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ECU’s Williams faces assault charges, suspension

BY MICHAEL ABRAMOWITZ
The Daily Reflector

East Carolina University sophomore running back Jonathan Williams, 20, has been charged with two counts of assault with a deadly weapon in connection with a Sunday incident, police said at a Wednesday news conference.

GPD Cpl. Kip Gaskins said at the news conference that a 20-year-old man and a 19-year-old woman told police at Pitt County Memorial Hospi- tal that Williams, of 318-I Haven Drive, hit them with a beer bottle. They said the incident occurred outside an apartment in North Campus Crossing in northern Greenville about 1:14 a.m. Sunday.

According to Gaskins, Douglas Robert Edwards, 20, and Bailey Hattem, 19, both of Greenville, told police they were attempting to go back into a party at the apartment complex when approached by four men.

He said the two told police that one of the men hit Edwards in the neck and Hattem in the arm with a beer bottle, and that one of the victims recognized the man as Williams from his days as a J.H. Rose football player.

Police secured warrants for Williams who turned himself in to authorities at 6:15 p.m. Tuesday at the Pitt County Detention Center, accompanied by a lawyer. Police arrested him at the jail, charged him with the two misdemeanor counts and released him on a $2,500 unsecured bond.

Wednesday’s information prompted confirmation from Tom McClellan, ECU sports information director, that Williams is suspended indefinitely from the team.

McClellan referred to head coach Skip Holtz’ statement that football players “will be held accountable for their actions on and off the field. Any player charged with a crime will not represent ECU in any manner until cleared to do so by university and athletic department administrators.”

Holtz declined further comment on the matter.

“At this point it’s the same,” Holtz said following Wednesday night’s practice. “When it changes from that release, I’ll inform everybody. It’s not a day-to-day matter.”

Holtz said the Williams situation has not been a distraction yet for the team, which is off this weekend before traveling to play Central Florida next weekend in Orlando.

Holtz said he did not address the matter with the team for fear of distraction.

“I don’t want it to be an ongoing saga day to day,” Holtz said. “It’s just like if he were to be injured. You close ranks and you’ve got to move on. I hate to say that, but that’s where we are right now. This is more about this team and not John individually.”

Williams, the team’s leading rusher, was not at practice on Thursday. Moments before Sunday’s assault on Edwards and Hattem, four men approached 20-year-old Tyler James Kelly of Washington, N.C., outside the same apartment, Gaskins said. Kelly told police the man grabbed him, he attempted to defend himself and was struck several times on the head with a beer bottle until the bottle broke, Gaskins said.

Edwards was unable to identify his assailant and no charges have been filed in that incident, police said today.

Edwards and Hattem took Kelly to PCMH, where all three were treated for injuries. Kelly received 30 stitches in his head, Hattem suffered a bruised shoulder and Edwards was treated for minor injuries, Gaskins said.

An investigation continues. The suspects were described as black men, about 5 feet 8 inches tall with dreadlocks.

The latest charge is in addition to an Oct. 5 arrest reported in connection with a disciplinary review under way by the Pirate football team. Williams also has been charged with resisting a public officer in connection with that incident, police said. He was at a home when police responded to a report of a domestic dispute, an investigator said.

Williams was told to sit down and stay out of the way when officers arrived but did not follow instructions, the investigator said.

That incident also remains under investigation. ECU officials would not say if their disciplinary review was related to the Oct. 5 incident or Sunday’s incident.

Williams also was charged in April for driving while impaired and underage drinking. According to court reports, Williams was released on $1,000 bond following his Oct. 5 arrest.

Anyone with information about Sunday’s assault can call CrimeStoppers, which is offering a reward up to $5,000, at 758-7777.

Nathan Summers contributed to this story.

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ARREST
Continued from A1
Hospital’s income tops projections by $7 million

PCMH expects to hire 80 new registered nurses and several hundred new employees in the next year.

BY TOM MARINE
The Daily Reflector

In the midst of a slumping housing market and a rising unemployment rate, the local economy may be getting a lift from one of its largest industries — the regional hospital.

Pitt County Memorial Hospital ended its 2008 fiscal year earning an income of $37 million from operations and investments, about $7 million above what was projected. In total, PCMH received about $772 million in operating revenues while spending roughly $741 million on operating expenses. In addition to the medical services provided by the hospital, its greatest value could be investing back into the area through jobs and other financial contributions, said PCMH President Steve Lawler.

"I think the exciting piece — and this is something that people are thinking about now because of the current trends in the economy — is this organization plays a vital role in the economic success of our community," Lawler said. "When we have a good year and we are able to invest those dollars and things that add value back to patients and add value back to the community, that is a good thing."

Diane Poole, executive vice president of PCMH, said the higher than projected income for the 2008 fiscal year can be attributed to an increased demand from patients.

