 symptoms, and one summer camp was canceled because of an outbreak. About 70 Duke campers, from a pool of about 8,000, were treated for mild cases of H1N1; none were hospitalized.

The numbers could really grow as students get back on campus and begin living -- and coughing and sneezing -- in close quarters.

Health officials insist the virus has yet to prove any more dangerous than the more common seasonal flu. But it's new enough that experts don't know whether its behavior will change.

"There is a fear of the unknown and a fear that the virus will change and become worse," said Mary Covington, director of Campus Health Services at UNC-Chapel Hill.

Universities have asked sick students not to return to campus until at least 24 hours after their symptoms subside. And those who get sick after they arrive are asked to stay away from dining halls and classrooms and to wear surgical masks in common areas like bathrooms.

And they've been asked to pack a few extra things for their dorm rooms as well: digital
thermometers, bottled water and sports drinks, soups or microwaveable meals, disinfectant wipes and hand sanitizer.

Faculty members will make arrangements for students who miss classes due to illness, said Ron Strauss, UNC-CH's executive associate provost.

But if large numbers of students in a particular class get sick at the same time, Strauss said, professors may have to make more drastic changes, such as changing the syllabus or even canceling classes.

"I suspect they'd want to tough it out for as long as possible," he said. "You want to keep the academic enterprise going."

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- Read our 2006 report on the state's preparation for a flu pandemic
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Chief says violent crimes down, property crimes up

By Michael Abramowitz
The Daily Reflector

Friday, August 28, 2009

Violent crime incidents are down in Greenville over the past few years while property crimes and arrests are increasing, police chief William Anderson told a gathering of business people and city officials Thursday at Brook Valley Country Club.

Those changes match national trends, Anderson said at the presentation hosted by the Greenville-Pitt Chamber of Commerce.

Anderson stressed that violent crime was down five percent in 2008 while property crimes increased by four percent.

“What you see in the newspaper, though, is the (overall) three percent increase,” Anderson said.

The presentation reflected concerns about crime that have been expressed around the city, most recently at Monday’s City Council meeting. Crime is a concern to the business community as well, chamber president Susanne Sartelle said.

“We have been looking at the issue of public safety for a number of years. We’ve worked really hard to be proactive in looking at it from the business community’s perspective, and at what we can do to help,” Sartelle said.

The chief first pointed out the steep rise in crime in 1998, 1999 and 2001, then showed that overall rates have essentially stayed consistently lower since then, with small changes up or down from year to year.

“Some are saying crime is out of control. Quite frankly, reported crime is lower now than it was in those years. Of course, any crime is one too many and I’m not saying to forget about our crime, but when you look at the numbers over the last ten years, we’ve been pretty consistent,” he said.

Arrests were up slightly in 2008, about 200 more than in 2007, the chief pointed out.

“A lot of this is because of our aggressive approach in dealing with these issues,” Anderson said.

In 2007, there were 109 commercial/business robberies. In 2008 there were 63, a 42 percent decrease from one year to the next, Anderson noted.

“That’s something we should be proud of. I remember we had a bad period in the summer of 2007. We put together a robbery response plan and directed officers to the particular areas where they were occurring, and we arrested a lot of people. The decrease we’re seeing now is a direct reflection of that activity,” he said.

Anderson also presented statistics reflecting crime during the first six months of 2009.

As of June 30, homicides in Greenville were up double from last year at this time, he said. There were three homicides by June 30, 2008 and six for the entire year. There have been six so far in 2009, he said. Violent rapes are down 83 percent, robberies down 12 percent, and aggravated assaults are down.

Overall changes from year to year are an ineffective way to analyze crime trends in the city, Anderson said. One
attendee at the presentation noted that an incident of homicide is grouped in with all other crimes in the overall picture. Anderson agreed and said that when the public reads about a six percent increase in crime, people don’t understand that the overwhelming majority of the crimes are burglaries and account for the greatest proportion of the increase, or decrease.

“It’s poor reporting because it doesn’t give a true depiction of what’s really occurring,” he said.

One of the biggest things that you’ll never read about is the population factor.”

Greenville is the second fastest-growing city in the state, Anderson said, behind Cary.

The city’s population grew by almost 18 percent from 2004-2008, reflecting a drop in the proportion of crimes to people, the chief said.

