

The Daily Tar Heel

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BOARD EDITORIALS

No Free Ride

The Carrboro Board of Aldermen made the wrong move in deciding against looking towards fare-free busing this year.

Get out your bus tokens. Last week, the Carrboro Board of Aldermen essentially nixed any plan to enact a fare-free bus system this year. In an area where traffic and parking are major problems, and where there is a large, receptive market for mass transit due to numerous University students, the move away from making busing fare-free is unwise. Instead of looking into ways of defraying the costs of fare-free busing, the Board proposes to spend \$58,523 to tack on an additional 9,957 hours of bus service through Chapel Hill Transit. The proposal would cover gaps in service occurring during University breaks and add later hours to several key routes. While this plan will benefit nonstudent bus riders who are hurt by reduced service during the summer, it does nothing to solve the long-term traffic woes of the area. When students flock back to the University in August, the same old problems will persist. Roads will be clogged, parking spaces will be at a premium and bus passes will still cost too much money for some people to buy into. Instead of trying to put a Band-Aid on the problem, Carrboro officials should be actively investigating ways to make fare-free bus service a reality instead of simply giving up on it this year. Fare-free busing would encourage more students, as well as staff and faculty, to take advantage of mass transit as an alternative to dealing with the hassle of driving into town. The fewer cars on the road, the easier the

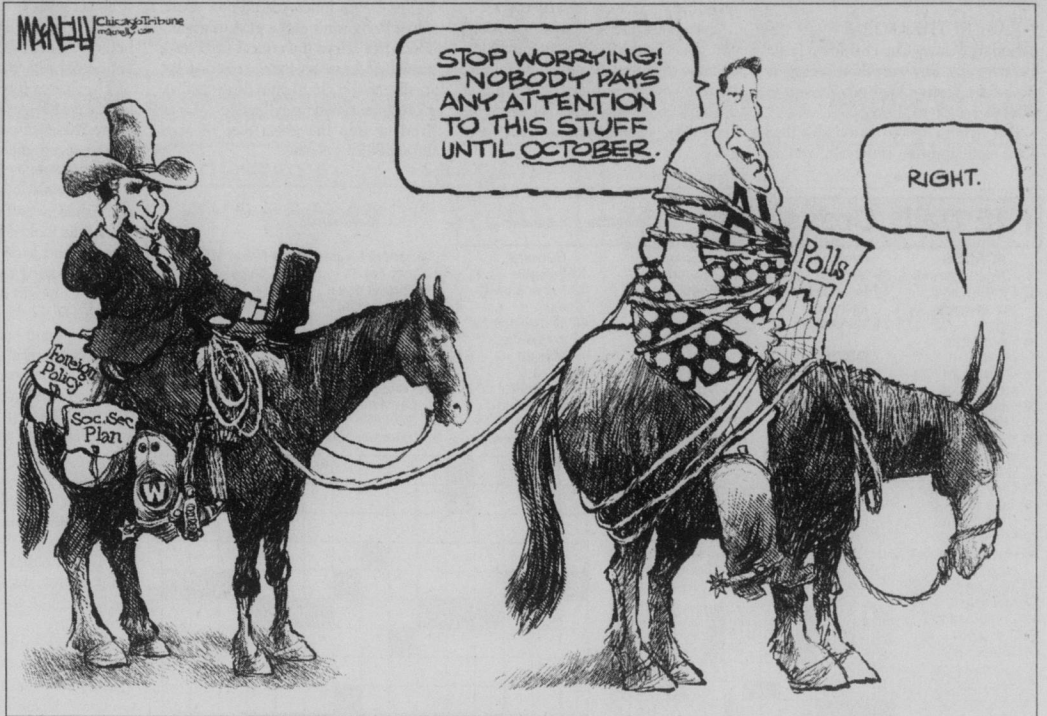
area's traffic problems will become. The University came up with the fare-free proposal and agreed to pay a major chunk of the estimated \$1.58 million cost earlier this year. But that was not enough to convince hesitant officials in Chapel Hill and Carrboro, who were reluctant to raise taxes in order to cover the plan's implementation. The fare-free proposal would have cost Carrboro an estimated \$62,109 for a one-year trial and would have raised residents tax rates more than 77 cents. But that's just about \$3,500 more than the proposal passed last week. And though the bus service is extended, there is no projected increase in ridership. And the frequency of bus visits will remain the same. Considering how much money is being spent, that's no bargain. Luckily, the plan isn't set into stone yet. Before the extended hours can go into effect, Chapel Hill must chip in \$166,841 and the University must agree to pay \$149,306 of the bill since all three entities cover the operating costs of Chapel Hill Transit. The University must take this opportunity to make a stand against this proposal and hold back funding until a more acceptable proposition comes to the table. Considering the fare-free proposal would be much more beneficial, University officials should press Carrboro and Chapel Hill officials harder for it instead of shelling out money for a program that would not give added benefits for students. The time to act is now.

