

The Daily Tar Heel

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Hot Potato

The North Carolina General Assembly is making a smart move by letting a child-abandonment bill fall to the wayside.

Legislators made the right move last week when they nixed a proposal that would help mothers abandon unwanted children without criminal prosecution.

Under a bill sponsored by Guilford County Democrat, Sen. