

# Opinions

## Coverage of third parties insufficient



**Kevin Rollins**  
Columnist

This year, the members of the Libertarian, Reform, Green, Natural Law and Constitution parties, as well as supporters of independents, have been called everything from crazies-on-the-fringe to the destroyers of America because our votes might cause the "greater of the two evils" to be elected. I don't see a greater of two evils.

I see one evil — the Washington elite that has no interest in democracy or fair play. It is an entrenched force that profits from its position, and uses that profit to entrench itself further. It is comprised of the media, government officials, elected politicians and the giant machines of the Republican and Democratic parties.

Harry Browne, Pat Buchanan, Ralph Nader, John Hagelin and Howard Philips were branded from the start as insignificant. At the beginning of the year, the media companies surveyed the contenders and found out that each of these candidates had far less people who planned on voting for them than either the Republican or the Democrat. Obviously, because they didn't have any support at the beginning of the year, they couldn't possibly have more by Election Day.

The media scrupulously ignored these candidates. The media made its prediction and used its power to hide these candidates from the view of the American people. They engineered a self-fulfilling prophecy. Sure, they would occasionally make a reference to the sidshow of Buchanan vs. Nader, but this was mainly to remark on how the pair affected the race between Bush and Gore.

Nobody really wants to vote for these guys. They are just voting against the one they like less. And the media has the audacity to tell us that voting for Browne, Buchanan, Nader, Hagelin and Philips is a wasted vote.

Endless hours of programming had analysts picking apart the carbon-copy platforms of Gush and Bore, divining their change in mood from day to day, and remarking on their clothing choices. Coverage of third parties was always subject to being preempted, should the Bush and Gore campaigns make the most insignificant announcements. A Republican or Democrat flunky was always of more interest to the press than a third-party candidate or party convention.

The major networks did cover the Reform Party convention. The Reform Party's raucous fracture and subsequent split was fodder for their preconceived notion that third parties

will never be successful. Apparently, a successful convention should be totally scripted, involve no party decisions, and have party leaders telling their delegates when to cheer and when to shut up.

When it was time for the presidential debates, exclusion raised its ugly head once again. The Commission on Presidential Debates set an insurmountable bar that a candidate must have at least 15 percent of the popular support in five selected polls to be invited. Since the third-party candidates had not been covered by the media, they did not manage to reach this point. No matter how many times the parable of Jesse Ventura and his 10 percent before the Minnesota debates was told, the Republican-and-Democrat-controlled commission kept saying no.

"He won," we would tell them. "We don't care," they replied. Ralph Nader wasn't even allowed to watch.

If the third party candidates weren't threatening, why were Bush and Gore so afraid to debate them? The room temperature of sixty-five degrees was decided upon, and Bush and Gore debated. Without any unexpected challenges or tough questions, the debates were trite little affairs. No real differences were uncovered. Some people decided they hated Bush more and some people decided they hated Gore more.

I really like Harry Browne. He represents what I believe. Neither Bush nor Gore comes close. Is it worthwhile to vote for something I don't want?

If you want to see any change in Washington, don't vote for one of the two Demopublican half-men. A vote for them is an endorsement of the system. It is the acquiescence to all the nonsense that the media has been pouring on us all year long.

The status-quo politicians read the polls to find out what they need to support. Please don't read the polls when it comes to your vote. Vote for what you believe. If you believe Harry Browne or Pat Buchanan is your man, pull the lever for him. If your game is more along the lines of Ralph Nader, John Hagelin or Howard Philips, write in one of them.

It doesn't matter if Ralph Nader's write-in votes won't be counted by the State Board of Elections. It doesn't matter that Buchanan might hurt Bush. It doesn't matter if Harry Browne disrupts their little election. It is our election. Let's fight for what we want, not for what they tell us we can have.

## Bond referendum needed for North Carolina higher education progress



**SGA Student Government Association**  
**Ryan Southern**  
SGA columnist

Complain, complain, complain — is this what we are all about here at UNCA? Do we just whine and moan about the things that we don't have and the things that are wrong with our university? You think it's bad now, but if the Higher Education Improvement Bonds don't pass on Nov. 7, you haven't seen anything yet. This is why passing the bonds are a must for the University of North Carolina system and for UNCA.

Many others and I clearly see the need for these bonds to pass to ensure the future of not only our own institution, but the higher-education standard that exemplifies our state's university system.