Costly Tradition

Few ballots were cast in Tuesday's primary runoff. But a great deal of taxpayers' dollars went into the process.

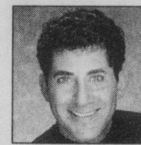
No one ever said that democracy was cheap. Voters went to the polls Tuesday in primary runoffs to choose the Republican candidates for the commissioners of agriculture and labor. But considering how low-profile the race was, few voters actually showed up to cast their ballot. The turnout was estimated to be a paltry 3 percent of registered voters. That's a mere 75,000 people throughout the entire state of North Carolina. The price tag of the race, however, is much more impressive. The cost is estimated to be around \$3.5 million in taxpayer dollars. Considering the cost and low turnouts, the General Assembly should abolish the practice of primary runoffs entirely. North Carolina is only one of 12 states who have primary runoffs. And all but two of the 12 are in the South. It's a remnant of the days of southern one-party domination when winning the Democratic nomination essentially meant winning election to the office itself. It's a tradition that has become too expensive to keep around. These races cost taxpayers money, but traditionally don't hold taxpayer interest. In 1996, the runoff for the Republican agriculture commissioner spot only attracted 2.9 percent of registered voters. That same year, a Democratic runoff for secretary of state only drew 2 percent. This year, neither Steve Troxler, who ran for agriculture commissioner, nor Cherie Berry, labor commissioner candidate, was able to achieve the "substantial plurality" of 40 percent plus one vote required by North Carolina law to capture the party nomina-

tion. Therefore, their 2nd-place challengers, Tom Davidson for agriculture commissioner and John Miller for labor commissioner, had the legal right to call for a rematch under the rules currently in place. And both did, at the expense of N.C. taxpayers. The General Assembly has considered abolishing the practice of primary runoffs for years, but has never taken the final step and tossed it out. Supporters steadfastly hold that the current system prevents fringe candidates from being nominated, since they are required to win 40 percent of the vote. But with only 3 percent of the electorate coming out to vote in many primary runoffs like Tuesday's, it is not difficult for a well-organized interest group to sway the election any way they choose if they invest the time and effort. When there's no high profile political candidate involved in a race, and when very little is at stake (those elected in Tuesday's runoff only will represent their party in the November election for the post), voters don't turn out en masse to vote. Yet their money certainly flows freely into the process. Voting machines have to be put into place and every precinct must be staffed. Those costs add up. In Mecklenburg county alone, taxpayers will have to foot a \$350,000 bill for the runoff. Now it's time for the General Assembly to do a little trimming of the electoral process fat. Remembering our heritage is good, but some southern traditions are best left in the past.



Carolina Blue: A Heavenly Color

My oldest brother Mark used to tell me that the sky was blue because the Army painted it that color. To be honest, I never believed him. I mean, he had to say that as he is a special forces airborne ranger in the United States Army. Those types think everything is up to the Army. Noah's Ark? They built it. The Grand Canyon? They dug it. Missionary position? They invented it. But I always figured that if the Army had painted the sky, they surely would have painted it fatigue green, right? Sorry, Lt. Col. Mark. You'd be wrong in this case. And he'd hit me for saying so, of course - he's Army tough. So, meanwhile, why is the sky blue? Carolina blue to be exact? Well, I think it's because the supreme powers-that-be wanted to pay homage, understandably, to the grand ol' University most of you either attend or are attached to in some way or another. That's right, the Lord above pulls for Dean Smith's boys. What else explains the Final Four run this spring? It's amazing how Carolina blue the sky really is! On most days as I walk to campus, I look up and get an instant rush of school pride. It's electric, calming, beautiful blue and it's everywhere, as far and wide as the eye can see. And it's my new favorite color. No more white or gray t-shirts for me. It's been nothing but school blue tops since I set foot on campus. I bought two new ones as the sum total of my back-to-summer wardrobe. Everyone I see during my far-and-wide summer adventures will surely know I've traded schools and colors! Now don't go telling any of my friends