“That’s something you’re not going to hear about or see reported in the paper,” Anderson said.

Anderson ignored his own admonition about focusing on overall trends and presented a graph depicting overall Pitt County and Greenville crime trends during a 10-year period from 1998-2008, based on numbers compiled by the state and federal bureaus of investigation.

Currently, the most prevalent crimes are property crimes, Anderson said.

“Burglaries and larcenies are what’s driving any increase in crime (statistics) right now. We’re having a tremendous problem with burglaries in apartments and duplexes,” the chief said.

The economic recession is probably a contributing factor in the increase in property crimes, he said. Stolen electronic items, including televisions and video game consoles, can be turned over on the street within 24 hours, Anderson said.

Greenville officers are aggressively addressing local property crimes, Anderson said. He referred guests to Thursday’s story in The Daily Reflector about the arrest of Willie James Lloyd, 26, who was arrested last week in connection with more than 50 break-ins in Greenville. He also mentioned the July 31 arrest of Travis Payton, 21, in connection with more than 61 incidents of car break-ins.

“Both of those arrests are the direct result of aggressive response plans by our investigators who address crime issues as they come up,” Anderson said.

The chief stressed that he does not want people to dismiss the fact that crime is a problem for Greenville, consistent with other cities its size.

“Crime is a primary issue. We have to continue to control it as best we can,” he said.

City Council member Rose Glover praised the police department’s efforts and Anderson’s policing plan as a sensible scientific approach to fighting crime.

“Public safety is and must always be the first concern of city government,” Glover said.

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What's ahead: Consider implications of city ordinances

Friday, August 28, 2009

After more than four hours of intense and occasionally testy debate, the Greenville City Council instructed staff to develop ordinances based on four initiatives, all with the goal of helping to curb crime downtown. Members acted without haste or impulsiveness, despite growing pressure for firm steps that improve public safety.

However, the ideas advanced by Monday’s meeting, if approved by the council, could radically change the heart of the city, a commercial district that would not be served by excessively costly obligations. That may be what citizens desire, but it is an important discussion the city must have in the coming weeks.

The July 31 shooting deaths of two men on a Fifth Street sidewalk were not the first incidents of violent crime in downtown Greenville, but the public responded with uncommon anger and outrage. Citizens expected action, and the City Council, working with the Greenville Police Department, responded with an increased officer presence and new traffic patterns to bolster public safety.

Those measures came as a result of meetings between city leaders, police officials and business owners, but were imposed as a stop-gap measure, not a long-term solution. They have received favorable reviews from downtown patrons who appreciate the increased safety, but most citizens would agree that these actions do not represent the broad-based crime-fighting strategy the city needs.

In search of more lasting effect, the council’s meeting on Monday invited the public to offer its view of crime and public safety. The council also discussed several proposals that would have lasting implications for the downtown area. Four of these were assigned to city staff for development into ordinances for consideration.

The council has done no harm in making this request, and the proposals should be evaluated once members have them in hand. Collectively, however, these ideas have the potential to dramatically change the downtown area by requiring off-duty law enforcement officers in every bar and nightclub and changing the zoning laws that govern that district.

That may be what a majority of citizens and the council want for Greenville. They may feel the funds devoted to public safety downtown could be better used elsewhere, and that the nighttime scene is more liability than benefit.

But the council must be very clear about its intention as it moves forward on these issues. The adoption of these measures would have lasting, and possibly irreversible, implications, and should be approached with careful and open deliberation in the coming weeks.

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COX
NC Sen. Hagan willing to consider health co-ops

The Associated Press

Thursday, August 27, 2009

RALEIGH, N.C. — North Carolina Sen. Kay Hagan said Thursday she is willing to consider health care co-ops as an alternative to a government-backed public option, signaling that she’s receptive to some of the same compromises as her GOP counterpart.

Hagan said in an interview with The Associated Press that she continues to support a plan to provide a government alternative to private insurance. But the freshman Democrat said a co-op may also have benefits, noting that it could be more agile if offered on a state or regional level.

"The states can respond quicker to citizens versus, in many cases, the federal government," Hagan said. "So I would be open to looking at a co-op plan."