Yet, time and time again, I have heard misinformed and ignorant responses to the bonds. Selfish comments like, "Why should I vote for it? I'll never see anything from it," have filled my ears more than once. The constraining arms of good political conduct and my own moral beliefs have kept these people from getting a big smack.

It's unfortunate that these poorly-informed individuals don't realize that the facilities that they enjoy now (i.e. Health and Fitness Center, parking deck, etc.) are a result of the foresight of individuals many years ago who saw the importance of high-quality facilities. They made the sacrifice to provide these comforts to us now and many of them never got a chance to see the completed projects. Now it's our turn to give back.

As many people as we, Student Government and the bond committee at UNCA have reached and informed, I feel as though there are many of you out there who still have questions, and are unsure of how to vote on these bonds that you have heard of. I'm here to clear up any rumors and put your mind at ease on this incredible and historic issue by giving you some frequently asked questions and their answers.

**Q:** If approved by voters in November, how will the \$3.1 billion bond issue be used?

**A:** The bonds will upgrade every state and community college campus. Bonds will provide \$2.5 billion for repair, renovation and construction of classrooms, science and technology labs and dorms at all 16 UNC campuses, and will finance federally-mandated upgrades at UNC-TV. Another \$600 million will go towards upgrading capacity at all 59 community college institutions.

**Q:** Exactly what will the money go for?

**A:** The state Legislature has passed a law with a specific list of projects for university improvements and you can see that list at [www.uncbuildings.org](http://www.uncbuildings.org). At community colleges, there is a formula that determines exactly how much each campus will get, and you can look at that formula on the N.C. community college web site, [www.ncccs.cc.nc.us](http://www.ncccs.cc.nc.us). As far as UNCA goes, there are numerous projects that will be funded by the bonds. To see this list, please visit the UNCA homepage ([www.unca.edu](http://www.unca.edu)) and click on the higher education bonds link at the

top of the page.

**Q:** When will the bond funds be spent, and when will they be repaid?

**A:** The bonds will be issued over a six-year period beginning in 2001, in amounts (regulated by law) that will enable community college and university campuses to manage the construction and renovation efficiently, while minimizing disruption for students. The bonds will be repaid over a 25 year period, allowing the state to pay for the buildings as they are used—just like a mortgage on your home.

**Q:** Will there be any oversight of this spending and construction?

**A:** Yes. The General Assembly has created a Higher Education Bond Oversight Committee, which will monitor progress on the capital plans and receive regular reports and updates from the university, the community colleges, the State Treasurer, and the Office of State Construction. To ensure that the construction program is carried out in the timely manner expected by the General Assembly, the Committee will advise relevant agencies and make recommendations on the timing and uses of bond issuances.

In addition, the bond legislation specifies the amount of bond funding that will flow to each university campus and to each community college. For each university campus, the legislation further details the level of bond funding intended for every building project listed in the act. Thus, voters will know precisely how the \$3.1 billion bond issue will be distributed and used.

**Q:** Isn't this a large amount of debt for the state to carry?

**A:** No. North Carolina's current debt is one of the lowest in the nation. Even after all currently authorized debt is issued, including the university and community college bonds, the state's level of debt will be relatively low. Analysts project that between now and 2025, the state's annual required debt-service payment would exceed 3 percent of the state's General Fund budget in only three years [2004-05, 3.1 percent; 2005-06, 3.2 percent; and 2006-07, 3.3 percent].

Financial experts consider any amount under 5 percent to be conservative to moderate debt. State Treasurer Harlan Boyles supports the issuance of these bonds as a sound investment in valuable assets owned by the citizens of North Carolina.

**Q:** Will my taxes need to go up to pay for the bonds?

**A:** No. While no one can predict whether taxes will go up for other reasons, State Treasurer Harlan Boyles and many other state leaders have plainly stated that the state will be able to repay these bonds without the need to raise taxes.

**Q:** Will tuition and student fees go up to pay for the bonds?

**A:** No. Tuition and general student fees will not be used to repay the university and community college bonds. As it has always done, the university will continue to use designated fees to support construction and upkeep of certain student facilities. For example, rental fees paid by students living in campus residence halls help pay for the con-

struction and maintenance of these buildings.

**Q:** Doesn't the state already provide funds to pay for building construction and renovation on university campuses?

**A:** University buildings belong to the state, and the General Assembly is the primary source of new building and renovation funds for the university. Still, over the past 75 years, the university has generated about 40 percent of all construction dollars spent from its own resources.

Because of the General Assembly's historic pay-as-you-go approach to capital financing, the state's record on providing funds for university construction has been both erratic and inadequate, based on whether there was money left over after all operating needs have been met. This bond issue would provide a reliable stream of capital funding to meet enrollment growth, and would also enable the university to address the huge backlog of repair and renovation needs that has accumulated over many decades.

**Q:** Aren't the counties responsible for constructing and maintaining community college buildings?

**A:** Community college buildings do belong to the counties that sponsor them, and counties historically have been the principal source of funding for their construction and maintenance. Over the years, however, many community colleges have received special legislative appropriations for capital, and the entire community college system benefited from a 1993 statewide bond issue.

Given shifting economies, many local governments, particularly rural and "low-wealth" counties, have found it increasingly difficult to keep their campuses up-to-date without supplemental state assistance. In fact, about 40 percent of the total capital investment in the community college system has come from state funds.

The proposed 2000 bond issue would require many local governments to partially match funds targeted for new community college buildings. This matching requirement has been reduced or waived for low-wealth counties and eliminated for counties that have exceeded historic match requirements. There is no matching requirement for repair and renovation projects. Thus, the use of bond funds will permit expansion and renovation without the need to raise property taxes.

**Q:** Are the historically black university campuses getting their fair share of the bond funding?

**A:** Yes. While the consultant's findings and recommendations were based on actual needs as opposed to a pre-determined formula, on a per-student basis or other comparisons, the university's five historically black campuses will receive an equitable share of the bond proceeds. Moreover, since the black campuses, along with other smaller campuses, have less ability to generate their own funds for campus projects such as dormitories and similar student facilities, a much higher proportion of their identified five-year capital needs will be funded through the bonds than is the case with larger campuses.

**Q:** How did university and community college buildings get in a condition that requires such a large investment in repairs and renovations?

**A:** University buildings have been constructed over two centuries, and as they age, facilities inevitably become outdated or require building system repairs. Over the years, the university has regularly requested

state appropriations to carry out needed repairs and renovations, but the General Assembly's ability or willingness to provide such funds has come nowhere close to meeting the documented need. Only since 1993 has the state provided a steady source of funds for the routine upkeep of state buildings, including university buildings. Also, many older university buildings are no longer suited for their original purposes.

Nothing short of a major retrofit can adapt 1940s laboratories to accommodate 21st-century uses, for example. Consider the case of Hines Hall at North Carolina A&T, a 50-year-old chemistry building that is dilapidated, overcrowded, and lacks air conditioning and proper ventilation. Even if it were restored to pristine 1950 condition, this building would be completely inadequate for modern-day chemistry instruction.

Similarly, the Community College System is almost 40 years old, and many campus facilities are even older. Many community college buildings have undergone little or no renovation since they were first constructed, due to limited local resources.

**Q:** How can we be sure that our state-owned buildings won't fall into disrepair in the future?

**A:** While the Reserve for Repair and Renovations, established in 1993 to provide annual funds for the routine upkeep of state-owned buildings, is an excellent program, it can't begin to eliminate the university's backlog of renovation needs that accumulated over many years prior to 1993. Furthermore, it only works when it is funded. The bond issue will address this backlog, helping the state get and remain current on preserving its university assets.

**Q:** What happens to the community colleges and the university if this bond issue doesn't pass?

**A:** Access to a community college or university education will be significantly restricted, and the demonstrated economic benefits derived from our fine community college and university systems will be limited.

By law, community colleges maintain an "open door" policy, with space for everybody who can and wants to learn. If voters reject this bond issue, many colleges will be forced to turn people away who need to gain technical skills, prepare for further higher education, or earn high school credentials. The most dramatic impact is likely to be in fast-growing industries, which already demand more trained graduates than community colleges have room to produce.

Similarly, faced with enrollment growth of over 30 percent in the next decade, university campuses will be unable to admit many qualified N.C. students. Some campuses already have had to limit admissions due to lack of space. The university's reputation for excellence in teaching and research gives N.C. a competitive economic advantage, but unless we repair and renew our classrooms, laboratories, and other buildings, that competitive edge will be lost.

Nov. 6 at 11:50 a.m., come to the dining hall and support the bonds at the bond referendum rally sponsored by SGA. We will be the host of several local incumbent legislators of the area, including senators Charles Carter and Steve Metcalf, and representatives Wilma Sherrill, Lanier Cansler and Martin Nesbitt. Please join us in support of this most urgent issue and feel free to contact us with any questions or comments you may have at 251-6587 or [sga@bulldog.unca.edu](mailto:sga@bulldog.unca.edu).

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