

The Daily Tar Heel

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On the Record

State law says people need not provide a reason for requesting public records, but chances are agencies will ask for one.

JULY 8 – The results of a recent test of North Carolina's public-records access law revealed that residents could expect to be denied one-third of the time when requesting a city or county public record.

In addition, the study showed that law-enforcement agencies had a higher refusal rate and often violated state law by asking the requester to identify themselves.

State law explicitly states: "No person requesting to inspect and examine public records, or to obtain copies thereof, shall be required to disclose the purpose or motive for the request."

The investigation was sponsored by the N.C. Press Association and the N.C. Associated Press News Council and involved reporters from across the state who presented themselves as average residents seeking access to records that had been deemed public by the state.

Most county and city agencies complied with the requests and reports stated that some were very pleasant to deal with.

However, reporters ran into the most trouble when requesting records from law-enforcement officials.

Some were pressured into revealing their identity, which is against state law. Others were told that the records were confidential. One reporter was threatened with being put in jail and two others had license-tag checks run on their cars.

This disregard for state law raises real questions when considering the fitness of the men and women that are expected to protect residents' rights.

It is alarming that police officers, sheriff's deputies and, in some cases, sheriffs were not aware of the law or did not care about the law.

It is the equivalent of a speeder arguing to a state trooper that he or she was not aware of the speed limit or did not care, therefore the law does not apply to them.

The result is that government gets stronger and residents are made weaker.

N.C.'s public-access statute was created to provide residents with information about a number of governmental activities.

The statute ensures that individuals moving to new areas can see crime reports from the neighborhood they are moving to.

In addition, the statute makes information available about property taxes, county and city fees and the salaries of officials that were elected by the people.

It is time for law-enforcement and other public servants to realize that just because they tote a badge, carry a gun or hold a high-ranking position they are not above the law.

In our system of government residents are forced to comply with the law whether they agree with it or not. The process provides legal recourse but requires initial compliance.

Law enforcement and public officials should be forced to adhere to the same set of rules.

After being denied access to a pistol-permit application a reporter told Orange County Sheriff Lindy Pendergrass what the public-records access statute stated.

Pendergrass replied to the reporter, "Don't you tell me what the law is. I know what it is. I'm the sheriff."

It is this pervasive attitude that should alarm and outrage residents.

Clearly, the message that a statement like this imparts is that law-enforcement view their role as that of law maker and not law enforcer.

ASHLEY STEPHENSON — EDITORIAL NOTEBOOK

Tradition Lost

The University's recent decision to integrate Old East and Old West residence halls disrespects a healthy tradition at UNC.

MAY 20 – Two hundred and seven years of tradition, community and brotherhood have fallen by the wayside all in the name of equality. The decision to make Old East and Old West residence halls coed starting in fall of 2000, while noble in its goal, will do the University more hurt than help.

If women had gotten the short end of the stick on housing, the change would make more sense. But this is not the case. Female students are not all stuck in cramped rooms far from campus. Instead, women enjoy several residence halls with good locations and spacious rooms with sinks. Women are not denied the opportunity to live in some of the best residence halls this University has to offer.

The issue is not about the oppression of women; it is about honoring the brotherhood of men.

The issue is about showing respect for a longstanding tradition, and there is something to be said for that. Residents of Old East and Old West have likened themselves to a fraternity. This sense of brotherhood will clearly be diluted if half of each residence hall is filled with women. This sort of bonding is what makes these halls so special, perhaps another reason why Old East and Old West house some of the most coveted rooms on campus.

Women do not want to live in Old East and Old West for the honor and prestige. They want the hardwood floors and unbeatable proximity to Franklin Street and cam-

pus. Sure most anybody would jump at the chance to live there, but in the trade-off a timeless sense of nostalgia and an element of UNC's history is destroyed.

But regardless of sentiment against the change, Old East and Old West will open their doors to women in 2000. In the meantime the University needs to tie up the loose ends surrounding the move.

Issues like what floors women will live on and what will happen to current male residents preferring a single-sex hall need to be resolved soon. Important decisions by University administrators at this stage of the game could mean victory for Old East and Old West residents and for women itching to live there.

There is a way to appease the women who think they are missing out on tradition while maintaining the community that exists in the halls. If housing officials required all women to live in one of the halls, as opposed to making each hall half-full of women, everyone would win.

Men would continue to enjoy the sense of community and tradition that exists in the halls, even if it meant only having one hall. Women would be allowed to enjoy the hardwood floors and ideal location while living in a place where history runs deep.