The comments could prove a source of middle ground for Hagan and fellow North Carolina Sen. Richard Burr, a Republican who has adamantly opposed to more government involvement in health care. Burr has also said that he would consider a co-op plan, so long as it covers all Americans, stresses prevention and doesn’t increase taxes.

Both lawmakers stressed that they haven’t seen any specific proposals on what the co-op plans would look like. The plans are generally designed as nonprofit, member-run systems for providing insurance.

The White House has pushed for a government-run health insurance option, but the administration seemed to back off the idea in recent weeks, suggesting that it wasn’t the key component of the overhaul.

Hagan continued Thursday to promote the government-backed public option that she voted for in her health committee before returning to North Carolina for the August recess. She wants it to come with a variety of other changes: incentives to get students into primary care, rules to prevent insurance companies from denying coverage for those with pre-existing conditions, a focus on wellness and prevention, and the adoption of electronic medical records.

She insisted that the private market would remain vibrant despite the newfound competition. She has insisted that any government-backed option have the same solvency rules so that private insurers can still keep pace.

"If I know the marketplace, the market is going to figure this out," she said. "That’s why I’ve never been in support of a single-payer system. I don’t think we ought to put private industry out of business. I strongly believe in competition and a strong market."

Aug 27, 2009 - 2:33 p.m. EDT

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Audit: Mary Easley highly overpaid

State Auditor Beth Wood releases an interim report she calls unreliable. The investigator disagrees.

BY JAY PRICE, Staff Writer

RALEIGH - The $170,000 salary that N.C. State University paid former state first lady Mary Easley until it fired her this summer was $91,000 too high, according to a never-completed -- and much speculated-upon -- state audit.

State Auditor Beth A. Wood took the unusual step of releasing an interim version of the investigation report Thursday to counter charges that she was trying to suppress it for political reasons. Wood, like Easley, is a Democrat, and the investigation was started by her Republican predecessor Les Merritt, who didn't have time to finish it before leaving office.

"I don't know you'll ever convince partisan folks out there one way or another, but the bottom line is, it had too many holes in it," Wood said during a news conference.

The salary and how Mary Easley won the job have become part of wide-ranging state and federal investigations into perks given to former Gov. Mike Easley and his family. Wood's office has twice been subpoenaed by a federal grand jury, and she said she had shared the report with investigators.

Wood said the report was too poorly done to be credible and "should not be relied upon for any purpose."

Easley's salary probably was too high, Wood said, but the proper amount was somewhere between her salary and the $79,000 recommended in the report.

She said she had halted work on it temporarily on the advice of Frank Perry, a former FBI agent who was then her director of investigations. Typically the auditor's office suspends work when federal or state criminal investigations begin, Wood said.

Wood said that after she reviewed the preliminary report in March, she wanted investigators to do more but that they didn't want to and that Perry recommended putting an investigation on a back burner at least temporarily.

Perry, who now works with Merritt at a nonprofit foundation they started to investigate public corruption, issued a statement after Wood's news conference saying that he had been unaware of the federal investigation and that he and his investigators had urged Wood to release their findings.

"It became clear to me and others investigating the case that, for reasons only known to her, Ms. Wood was not inclined to release the investigative report," Perry wrote. "She recommended that either a new investigative approach be taken or that the matter be closed unsubstantiated.
In spite of the fact that I made it clear that I did not consider the matter 'unsubstantiated' and that our investigative team considered the report to be complete and accurate, Ms. Wood made it clear she would not release the report as it stood."

Perry wrote that the report's findings seemed to be substantiated "given that four people, including the former NCSU chancellor and the former first lady, have resigned or been fired as a result of the allegations received and investigated" during the inquiry.

Wood said that focusing solely on Easley's salary was probably a mistake and that the investigation should also have looked at more serious questions, such as the role political connections played in getting Easley the job.

Wood's office may restart the audit once the federal investigation is over, but she said it's unclear whether that would be responsible given that Easley has been fired. Wood said she'll face criticism in any event. If she doesn't finish the investigation, people will say she's covering something up; if she does finish it, they'll say she's wasting money investigating a defunct job.

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Family sues Duke over worker's death

BY ANNE BLYTHE, staff writer

DURHAM - The family of a master steamfitter killed last year at Duke University when a steam pipe ruptured at the Levine Science Research Center filed suit this week in federal court, seeking funeral expenses and other financial damages from Duke.

Rayford "Wiley" Cofer died May 14, 2008, while adjusting a steam valve in the basement of the animal lab building after co-workers on an upper floor worked on a gasket.

Cofer, an employee at Duke since 2000, had opened a valve in the basement of the building "about four turns," according to the lawsuit, "approximately one inch," when a water hammer erupted.

Steam and hot splashes of water filled the room. "The heat was so intense," the lawsuit said, "that credit cards inside [Cofer's] wallet and other personal belongings on his body melted."

Water in the basement hallway was so hot it burned through the boots of a co-worker who tried to rescue Cofer.

After temperatures cooled enough for rescue workers to get into the equipment room, they found Cofer's lifeless body about 5 feet from the door, face up with his arms pointed in front of him, straight in the air, the lawsuit said.

"A fireman at the scene described him as 'frozen in time,'" the lawsuit said.

In the 34-page complaint, Suzanne Cofer, the widow, accuses Duke of knowingly operating a "defective and inherently dangerous steam system." The suit alleges that Cofer and others at Duke had complained about system problems for years, but the university refused to spend the money required to make it better.

The complaint says Duke refused to turn the steam system off for any extensive time because "any shutdown for more than 24 hours" was too inconvenient and costly for a major university, and specifically, a "state of the art" research facility that was contained inside the Life Science Research Center building.

Duke administrators dispute claims that the university hid important information and caused the accident. They plan to fight the suit.

"Ray Cofer's death was a tragedy for the Duke community, and we join his family and friends in their grief," Michael Schoenfeld, vice president for public affairs and government relations, said in a prepared statement. "We now understand that his death was an accident that Duke itself could not have wholly prevented."

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SAT scores climb in county schools

On the whole, they still remain below state, U.S. averages

By BETTY MITCHELL GRAY
Staff Writer

Published: Friday, August 28, 2009 2:21 AM EDT

Two reports released this week on the performance of public high-school students in Beaufort County contained a mixed bag of results for local schools.

Beaufort County student performance on the SAT in 2009 rose slightly, bucking national and state trends. But local scores continue to fall below national and state averages, according to a recent report from the College Board.

"Overall, Beaufort County SAT scores have maintained a gradual increase over the past three years. Of course, we are pleased with those numbers. Now, the challenge will be to analyze the scores to see how to maintain improvement and identify specific areas needing attention," said Sarah Hodges, public information officer for Beaufort County Schools. "Our definition of success in this arena will include increasing the number of students taking the SATs and the overall scores for each school."

Also, the four-year graduation rate from three of four public schools in the county fell below the state average, according to a report recently released by Beaufort County Schools.

Beaufort County's average SAT score was 983 in 2009, three points higher than the average in 2008 and 11 points higher than the average in 2007.

At 1016 — 490 in critical reading and 526 in math — the average combined SAT score at Northside High School was the only score above the state average, according to the College Board report.

The average combined SAT score at Southside High School was 992 — 473 in critical reading and 519 in math; the average combined SAT score at Washington High School was 970 — 481 in critical reading and 489 in math, according to the College Board report.

North Carolina's average score is 1006 — 455 in critical reading and 511 in mathematics. The national average score is 1016 — 501 in critical reading and 515 in mathematics.

These test scores are based on the most recent SAT taken by public- and private-school graduating seniors in 2009.

Although the SAT report focuses on all students in public and private schools, the performance of public schools remained the same in 2009 and, in fact, the math score for public school students in North Carolina was one point higher than the nation's, according to the College Board report.

Participation by Beaufort County students fell slightly from previous years, according to the report. Forty-one percent of students took the SAT in 2009 as compared with 47.1 percent in 2008 and 52.9 percent in 2007.

Participation by North Carolina students remained high at 63 percent, where the SAT is not a required test but is taken by college-bound students. Nationally, the SAT participation rate is 46 percent.

The number of Beaufort County test-takers was 166 in 2009, down from 179 in 2008 and 203 in 2007. The number of test-takers in North Carolina was 57,147 in 2009, a 1.2 percent increase over 2008. By comparison, the number of SAT takers in the nation increased by 0.7 percent.

In addition to reading and math, the SAT includes a writing component, although that component is not commonly reported as part of the combined SAT scores. The writing component has been included in the test since 2006.

