

STATE & LOCAL

FORMER GOVERNOR EASLEY ABUSES POWER

Amy Hruby
Staff Writer

The story of Mike and Mary Easley has become the summer political soap opera of choice for reporters across North Carolina. Full of scandalous finances, a seemingly renewed spoils system, and questionable salaries, the acts alleged against the Easleys have become a hot topic among North Carolina press, politicians, and voters. But despite the emails, records, and interviews unearthed by a North Carolina grand jury investigating the Easleys, the events still remained clouded in enough mystery to make this a perfect political drama.

Mike Easley was the governor of North Carolina from 2001-2008. Recent investigations have alleged that during that time he engaged in a series of questionable financial practices concerning campaign fund management, travel financing and property purchases.

The investigation into Mike Easley's finances began when a News and Observer reporter found DMV records that showed that the cars driven by Easley's son and wife (a GMC Yukon and Honda Accord, respectively) were not owned by the Easley family but by car dealerships in Fayetteville and Charlotte, NC.

Further investigation by various reporters into Highway Patrol records led to the discovery that Easley had received undocumented free flights from his Democratic supporters and that flights records for the years 2003-2005 were missing from the Highway Patrol database. A secretary working with the Highway Patrol's governor security detail reported that in 2006, the head of the security detail, Captain Alan Melvin, had asked her to place the records from 2003-2005 on a disk and delete them from the computer to free up space. Melvin denies this accusation but has been placed on leave awaiting further investigation.

Federal investigators have since recovered the 2003 and 2004 records from the Highway Patrol server, but the 2005 records remain missing.

In addition to the missing records, News and Observer reporters have also found that many of the supporters who allowed Easley to use their planes were later appointed to various high-level state positions including, but not limited to, the North Carolina State University (NCSU) Board of Trustees, the NC State Board of Transportation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC-CH) Board of Trustees and the NC Aeronautics Council.

Because many of these flights were originally undisclosed, they often fall into the category of illegal campaign contributions. North Carolina state law allows individuals to contribute no more than \$4000 to any individual during his political term in office, and the unreported flights placed many of Easley's supporters above the \$4000 mark.

Mike Easley's wife, Mary Easley, has also been under investigation recently in relation to her position and salary as "executive in residence" at NCSU. Mary Easley was originally hired by the university in May of 2005 as a lecturer making a salary of \$80,000 per year for a nine month contract. Emails between Governor Easley's office and the office of various NCSU officials showed that Governor Easley aided his wife in getting a job with the university, utilizing university connections such as McQueen Campbell whom Easley had appointed to the NCSU Board of Trustees in 2001 and kept close political and business connections with during his term.

At this time, NCSU was also trying to replace its interim provost, Larry Neilson, with a new, permanent provost. When hired, the interim provost had been told specifically that he would not be a candidate for the permanent position, but on June 3, 2005, a mere eight days after Neilson had hired Mary Easley as a lecturer—an already bold act for

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PUBLIC SCHOOLS LACK FUNDS

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In North Carolina, teachers, and students are suffering. Numerous teaching positions have been eliminated, leaving those teachers and teacher assistants unemployed. According to News14Carolina, the state budget will decrease by \$1 billion this year, leading to 11,000-15,000 job cuts. The News and Observer describes that in Wake County 600 of 1,496 teachers were not asked to renew their contracts. 200 teachers were allowed to remain in Wake County but were forced to transfer schools.

With setbacks in their paychecks, teachers have less supplies for their classrooms and must learn how to make their resources stretch further. For years before this, Anna Hollifield, a third grade teacher of Morganton, NC was once able to purchase folders, paper, crayons, and other classroom supplies with her own money, but with cuts to her paycheck this was not possible.

The budget cuts in schools have led to an increase in the student to teacher ratio. Currently, the NC Education Lottery supports an 18 to 1 student- teacher ratio, according to Bill Harrison, CEO of Public Education. At a Q&A conference with Harrison, sponsored by WRAL, citizens have demanded to know to where funding from the lottery goes since it has not appeared to be a cushion for the current fiscal situation.

Trilby McClammy, President of the PTA of Durham Public Schools expresses her concerns with the increase in classroom size. "History says when you fill up a classroom with kids, it's kind of difficult for the quality of the classroom to be maintained."

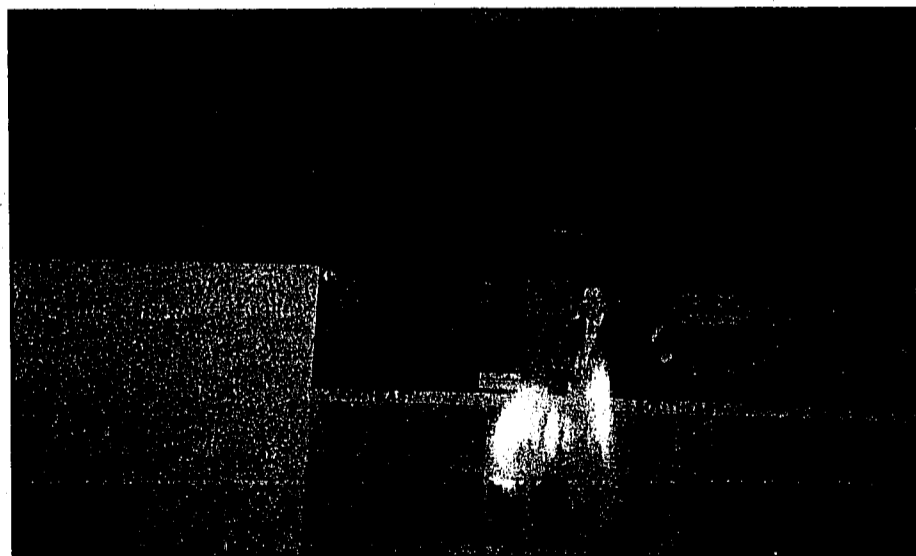


Photo courtesy Ashley Matthews

The superintendent of Wake County Schools announces that classes will more than likely have 30 or more students. "Grading 34 papers as opposed to grading 24 papers is a significant increase in work," said Speer, who taught for 15 years in Buncombe County Schools. "That's just the reality of teaching in the 2009-10 school year."

Another adjustment to the school system is that Wake county schools will be sending students home early on Wednesdays, with the early release ranging from one hour to two and a half hours early. This not only inconveniences parents, but also strains teachers who have required objectives and goals to reach by the time of End of Grade (EOG) testing.

In higher education, budgets are being cut as well. EARN, a schol-

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