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Our Views

Seven years

Preserve Sept. 11 for remembrance

Seven years ago, 19 hijackers, using crude weapons and basic flight training, seized control of four commercial aircraft intending to crash them into cherished American landmarks of economic, political and military strength. Three succeeded, one failed and nearly 3,000 people died in an event that profoundly altered the course of this nation.

America's response to this tragedy will be debated, with justification given some severe missteps taken in the name of national security. However, on Sept. 11, setting aside the cause of politics affords time for reflection and remembrance, a fitting tribute to the men and women killed on that horrific day.

Though seven years have passed, the terrifying images of the attacks remain fresh for most Americans. Millions saw United Flight 175 smash into the South Tower of the World Trade Center on live television, the clear declaration that the United States was under attack. They can readily recall the black smoke belching from the towers and their eventual collapse into the streets of Manhattan.

The American landscape still bears the scars. They are visible in New York City, of course, where the absence of the Twin Towers still marks the familiar skyline, and in Washington, which today dedicates a memorial to those killed in the Pentagon. But they are also seen in this community, in places like Pitt-Greenville Airport, where the security screenings are a standard part of air travel.

Sufficient time has passed to allow the pre-Sept. 11 memories to seem distant, foreign, strange. Americans talk easily of things like waterboarding or terrorist watch lists because they have become the familiar vocabulary of this new era. That process will only accelerate. A child born on Sept. 11, 2001, is now in first or second grade and thousands of East Carolina University freshmen were 11 years old when the terrorists struck.

That gives rise to fear that this date will lose the significance it deservedly commands. A dwindling number of Americans can recall the shock and anguish of the Pearl Harbor attacks, and Sept. 11 threatens to be eventually regarded in a similar fashion, as a relic of history.

Let that not be the case so soon.

For the thousands of American families who lost a loved one that terrible day — or who have given a loved one to the cause of war in the years since — the country must preserve this memory.

For the thousands of American families who lost a loved one that terrible day — or who have given a loved one to the cause of war in the years since — the country must preserve this memory. It must recall those killed and injured and wish for comfort and healing.

Let the political debates rage tomorrow. Today is a day for remembrance.
Chancellor's words bias investigation

Dr. Steve Ballard's comments to the press concerning the use of force at Saturday's game indicate that he has already concluded that the officers are guilty. This is a great disservice to the officer in question and East Carolina University Police Department Chief Scott Shelton, who is trying to conduct an impartial investigation.

The facts are not in yet. Ballard's comments make it more difficult for Shelton to conduct an unbiased investigation. Ballard owes the deputies and Shelton a retraction and an apology. One more thing: I find it hard to believe that Ballard finds this more shocking than a female being choked in her dormitory or a student being shot just off campus. Lighten up on the rhetoric and stop jumping to conclusions before the facts are in.

STAN KITTRELL
Belhaven
A football beating

It's a long, long way from America's major urban centers, where complaints of police brutality are common, to Dowdy-Ficklen Stadium at East Carolina University. Yet videotapes of a couple of law officers there manhandling ECU fans, replayed frequently after last Saturday's football game in Greenville, have a disturbing familiarity.

True, there are no beatings with batons. But here's a law officer winding up and body-slamming a fan into the turf. Here's another whaling away with his fist, three times, at someone on the ground.

Fans who complained about excessive force after spectators rushed the field following the upset win over West Virginia found their complaints echoed by campus officials. Campus Police Chief Scott Shelton termed some of the videotape images "sickening."

At midweek, authorities were still sorting out who did what to whom, what the provocations might have been and which agencies the officers represented (security was provided by a mix of ECU police and area officers hired for the occasion). Chancellor Steve Ballard promised a thorough investigation and accountability for those responsible.

That pledge should help in the short run. Longer term, and starting with its next home game on Sept. 27, ECU and its resurgent football program will have to devise a more effective plan for handling postgame celebrations.

Students storming the field is as American as apple pie, but can indeed be risky for those caught in the crush of an excited crowd. People can be hurt jumping from the stands or climbing onto goalposts. Some stadium layouts lend themselves to walling off the field better than others. At all sports venues, having carefully stated and clearly understood postgame policies is the name of the game for safety.

That, and minimal common sense from the security force. It's troubling to wonder what the offending officers (among dozens on duty) were thinking when they abused fans before tens of thousands of people and who knows how many cameras.
UNC board should boldly address illegal immigrant issue

BY ERIC JOHNSON

As the leaders of the UNC System gather in Chapel Hill today, they know that hours of complex policy discussions are likely to boil down to a handful of controversial headlines.

Instead of graduation rates and research grants, the focus will inevitably turn to Mary Easley’s $79,700 pay raise and disbelief that it took four years for anyone to notice that N.C. Central University was running a branch campus in Atlanta.

For a Board of Governors that likes to operate by quiet consensus, all of the critical attention will no doubt be uncomfortable.

But this week’s controversies pale in comparison to a landmine issue buried deep within the system’s heavily researched and much-publicized UNC Tomorrow report, which system leaders have called their blueprint for the future.

Long before the state’s community colleges ignited a firestorm by closing the door to illegal immigrants, the university system began to consider widening access for those very students.

Tucked into the UNC Tomorrow report — in its longest, most carefully worded recommendation — is the suggestion that the state not only allow undocumented immigrants into college classrooms, but also consider subsidizing them.

The university should examine "whether and under what circumstances, if any, undocumented students who graduate from North Carolina high schools and who are academically qualified for admission to a UNC institution should be charged in-state tuition," the report says.

UNFORTUNATELY, THAT CALL FOR A REASONABLE EXAMINATION OF A COMPLEX ISSUE was published in December, just in time to be eclipsed by the political shouting match over community college access for undocumented immigrants.

Any chance a serious public debate about the fate of students brought to this country illegally was obliterated in the overheated rhetoric of politicians competing for the toughest stand against lawbreaking aliens.

The UNC System called for a long-term analysis of the costs and benefits of a more open policy; Republican gubernatorial candidate Pat McCrory repeatedly denounced illegal immigrants as an unfair burden on schools.

University officials wanted to study the legal issues surrounding college access; Democratic gubernatorial candidate Bev Perdue called for an immediate ban on undocumented immigrants in public colleges.

The fact that both candidates are united in short-circuiting a real policy discussion about these students is all the more tragic when you consider the context.

A vanishingly small number of high-achieving young people have been turned into political punching bags in the national fight over a broken immigration system.

These students are being made to suffer not only for the sins of their own fathers and mothers, who chose to bring them here illegally, but also for the sins of a political class that refuses to engage this problem on its merits.

North Carolina taxpayers will spend more than $20 million this year to award in-state tuition for any nonresident student who wins a full scholarship. That means that if you’re a good enough basketball player, a talented enough writer or a brilliant enough mathematician, the state will chip in tens of thousands of dollars to make you an honorary Tar Heel and reduce the cost of your education.

But for many who grew up in North Carolina, coming of age in difficult neighborhoods and households where English was most often a second language, the struggle to graduate from high school and earn a spot in one of the state’s distinguished public universities is not enough to impress our political leaders. Not in an election year.

So this week, as the focus once again turns to fleeting controversies at the expense of far-reaching policies, you can bet that UNC officials are getting the message. It will be a long time before North Carolina students — documented and not — get the debate they deserve.

Eric Johnson has been a reporter and editor at The Daily Tar Heel, the UNC-Chapel Hill student newspaper, and is now the paper’s public editor.
Former state senator dies

J.J. Harrington, 89, called ‘Monk’

BY ROB CHRISTENSEN

Former state Sen. J.J. “Monk” Harrington, one of the last of North Carolina’s rural political barons and host of a legendary deer hunt, died Wednesday.

Harrington, 89, of Bertie County, who served in the state Senate from 1963 to 1988, was a fixture in Tar Heel politics for three decades. He was known as a champion for Eastern North Carolina in the legislature and a connoisseur of pigtail soup and other Southern delicacies back home.