But for 207 years UNC men have shared in the tradition of living in the first residence halls at the oldest state university in the country. It is their tradition. Letting women live there will not make it theirs too.

Chapel Hill, We Have a Problem

Get off the streets. That's right, NASA, we're talking to you.

It's millennium and everyone is talking about the future. When people talk about the future they talk about space. And that is the problem.

People, do you every really think we are going to live in space? Lies. This is what NASA has spoon-fed you since day one. Political what? – propaganda.

Even Hollywood has jumped into the mix. Countless movies focus on either going to space or going there to stop something from space that will kill us all. Don't you see? Armageddon, Independence Day, Deep Impact – what do they all have in common? They are all about something hurdling down from space to destroy our planet.

And NASA continues to tempt the Earth's fate. They keep sending people to the moon time and time again. Astronauts are always building useless contraptions with weird names. We personally consider it sacrilege to use Apollo Creed's name on the side of a spaceship. Honor my ass.

Children are used as a pawn in this societal ploy to embrace space and NASA. All kids are taught to grow up to want to be astronauts. The only kids who escape the ruse are the ones who wear glasses – everyone knows you need to have good vision to go into space.

The ploy is carried even further when NASA created that ridiculous Space Camp. The camp itself is bad enough, but then there was the movie. Kids get shot into space unexpectedly, their leader Kate Capshaw gets knocked out by



ASHLEY STEPHENSON & CARA BRICKMAN
GUEST COLUMNISTS

oxygen tanks, and the teen crew brings the ship down safely all by themselves. Hooray for kids! Hooray for NASA!

Nonsense, we tell you. If it was up to us, Kate Capshaw would never get another movie role after Space Camp ... ever.

Listen up, storkids. There are three good things about space.

One, those satellites floating around bring kids like us sweet, sweet cable.

Second is space ice cream, perhaps the greatest invention since Flowbee.

Three is David Bowie. ...mmm, space oddity. But that is it.

UNC students, we put it to you. The invention of NASA and all its endeavors are part of a political ploy to make all humans live in space because the Earth will blow up at the turn of the century.

You think all these wacky words like millennium and Y2K don't mean something? It's no accident John Glenn went up in space again. NASA wanted to see if old people would survive space, since Florida will also be destroyed

when the Earth detonates.

It all fits together.

The earth is going to explode and, conveniently, NASA will come to our rescue. Oh, we can live on Mars or on a spaceship or on all the other planets that are completely inhabitable for humans. Thanks, NASA. Our heroes, indeed.

Does it disturb no one that we are actually paying NASA to kill us?

Everyone gets all jacked up whenever a shuttle rockets into space. But, that's just because people naturally get excited about any event preceded by a countdown. You could tell someone that he or she has ten seconds to live and they would die happy chanting, "10, 9, 8..."

Let's all go down with our Mother planet. Make a list of things you would like to accomplish before we all go up in smoke.

For instance:

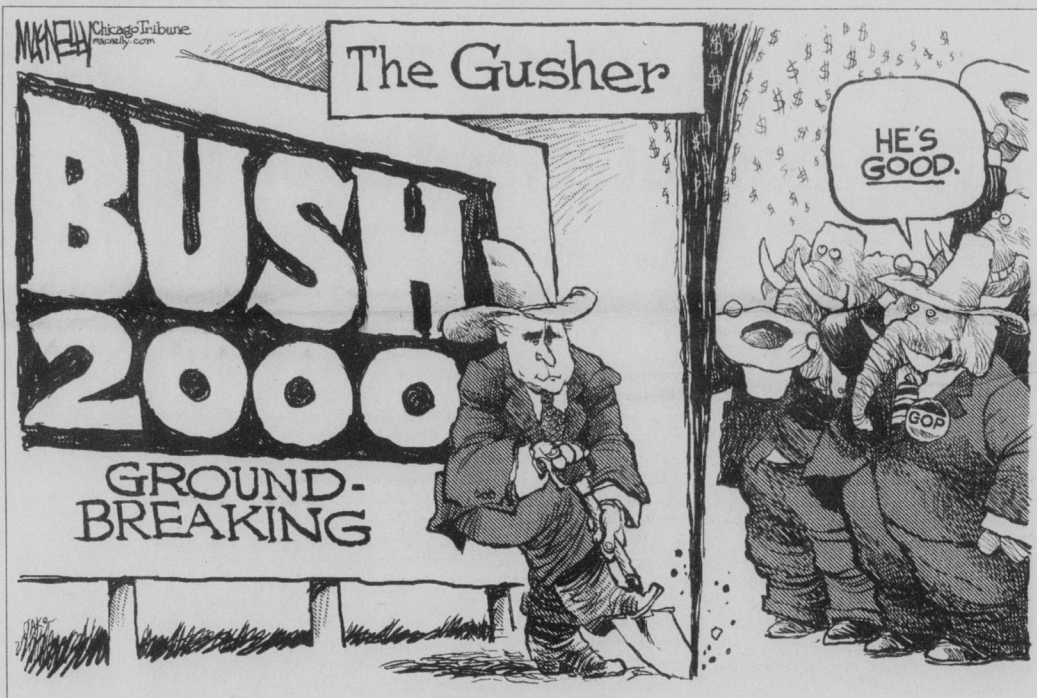
- 1.) Shower
- 2.) Get laid ... twice.
- 3.) Rinse, repeat