Beaufort County's average writing component score was 460, 20 points below the North Carolina average and 33 points below the national average score. Since writing component's inception, the writing-test results have remained fairly constant at the county, state and national levels.

The SAT is one of the college-admissions tests widely accepted and required by colleges and universities and the one most commonly taken in North Carolina. Of entering freshmen at East Carolina University in 2008, 75 percent scored at least 920 on the SAT; at N.C. State University, 75 percent scored at least 1080; at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 75 percent scored at least 1210 on the SAT; at Duke University, 75 percent scored at least 1340, according to the North Carolina SAT report.
Four-year graduation rates from Beaufort County schools varied widely by school, according to a report given at a meeting of the Beaufort County Board of Education earlier this week.

Northside High School also scored best on four-year graduation rates, according to the report. Of 115 ninth-grade students entering Northside High School, 95, or 82.78 percent graduated in four years. However, its four-year graduation rate fell from 76.85 percent in 2008.

Northside High School was the only public school in Beaufort County to top the statewide average four-year graduation rate of 71.4 percent, according to the report.

Southside High School had the largest drop in graduation rates of public schools in Beaufort County from 2008. In 2009, 86 of 159, or 54.06 percent, of students entering the ninth grade graduated in four years. In 2008, 66.15 percent graduated in four years, the report said.

Washington High School scored the largest gain in graduation rates from 2008. In 2009, 196 of 297, or 66.02 percent, of students entering the ninth grade graduated in four years. In 2008, 58.63 percent graduated in four years, the report said.

At the Beaufort County Ed Tech School, seven of 19 students graduated in 2009 for a graduation rate of 36.84 percent. This was the first year of information on graduation rates at the school, according to the report.

The four-year graduation rates were included in the 2008-2009 Performance Report presented by Patrick Abele, executive director for learning services, to the school board on Monday.
Nuclear drive a casualty of Iran's turmoil

Experts say Tehran is unlikely to speed up its program, giving the U.S. and its allies more time to work with.

By Borzou Daragahi

August 28, 2009

Reporting from Beirut

Iran’s political crisis could prevent the nation from making any swift move to ratchet up its nuclear program, said analysts and officials, giving President Obama and Western allies more time to grapple with the issue.

The chaos over the disputed reelection of hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad brings into question who calls the shots in Tehran, and what any deal with the Islamic Republic involving its nuclear program would look like.

The Obama administration, concerned that Tehran is seeking to amass the materials needed to manufacture nuclear weapons, set an informal deadline of September for Iran to respond positively to an offer to discuss the matter rather than risk new economic sanctions.

"The infighting in Tehran has sent up a smoke screen that further confuses the picture from the outside, and the picture was plenty opaque to begin with," said a U.S. official in Washington who is involved in formulating nuclear policy and spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the issue.

Tehran has long insisted that its nuclear research program is meant solely to provide electricity for its growing population. Its production of reactor-grade uranium has become a source of national pride, the atomic symbol emblazoned on the back of Iran's 50,000-rial bills.

But most Western arms-control experts believe Iran is trying to achieve the ability to quickly manufacture a nuclear bomb. And Iran continues to defy United Nations Security Council resolutions demanding that it stop producing the enriched uranium, material that, if further refined, could be turned into the fissile material for a bomb.

The International Atomic Energy Agency, or IAEA, is set to take up its latest quarterly status report on Iran's nuclear program in early September.

In recent weeks, Iran granted IAEA inspectors access to a heavy-water reactor and parts of the country's enrichment facility after previously barring them. The move suggests an effort by Tehran to ease pressure on itself and on its most likely supporters at the Security Council -- Russia and China -- before
any new talks on sanctions.

Although Iranian scientists have continued to enrich low-grade uranium during the nation's political crisis, news agencies have reported that Tehran has not taken steps to increase its processing capacity during the last quarter. Experts say that may have more to do with technical quirks than political decisions.

For now, most Iran watchers agree that Tehran will not only be unable to respond positively to the Obama administration's offer of talks, but also is in too much political disarray to make the major decisions necessary to build a nuclear weapon. Such steps would include further enriching its uranium supply to weapons grade, or constructing controversial new facilities for speeding up the process.