DANA ROSENGARD
TV GUY

back in Vermont, where I moved from to come here to school. Let's just say my favorite color during my five Vermont years was green. Everywhere you looked, things were green. The grass and trees were green, of course. But what you have to understand about Vermont, in case you've never been there, is that there's not too much more than green grass and green trees, at least not in the Northeast kingdom where I came from. It was gorgeous. You could look for miles and miles and see only green, save for the black and white cows lazily munching the green grass and the faded red barns they called home dotting green pastures. I lived in such a rural part of Vermont that Franklin Street seems like a hustle and bustle thrumway to me! I was nine miles from the nearest bar where I used to live. Heck, now I can take nine giant steps and be behind a brew at a bunch of different bars. Gotta love Carolina! So in Vermont I stopped describing my eyes as hazel and started telling people they were green. I traded in my maroon Volkswagen and bought a green car which still has (wildly expired) green Vermont license plates. The new VW is metallic sequoia green, to

be exact. It should be noted, however, that the maroon car did have 156,000 miles on it. I didn't just trade it in for the sake of color. But I'm giving in. Green is out; blue is my new favorite color, for sure. No, I'm not going to get blue contact lenses, but I am going to get blue N.C. license plates, as soon as I can afford them. I know they'll clash with my green car (don't even talk to me about when I'll be able to afford a new one of those!) and that will bug me. I am the TV Guy after all - visuals matter. But I'm making the transition from the Green Mountain State green to Carolina blue heaven. I have that growing Carolina blue wardrobe. And that's not all. Picking the color of my new iBook Macintosh laptop computer was easy. None of those fruit colors for me. Grape? No thanks. Strawberry? I don't think so. Tangerine? Hardly. Blueberry? It's Carolina blue, buddy. I'll take it, and the color printer to match, thank you very much. I guess it's about pride and satisfaction. I guess it's about transferring allegiance, going with the flow and being happy wherever you find yourself. I guess it's about knowing the makers of the Universe saw fit to choose our school color as the hue for the heavens. Go Tar Heels! Dana Rosengard is a Ph.D. student in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication originally from Haverhill, Massachusetts, with many stops along the way between there and here. He can be reached at danar@unc.edu for questions, comments, concerns or column suggestions.

READERS' FORUM

Construction More Appropriate During Summer Sessions

TO THE EDITOR:
Somewhere in the frenzy to improve the intellectual climate - build more coffee shops, create freshmen seminars, restructure the advising system - we have forgotten that students come to the University to learn in their classes. The enhancement of Dey Hall classrooms spring semester made holding classes in the building a frustrating experience. The sound of the power drill drowned out my professor, and although it affords a convenient excuse for why I don't understand the imperfect subjunctive, it prevented me from learning the material for which I came to college. The Dey Hall renovations bring great improvements and technology to the building. But these academic enhancements provide few benefits without a commitment to uphold academic study. Surely, there is a way to schedule classes for the semester in different wings of the building with planned constructions or to renovate during the summer session, when there are less students, and move to another building altogether.
Kristen Campbell
Junior
English

RSVP Chairwoman Thanks Volunteers For a Job Well Done

TO THE EDITOR:
The 10th Annual Triangle-wide RSVP event (Restaurants Sharing V/5 & V/5 Percent) held in November 1999 has, thus far, raised more than \$30,000. In Chapel Hill-Carrboro, with 91 of the 99 pledges received, more than \$17,000 has been raised to benefit the Inter-Faith Council's hunger-relief programs. Hopefully, the remaining restaurants will increase our final total to over \$18,000. The Durham project, which benefits St. Philip's Community Kitchen, reports that pledges from 41 of 43 restaurants total \$6,000 and The Food Bank of North Carolina in Raleigh collected \$7,200 from 35 of 43 participating restaurants. I attribute the obvious Chapel Hill-Carrboro advantage to the loyal support of our University community and would like to thank everyone who helps to make this project so successful. Paul Barnhardt of Alpha Phi Omega fraternity distributed posters and table tents to all of the downtown participating restaurants. Ron Binder, Director of Greek Affairs, helped to get the complete list

to all of the fraternities and sororities; and Wayne Thompson, the former Assistant Director of Special Programs, distributed the lists to all of the student housing within his jurisdiction. Antoinette Peuch of West Franklin Street Partnership sponsored the trolley which made continuous runs between UNC and downtown during the lunch hour. The pick-up bus stops were identified with balloons contributed by Balloons and Tunes. Each one contributed in their own way to the success of the event. With due respect to the many community-spirited restaurateurs who choose to participate, to the large numbers of diners who fill these restaurants each year, and to the great promotion by the sponsors, I do believe that the loyal support of the University community offers a special "edge" to our local effort and for this, I am most grateful. Those who benefit from the hunger-relief programs of the Inter-Faith Council - the Community Kitchen and the Family Services Emergency Food Pantry - join with me in thanking you. I share the joy of this success with all of you.
Irene T. Briggaman
RSVP Chairwoman,
Chapel Hill-Carrboro
The length rule was waived.



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The editorials are approved by the majority of the editorial board, which is composed of the editor and the managing editor.
The Daily Tar Heel is published by the DTH Publishing Corp., a non-profit North Carolina corporation, Monday-Friday, according to the University calendar.
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Office: Suite 104 Carolina Union
Campus Mail Address: CB# 5210 Box 49, Carolina Union
U.S. Mail Address: P.O. Box 3257, Chapel Hill, NC 27515-3257
ISSN #10709436