"We have had a lot of demand for the services that are offered at PCMH," Poole said. "(The staff members) have worked very hard to accommodate that increased demand by getting the patients the services they need as quickly as possible."

Once the East Carolina Heart Institute opens in January, the number of inpatient beds at PCMH will be 861, about 100 more than now.

Because of the new facility, the hospital will hire 80 new registered nurses and

See PCMH, B3

PCMH
Continued from B1

several hundred new employees throughout the next year. PCMH already had increased its workforce to more than 5,500 full-time positions during the last fiscal year, an addition of nearly 90 positions, according to a PCMH press release.

Lawler said adding these new beds will help staff better serve the region, referencing the many months when 100 to 150 patients are not admitted because the hospital is full.

"Creating this new capacity is going to help us do a better job addressing that need and be a better partner for physicians and hospitals in the region," he said.

As a private, nonprofit organization, PCMH will use its extra income to fund capital-related items and projects, such as renovations or purchasing new equipment.

David Hughes, PCMH chief financial officer, said a certain amount of the hospital's costs are fixed, regardless of patient load, so treating more people allows costs to be spread, and lowering the cost of care to individual patients.

"I would say our normal capital equipment, our normal renovations — we probably spend $50 million a year just on our normal capital-related items that we do not have debt finance, that we have to internally generate enough funds to cover," said Hughes, referring to new cardiac catheterization labs, new CT Scanners, new MRIs and upgrading the hospital's information system. "The last two years, we've spent over $200 million just at PCMH alone on capital-related items."

Lawler says good patient care and strong employees are keys to sustaining the success of the last fiscal year.

"If we are going to be leaders in quality in patient safety and be leaders in service and look for opportunities to grow our business, when there is an economic downturn we can't shrink our way to greatness," Lawler said.

Contact Tom Marine at tmarine@coxnc.com or (252) 329-9567.
First task: Fill N.C. budget hole

Whoever is elected governor could face a gap of $2 billion – a tenth of the budget.

BY BENJAMIN NOIET
STAFF WRITER

RALEIGH - The first crisis to face the next governor is already here. Even as the inauguration parties wind down, the new governor will have to confront a sobering reality: The state budget will have a hole in it that could be as wide as $2 billion. That’s 10 percent of the state’s current $21.4 billion budget.

The candidates are short on specifics in how they would deal with such a shortfall. But Democrat Beverly Perdue and Republican Pat McCrory say they would not favor raising taxes.

The economy has slowed and tax revenue has started to dip. Forecasters say the extent of the problem won’t be clear until next year. So far, the portents are bad, said state Rep. Jim Crawford, an Oxford Democrat. Crawford has been writing budgets for 22 years. He said he’s never seen it this bad, and said the next governor will have a tough enough time assembling a balanced budget without trying to push through signature programs.

“I love hearing all these people talking about all these programs they’re going to put out there and how much they’re going to spend on this, that and the other,” Crawford said. “I wonder where it’s all going to come from.”

Perdue and McCrory said in interviews this week that they wouldn’t wait until they are sworn in to tackle the problem. They both said they would convene expert panels to identify cuts and efficiencies in state government. They said they would prefer targeted cuts to across-the-board slashing. McCrory and Perdue agree on something else: New BUDGET
CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1A

taxes would be a mistake.

“I don’t believe that you can raise taxes in an economy with folks struggling the way they are,” Perdue said.

McCrory said, “The last thing I want to do is tax people who are losing their businesses right now. The economy is in a terrible downturn. Who are we going to tax?”

Libertarian candidate Mike Mungar, chairman of the political science department at Duke University, said he would favor across-the-board cuts and that he wouldn’t push for a tax increase, but that it may be necessary given the size of the shortfall.

Cutting already

The legislature has typically fallen back on a combination of spending cuts and tax increases. In 2001 lawmakers fought over how to cope with a shortfall that eventually swelled to $850 million. After a long fight, lawmakers eventually approved budget cuts and tax increases.

The governor recommends a budget, but he or she needs the legislature to adopt it. Unlike the federal government, North Carolina’s constitution requires the budget to be balanced.

Gov. Mike Easley, a Democrat, has already ordered state agencies to hold back 2 percent of their spending. Easley said he doesn’t want the next governor to inherit a budget shortfall as he did.

Crawford said declining revenue tells only half the story. He said he believes tax revenue will be down a billion dollars or more. But the state will also see an additional billion in expenses such as bonuses promised for teachers whose students excel on the state’s testing and accountability program, and the cost of new students enrolling in the state’s schools. The costs for Medicaid, the government’s health insurance program for the poor, is always more expensive than the year before.

Job cuts in state government may be necessary, Crawford said. “The problem is those things feed on each other,” Crawford said. “If you lay people off, you’ve got consumers who don’t have any money. It’s a bad situation.”