“Monk was a giant of a man in the Senate,” said former Gov. Jim Hunt. “He was a great big man physically. He was a big man in his influence and friendliness in the state Senate. He was always deeply devoted to his county and to his community and the whole of northeastern North Carolina.”

Harrington may have been best known for the annual deer hunts he held in his lodge — one of the last of the state’s rural political traditions that included the Rat

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Killing in Pitt County and the Ramp Festival in the mountains, where governor wannabes would prove they were not stuffed shirts by eating venison stew, drinking bourbon or eating smelly wild onions.

Every December, Harrington would host hundreds of lawmakers, lobbyists and candidates at his Bertie County lodge. The menu one year included 38 deer hams, four bushels of sweet potatoes, 15 bushels of oysters, 60 pounds of barbecued pork, 30 pounds of beans, a pickup truck load of collards, and copious amounts of whiskey. Cigars and chewing tobacco were not frowned upon.

“You had to prove that you weren’t wedded to culture,” said former Secretary of State Rufus Edmisten. “You don’t go down there and act like you are from New York City. If you didn’t hunt, you ate what they hunted.”

If one missed a deer, there would be a ceremonial cutting off of the errant hunter’s shirttail.

“I lost a shirttail to a brand new shirt,” Hunt recalled. “My wife never forgave me for that.”

Hunt was one of a number of big-name politicians who made the pilgrimage, including former Gov. Terry Sanford, former Gov. Bob Scott, former Sen. Robert Morgan and countless lawmakers.

“You’d think it was a special session of the legislature,” quipped state Sen. A.B. Swindell of Nash County, a family friend.

Harrington got his nickname as a child when he visited a moonshine still and sampled a homemade alcoholic concoction called monkey run. He played minor league baseball in Mississippi.

He took over the family farm implements business, providing equipment for peanut, cotton and tobacco farmers. Years later, a fellow legislator, state Rep. Ron Taylor, went to prison for torching two of Harrington’s buildings in a business dispute.

As a lawmaker, Harrington was a man of few words. He worked behind the scenes for East Carolina University, for agriculture, for hunting and fishing laws, and for roads. There is a bridge on N.C. 11 over the Roanoke River named for him. Rising to become Senate president pro tem, he was regarded as a moderate conservative.

“I don’t have much to say on the Senate floor,” Harrington once observed. “But I never lost a battle on it. When I want something, I know how to get it. I’ve always been a behind-the-scenes man.”

When he did speak, his speech evoked the colonial cadences common among Albemarle natives.

Everyone chuckled at the incongruous site of such a big man carrying his toy poodle, Pierre, around the legislature.

Harrington was a white legislator in a black-majority county, and with the passage of the Voting Rights Act, his days were numbered. In the face of certain defeat, Harrington retired in 1988, giving up his seat to Frank Balance, an African-American.

Harrington lobbied in Raleigh after leaving the legislature but spent most of his time back home in Bertie County.

“This used to be one beautiful wood,” Harrington once told a reporter. “Good deer country and good land.”

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Office Depot overcharged state, report concludes

Overpayment of $300,000 made, auditor's office says

MARK JOHNSON
STAFF WRITER

Office Depot overcharged state agencies by nearly $300,000 for office supplies last year, according to a state auditor's report released Wednesday.

The embarrassing overpayment comes two years after an administrative law judge ruled that the state was paying Office Depot too much through its new contract. N.C. Department of Administration officials rebid the contract but still ended up giving it to Office Depot.

State officials said in the report Wednesday that they have recovered $294,000 in overpayments and are overhauling their bid system for the supplies contract. Purchasing Officer James Staton also said Office Depot agreed not to collect on $500,000 in undercharges for other supplies.

The report by State Auditor Les Merritt's office said Office Depot inflated prices on its store brand products and failed to offer the lowest available price, among other violations of the contract.

