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Pulling for Friday

Bill Friday is resting up. It is an uncommon state of things for the president emeritus of the University of North Carolina system, a man beloved by many across the state for his legacy of leadership and his gracious manner. In fact, he’s been a dynamo for decades — he is 88 years old — and has continued to work four days a week in “retirement.”

But a recent mild heart attack has Friday resting at home for a month or so, perhaps looking at cutting back a little. He’s been on call to several generations of North Carolina leaders, and to former students and to ordinary folks who just admire him. There is no corner of North Carolina where he is not known, and precious few he has not visited.

His pace of work has been an inspiration to many, and the example he set has been admirably followed by a host of university presidents and chancellors over the years, many of them recommended for their positions by Friday. His influence, after all, has gone far beyond the borders of North Carolina. All the way, in fact, to several White House administrations.

Even a day after his illness struck, his phone was still ringing for counsel from a variety of people. And he was giving it, as always modestly, from his home in Chapel Hill. But the cards and letters are coming as well from grateful students and their parents who appreciate his leadership and his friendship.

He will of course soon return to his office on the Chapel Hill campus, with the same remarkable physical and mental vigor that has amazed those who’ve known him well all these years. A merry and mending Christmas to this great friend of the state.