Well, that's about it for us, but feel free to establish your own goals.

You can reach for the stars, young buckaroos, but don't go up there and live with them just to escape annihilation.

Mothers, don't let your children grow up to be astronauts. Thank you, good night.

Ashley Stephenson and Cara Brickman are senior journalism and mass communication majors from Charlotte, except Cara, who majors in English and is from Indian Trail. Reach them at ashley21@email.unc.edu. Their reign of terror is over.



READERS' FORUM

N.C. Students Cannot Be 'Let Down' By State Efforts for Bond

TO THE EDITOR:

During the final weeks of the 1999 General Assembly, the staggering capital needs of the University of North Carolina dominated much of the discussion. Legislators in both houses worked diligently to respond to the sobering report that emerged from a comprehensive study delivered to the General Assembly in mid-April as called for in a 1997 special provision—of the condition and adequacy of the capital facilities on the 16 UNC campuses.

Prepared by consultant Eva Klein, the report documented an enormous backlog of deferred maintenance, the pervasive need to replace or retrofit outdated science facilities, and the need for new and renovated buildings to manage unprecedented enrollment growth over the next decade.

As called for by the legislature, the report also included a detailed capital plan to address identified shortcomings. The ten-year tally of documented needs was \$6.9 billion, to be financed through a combination of increased state funding, new University-based funding, and increased private giving.

The House and Senate were unable to agree on a financing approach in this session, but they did reach consensus on two fundamental issues.

First, they came to agreement on the reality of the needs and the imperative to protect the state's capital investment in the University.

Both houses displayed a genuine

desire to help the University, even though they differed sharply on the appropriate size and timing of that support. And second, everyone acknowledged that business as usual—relying on money left over at the end of the session to fund capital projects—could not begin to address problems of this magnitude.

These two important outgrowths of the Klein report give the General Assembly and the University a solid basis for moving forward to find a workable solution.

In light of these widely held conclusions, it is all the more disappointing that the urgent needs of the University were overshadowed by political pressures related to the 2000 elections.

Faced with Klein's findings, State Treasurer Harlan Boyles proposed a financing strategy that would have used non-voted bonds to provide a substantial, immediate infusion of funds to begin implementing the University's capital plan.

The approach was sound, fiscally prudent, and unquestionably within the authority of the General Assembly. But while two-thirds of all public debt in North Carolina is issued without a vote, the political issue of requiring a vote of the people on the proposed UNC bonds—particularly following the failed Wake County school bond referendum and the ensuing threats of negative campaign ads in the May 2000 primaries—polarized this legislature.

All efforts at compromise failed.

We are grateful to Treasurer Boyles for lending his expertise and counsel and for the extraordinary commitment demonstrated by the leadership of both the Senate and the House.

We also are heartened by the countless University supporters throughout North Carolina—trustees, students and parents, alumni, business and community leaders, editorial writers, and others—who in recent days urged legislators not to adjourn without addressing UNC's most critical needs for this two-year budget period.

But in the end, too many legislators could not set aside political differences about long-term financing approaches in order to agree on a short-term solution for the current budget cycle.

As a University and as a state, what do we now say to the middle school and high school students of North Carolina?

They represent the future of this state. They deserve an opportunity to gain an affordable university education that will prepare them for 21st-century jobs.

And without a well-educated work force, how can North Carolina hope to sustain the vigorous economic growth it has enjoyed over the past two decades?

For family after family, a UNC education has provided the ticket to a better life.

Each and every week, I hear these heartfelt accounts in communities all across North Carolina. I hear from students on our campuses—students who are the first in their families to attend a university.

They are full of promise and inspired by the opportunity to attend a UNC institution. This state cannot let them down.

Molly Broad
UNC-System President

The Daily Tar Heel

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