Staton responded that Office Depot erred but not in some of the ways identified by the audit. He said Office Depot applied incorrect prices or insufficient discounts on thousands of products. He also defended the overall contract as offering "excellent discounts" and having "saved the taxpayers millions of dollars each year."

But on Wednesday afternoon, Secretary of Administration Britt Cobb issued a statement saying he has asked the State Bureau of Investigation to determine whether a criminal probe should be launched into the pricing practices of Office Depot.

Office Depot spokesman claimed to comment Wednesday, saying company officials were still reviewing the audit.

A lawyer for a competing office supply firm said the Office Depot problems were clear two years ago. Colorado-based Corporate Express sued the state in 2006 when it offered the lowest bid for providing office supplies, but the state chose Office Depot.

An administrative law judge ruled that the department improperly awarded the contract and could have saved $1.8 million by choosing Corporate Express. The department opted to rebid the contract and again awarded it to Office Depot, though at a lower price.

The judge in that case also criticized Accenture, the consulting firm hired by the state to set up the contract selection process. Accenture failed to disclose that Office Depot was one of its clients. Office Depot paid Accenture $30 million during the preceding three years for software and merchandising help.

"The problems identified in the 2008 auditor's report were predictable given the evidence established in the 2006 bid protest," said Hampton Dellinger, Corporate Express' lawyer in its suit. "It is critical that the next office supplies contract be awarded to a vendor who can deliver — not just promise — the best value for state taxpayers."

Staton said in Wednesday's report that his office identified the overcharging before the auditor's office stepped in and considered terminating the contract.

"The net result is no harm to the taxpayers," Staton wrote. He also said the state is implementing many of the safeguards that the auditor's report suggests and is changing the bid solicitation process.

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Duke disputes claims by Giuliani’s son

BY ANNE BLYTHE

STAFF WRITER

DURHAM — Duke University took a swing Wednesday at Andrew Giuliani, the son of former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani and a former member of the golf team.

University lawyers filed dozens of pages of documents disputing claims Giuliani made in his attempts to make a federal case against the school and the coach who kicked him off the golf team.

Giuliani claimed that O.D. Vincent, head of the Blue Devils team since June 2007, trumped up misconduct allegations against him.

Giuliani also claimed that as a high school recruit, he was promised lifetime access to Duke’s state-of-the-art training facilities if he enrolled at the university.

In their Wednesday filings, Duke lawyers disputed that claim.

“There is no such contract,” the Sept. 10 filing says. “Put simply, Giuliani had no right to play varsity golf; he had an opportunity for the privilege to be part of a team, one... that he squandered through his own conduct.”

Giuliani, an aspiring pro golfer since high school, was not a scholarship athlete. As a member of the golf team, he played in six tournaments. His top finish was a tie for 36th.

His conduct became a problem this year, according to the court documents. He flipped a putter, broke a driver, gunned his car engine in a golf course parking lot and threw an apple in the face of one of his teammates.

His coach suspended him, and, on April 9, according to documents in the suit, five teammates sent a message to Giuliani saying they wanted him off the team.

Duke, according to court filings, has a grievance process for student-athletes who think they have been wronged.

“Having failed to convince his coach or his teammates that he should return to the team, Giuliani and his family next appealed to Duke’s athletic administration,” court documents said.

Chris Kennedy, acting as Duke’s interim athletic director, met with Giuliani and six of his teammates, the filings show.

Duke’s general counsel stepped in once Giuliani and his parents indicated they had obtained a lawyer.

“Indeed, through his lawyer, Giuliani demanded not only reinstatement to the team, but also guaranteed playing time,” Duke’s lawyers said in the filings. “He also demanded that any future coaching decisions about him be pre-approved by ‘a designee within the general counsel’s office.’ ”

Giuliani bypassed the final step of the grievance process and filed suit in federal court July 24.

Efforts to reach Giuliani and his attorney, Robert Ekstrand, were unsuccessful.

Duke asked that claims against the university be dismissed and any outstanding issues go to a jury trial.

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