

Elon poll's optimism about social progress requires another look

By Peter Kostin
STAFF WRITER

"It's not easy when your career is with the church and you are a homosexual," said a former resident of the mountains of North Carolina and Guilford student who protected his family by not revealing his name. "It's not easy for my mom to have to live a secret life."

His family split and was forced to leave North Carolina when rumors about her sexual preference became community knowledge.

However, on March 15, a poll released by Elon University, comprised of 620 voters, showed surprisingly liberal opinions about same-sex marriage in North Carolina.

Slightly over half said that they would oppose a constitutional amendment to restrict it.

"I didn't think we'd get over 50 percent," said the poll's director Hunter Bacot. "In North Carolina, we are a southern state and generally more conservative, particularly on these types of issues."

The North Carolina News and Observer, a larger newspaper whose scope spans five counties, made headlines out of the intriguing Elon results. After all, North Carolina did go blue in the '08 elections - the first time since 1976. Poll results could be yet another indicator that the state is slowly ditching its conservative roots.

But compare the optimistic Elon results

to the story of the anonymous resident who was forced to leave the state because of his mother's sexuality. North Carolina's supposed social progress situation seems a little more bleak.

The majority of Guilford students I asked agreed with giving legal recognition to same-sex couples. But most of us know that Guilford is not like the rest of the state - not even like the rest of Greensboro.

Yet I started 15 student interviews with

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questions about Warnersville, NC - the historically black community located within Greensboro itself - a hotbed for civil rights history. Not one person knew it even existed.

"We may think that we are socially progressive at Guilford but we are still in a bubble," said sophomore Marcus Edghill. "Guilford College is faking us into believing that society had changed. But we are still homophobic - we are still racist."

In terms of rights for same-sex couples, North Carolina's constitution has specific language that limits marriage to between "one man and one woman." Also, a closer

look at the Elon poll shows that in fact only 21 percent of those who opposed a gay marriage ban supported giving full rights for same-sex couples.

The national situation is not so bright either. Same-sex couples can receive at most about 400 rights and benefits out of the near 1,500 that heterosexual couples get anywhere in the country. This is even the case in Massachusetts and Connecticut, states that have passed the most liberal gay-rights

legislation in the country.

Carolina). I don't condone that behavior myself," said Public Safety officer Romeo Williams. "My belief about marriage is a religious and realistic one (in terms of procreation). God created Adam and Eve, not Adam and Adam."

Christian perspectives find themselves close to our public policy as well. There are currently bills waiting legislation in North Carolina that would broadly limit the rights of same-sex couples.

"This bill has great meaning to the faith community," said senator Jim Jacumin (R) according to the News and Record. "The amendment will ensure that marriage is that which God designed it to be."

There are no bills which seek to broaden the rights of same-sex couples, despite the liberal consensus around Elon and Guilford College.

The Elon poll's accuracy has been called into question. Pollers were asked if they would vote to "prevent any same sex-marriages," which has been construed as misleading.

"Phrasing it in a negative way probably elicited a stronger response in the negative," said Tami Fitzgerald, a North Carolina attorney.

And it is unlikely for any anti-gay rights bills to pass because North Carolina's Senate leader Mark Bassnight (D) has killed off similar bills in the past.

In terms of gay civil rights legislation in North Carolina, the march is at a standstill.

N.C. unemployment rate rises to record high

By Deena Zaru
SENIOR WRITER

These past few years have been the first in which I have actually made an active effort to remain informed about the economy because like most people, I have been personally affected.

I began watching the news actively, reading articles, asking questions, and best of all, I interned at City A.M., a London-based financial, business and stock market news newspaper.

I learned a lot and I still have a long way to go.

But what did this accomplish?

The economic downturn is still as severe as ever and while there might be some slight improvements, many factors are getting worse.

The North Carolina State Employment Security Commission (ESC) reported on March 27 that North Carolina's unemployment rate increased to 10.7 percent in February from 9.7 percent in January.

In Feb. 2008 the unemployment rate was 5.2 percent.

As a rising senior, who might not be able to afford graduate school yet, this is something to be concerned about. And judging by the rising unemployment all over the country, moving to a different state is not a solution.

According to CNN, North Carolina is one of seven states

with double-digit unemployment. Michigan is on top of the list with 12.1 percent, followed by South Carolina, Rhode Island and California - all with about 10 percent.

In early March, the federal government reported that in February employers cut 651,000 jobs across the country, raising the unemployment rate to 8.1 percent, which is the highest it has been in 25 years.

According to local Raleigh news channel WRAL, North Carolina's unemployment rate has been increasing for the past 13 months. The 10.7 percent breaks the previous

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10.2 state unemployment record of the 1983 recession.

In order to help ease job losses, NC Governor Beverly Perdue decided that the time has come to use NC's "rainy day" funds. According to ABC local news (Chanel 11), "Earlier this year, Governor Beverly Perdue said tapping North Carolina's rainy day fund would be a last option. It appears that time has come."

According to Perdue, using these funds is necessary due

to North Carolina's increasing unemployment rate in light of the worsening nationwide recession.

"The sharp rise in unemployment combined with a significant decrease in state revenue has required me to take certain steps to responsibly manage the state's cash flow," said Perdue.

According to WRAL reports, Perdue hopes that unemployment rates will decline through her \$21 billion budget proposal to retrain workers.

"We all are just hopeful the bleeding will stop soon," said Perdue. "This is hard news for North Carolina, hard news for

the country. We just all hope that sunshine begins soon."

And until then, what can we do? After making an effort to get educated, I realized that while the economic climate is still dreary, I feel more empowered and I am not as scared. I have been able to develop relevant and educated opinions about what needs to be done, what politicians to support and the most valuable of all - how and why is this all happening? President Obama's stimulus

plan will give money to the state Employment Security Commission to help them meet record demand during the recession.

According to WRAL, "N.C. paid out \$212 million in unemployment benefits in February and has started borrowing money from the federal government to cover benefits payments."

"We need help on many levels, simply because we're dealing with an unprecedented capacity issue," said David Clegg, who serves as Deputy Chairman of the Employment Security Commission.

Under the stimulus plan, \$7 billion from the Federal Unemployment Account will be given to states to assist them in paying for unemployment benefits.

Clegg said that North Carolina expects to receive \$205 million, along with \$14.6 million from the Unemployment Insurance Administration's State Grants Program and \$10.9 million from the Employment Service and Re-employment Activity programs that are run by the U.S. Department of Labor.

I have faith in Obama and his plan, but time will tell how effective it will be.

I still might not find a job after I graduate, but I would at least like to know what needs to be done so that we can recover from this Great Recession.

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