"The nuclear dossier has been stalled and is in a stagnant position, with no back or forth moves," said Ahmad Shirzad, an Iranian nuclear scientist and political analyst. "The recent events in Iran put all important decision-making in limbo. The postelection events have not completely unfolded, and Mr. Ahmadinejad has not come to a conclusion what to do."

Iran's 20-year foray into nuclear technology has long benefited from a broad consensus among the nation's political elites, or at least acquiescence by foes of the program. Important institutions such as the Expediency Council, led by Ayatollah Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani; the presidency; the Supreme National Security Council and parliament, along with supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, have played a role in the program's creation and sustenance.

Conservative Ahmadinejad likes to take credit for Iran's recent nuclear progress. But Tehran actually relaunched its dormant program under the 1980s premiership of his primary rival, Mir-Hossein Mousavi, and the first breakthroughs on enrichment came during the presidency of Ahmadinejad's reformist predecessor, Mohammad Khatami.

"Nuclear policy has not changed regardless of the domestic problems, as the nuclear policy, like any other strategic policy, was predetermined more than two decades ago," said Ali Khorram, a former Iranian diplomat based in Tehran.

Since the disputed June election, Iran's feuding factions have been preoccupied with political infighting. Rafsanjani skipped Ahmadinejad's inauguration and the president skipped a session of the Expediency Council. At a ceremony honoring the new judiciary chief, who is a conservative rival to Ahmadinejad, the president arrived an hour late and left in haste after delivering a blistering speech calling on the jurist to go after those he termed elitists, alluding to Rafsanjani.

Within Iran's treacherous domestic political arena, any sign of weakness, or of bowing to the West, either by slowing Tehran's missile program or suspending the production of reactor-grade uranium, could be used by rivals to pounce, political analysts say. Therefore, it is likely that the current program, in which reactor-grade nuclear material is processed by at least 5,000 spinning centrifuges, will keep moving forward at its current pace.

"The nuclear program is a touchstone issue for the entire government," said the U.S. official. "No one on either side of the current controversy is going to risk his credibility by even suggesting a change in posture or a substantive pause."
Iran's political hard-liners have made dramatic moves during previous periods of domestic discord. Such measures as stoning women or questioning the Holocaust provoked an international reaction that unified squabbling domestic factions and silenced critics.

But because of the extent of the current political feuding and the stakes involved, experts say, it is unlikely that Tehran will make a dramatic move toward constructing a nuclear weapon.

"It will be hard to get an approval by all concerned," said Jalil Roshandel, an Iran expert at East Carolina University.

Moreover, he said, continued public support of Ahmadinejad's nuclear policies is no longer a given.

"Public opinion is divided, dispersed or, at best, indifferent," he said.

A "breakout" move on the nuclear issue risks not only public scorn, but also tighter sanctions, an embargo on sales of refined petroleum to Tehran or even armed conflict.

Iran's rulers may not want to risk testing the loyalty of an already volatile and angry populace.

"We must remember that the nuclear program is a means to an end," said Meir Javedanfar, an Iran expert based in Tel Aviv. "Khamenei would not sacrifice his regime over it."

Anger over Ahmadinejad's domestic policies has already emboldened figures close to the opposition to speak out more forcefully against his approach on the nuclear issue.

"The Iranian authorities should know what they should expect if they do not enter the negotiations seriously and do not adhere to the repeated resolutions of the Security Council on the suspension of the uranium enrichment program," warned a commentary in the reformist newspaper Mardom Salari.

Internal paralysis, international isolation and stagnant oil prices, analysts say, could work dramatically in the West's favor, giving Tehran the incentive to make a quick deal with the West in order to concentrate on shoring up domestic stability and its faltering economy.

"So far, since the election, Iran seems to be a bit more flexible than before," said Anoush Ehteshami, a professor of international relations at Durham University in Britain.

"Given the current political climate at home, it makes sense to try to contain the nuclear crisis for as long as possible."

But some warn that any deal with Iran's current government would strengthen its legitimacy, betraying an election protest movement that has captured the world's imagination and challenged decades-old ideas about Iran's political realities.

"The Iranian people will never forget if Western liberalism and the international community abandons the Iranian nation's struggle for freedom," said Reza Kaviani, a Tehran-based analyst and opposition supporter.

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