Convene the experts

McCrory and Perdue would not provide specifics on what cuts they would consider.

McCrory said that if elected, he would convene experts from in and out of government to help him find a way to cut. McCrory, in his seventh term as Charlotte’s mayor, said he hasn’t studied the
FROM NO. 2

How would the candidates for lieutenant governor address the projected budget shortfall?

WALTER DALTON
State senator, Democrat
“We faced that when I first became budget chair, ... The first thing you do, you don't wait until next year. You do what the governor is doing, which is asking agencies to hold back an amount of money. ... I don't think anybody can responsibly say right now what they need to cut or not. You need to start that analysis. The main thing is not to panic. Measure twice and cut once.”

ROBERT PITTENGER
Former state senator, Republican
“I would assure that fiscal reforms that I've tried to get enacted or heard are debated and voted on and not ruled out of order or ruled not germane. ... I think you can start at Medicaid fraud. There is anywhere from $300 million to $600 million savings in Medicaid fraud. ... You put a freeze on hiring. ... You do an across-the-board cut in spending. ... And the one thing that they've continued to do is eliminate or not add new auditors. ... We have a very mismanaged, undisciplined government that's replete with waste and a bloated government.”

State's current budget.
“We're going to have to, at a minimum, decrease the increase in spending and most likely have some serious cuts in other areas,” McCrory said. “I believe in prioritizing more strategic cuts and prioritizing where the needs are, versus where we have to cut.”

Some of McCrory's signature issues, such as government reform and offshore drilling for oil, would not require expensive programs. Others, such as efforts to combat gang activity, could cost.

Charlotte has an annual budget of roughly $1.8 billion, and McCrory said that after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the city took a huge hit to its hotel and motel tax, a major source of revenue. McCrory said the city canceled some contracts, delayed capital projects and took other measures to cope.

Perdue, in her second term as lieutenant governor, said that even before the inauguration in January she would assemble a panel to recommend budget reforms. Since the primary, Perdue has pitched the idea of a budget reform commission. The commission would be modeled after a federal body that recommended how to close and realign military bases. She said the group could quickly devise ways to reduce spending. She said the state has a rainy-day fund of nearly $850 million, and she said she would use that money to keep her priorities intact.

“My goal would be to hold the classroom and teachers and kids as harmless as possible,” she said. “After that, you have to be a realist and do what you have to do to make the budget balanced.”

Some of Perdue's promises, such as a plan to offer free community college to certain high school graduates, and a plan to expand health care coverage for children, would require new spending.

Perdue was one of the senate's chief budget writers in 1999 when Hurricane Floyd hit the state. Then-Gov. Jim Hunt called a special session to find money for hurricane relief. Perdue takes credit for finding cuts to pay for the $836 million package.

“We did it without having to raise taxes a plug nickel,” Perdue said.

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College Board Will Offer a New Test Next Fall

By SARA RIMER

Amid growing challenges to its role as the pre-eminent force in college admissions, the College Board on Wednesday unveiled a new test that it said would help prepare eighth graders for rigorous high school courses and college.

The test, which will be available to schools next fall, is intended only for assessment and instructional purposes and has nothing to do with college admissions, College Board officials said.

“This is not at all a pre-pre-pre SAT,” Lee Jones, a College Board vice president, said at a news conference. “It’s a diagnostic tool to provide information about students’ strengths and weaknesses.”

The College Board, which owns the SAT and PSAT, made its announcement when an increasing percentage of high school students are taking the rival ACT and amid mounting concern over what critics call the misuses of the SAT and ACT and other standardized tests in college admissions.

Those critics dismissed the new test for eighth graders as just what Dr. Jones said it was not: “a pre-pre-pre SAT.”

“Who needs yet another pre-college standardized exam when there is already a pre-SAT and the SAT test itself?” said Robert Schaeffer, the public education director of FairTest, a nonpartisan group that has called for colleges and universities to make standardized tests optional for admissions. “The new test will only accelerate the college admissions arms race and push it down onto ever younger children.”

The new test, called ReadiStep, can be completed within two hours and is divided into three multiple-choice sections of critical reading, writing skills and mathematics.

It will cost less than $10 per student, College Board officials said, and schools and districts will pay for it. College Board officials described the test as voluntary and “low-stakes,” and said the results would be shared only with teachers, parents, students and schools.

Gaston Caperton, the president of the College Board, said the new test had been developed in response to the demand from schools and districts, which he said had requested a “tool that would help them determine
before high school what measures should be taken to ensure that students are on the path to being college ready.”

Mr. Caperton and other officials refused to identify any of the schools and districts that had requested the test. They said that they had done market research in “well over 1,000 schools and districts,” and that “well over 50 percent” of them had expressed strong interest in the new test.

Officials offered to provide the names of educators from interested schools and districts, and subsequently made available two people: Susan Rusk, the coordinator of counseling for the Washoe County School District in Reno, Nev., and James R. Choike, a professor of mathematics at Oklahoma State University.

Mrs. Rusk is on the College Board’s board of trustees, and Dr. Choike helped develop ReadiStep.

The Washoe County School District made the PSAT mandatory for all 10th graders a couple of years ago, Mrs. Rusk said, and pays for students to take the test.

She said she thought the new test could inform parents and teachers about whether “kids are on track with the particular skills they would need as they go forward into taking the PSAT and SAT and being ready for college.”

John D’Auria, a former principal of Wellesley Middle School, in suburban Boston, and now the superintendent of schools in Canton, Mass., said that with all the testing currently in place, he was skeptical about the need for the College Board’s new offering.

“It’s all about sorting and finding out who the talented are,” Mr. D’Auria said, “rather than trying to build into young kids the lifelong journey of learning.”
EDUCATION
A Frosh New Start.
College gets warm and fuzzy for the Harry Potter generation

BY JENINNE LEE-ST. JOHN/ NASHVILLE

If you've ever seen a new England boarding school or a Harry Potter film, you can picture the scene in Nashvillen: an idyllic campus with kindly professors who head the dorms, a dining hall that's a social hub and a living room, interhouse rivalries and organized activities galore. But if you're thinking high school, think just a little bit higher: this is the Commons at Vanderbilt University, a brand-new campus within a campus to house the entire class of 2012, 10 professors and its own Dumbleore-like dean. The school spent $350 million and a decade creating this community, designed to help 1,570 first-years get acclimated to college life. And the Commons is just the most holistic example of something that more and more turning into High School 2.0?

As higher education adjusts to the needs of 21st century students, schools are trying to borrow from the campus culture of yore, when college kids spent evenings analyzing poetry in professors' quarters. Research indicates that students are more likely to be satisfied with school and become campus leaders if they spend time with faculty. Which is why the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville created Core Connections, which lets mostly freshmen opt to live in two dorms where attendance at faculty-planned events is required. The University of Maine now makes all frosh live together in dorms with new support networks. Ditto for Holy Cross in Worcester, Mass., where first-years are also encouraged to go on hikes with the pros who lead their freshman seminars and to debate them at town meetings.

Vanderbilt tries to make palling around with teachers the norm, believing that even casual exchanges with faculty can broaden kids' academic and social perspectives. As dean of the Commons, Frank Wcislo has films and forums in his living room, a.k.a. Wcislo's Salon. The 10 pros who live in the Commons' dorms host similar extracurriculars, and 55 others have agreed to come hang out with frosh. But amid all this bonding with authority figures, there's a risk that some students won't learn independence. "A very small percentage of students see me as a father figure, but I try to discourage that," says sociologist Tony Brown, who opens his dorm apartment on Friday evenings for rap sessions, using bath like cookies, Wii Tennis and his pet rabbit. "At move-in, I can't tell you how many parents said to me, 'Oh, good, you're an adult. Please take care of my kid!' But this was sold to us as an academic endeavor."

The school knows, though, that today's parents are more involved with their college-age children than those of a decade ago, and it tries to accommodate, within reason. During orientation, staff members put photos online almost in real time so family can keep an eye on their kids. "You don't want to just push helicopter parents away entirely," says Angela Cottrell, associate director of residential education. Even undergrad residential advisers like sophomore Deno Saclarides do some parental hand-holding. After a call from the mother of one of his freshman advisees, Saclarides says, "I wrote on his door, 'Sweetie, I haven't heard from you in a while. Call Mom.'"

Recent chats with students in the Commons suggest that the Hogwarts-like haven is off to a good start. Many welcomed the adult attention and said they were less homesick than their friends at other schools. A few were grateful to be able to take baby steps into college. "We're all here in one place so we can be cheesy and lame together," says first-year Meryem Dede. Some freshmen, though, complain they're being deprived of role models closer to their age. "I feel disconnected from upperclassmen," says Cole Garrett.

Corraling frosh makes it easier to prevent their dropping out or becoming misfits. But if you make freshman year one big group hug, will kids be unprepared for the wilds of second year? Maybe. And yet some colleges have concluded that the way to deal with the problems potentially caused by coddling is to do even more of it. That's one reason the University of Maine is developing a program to help combat the sophomore slump by building on what first-years learned in Froshireville. Vanderbilt has a $1.75 billion capital campaign to turn all the rest of its dorms into neighborhoods where some 5,000 upperclassmen and their professors can live and eat together. "Twenty years ago, there was no talk of retention. It was just about getting kids in the door," says Michael McLendon, who teaches public policy and higher education at Vanderbilt. "Now we want to make sure their education is social." Let the study break begin.

'We're all here in one place so we can be cheesy and lame together.'
— MERYEM DEDE, FIRST-YEAR STUDENT AT VANDERBILT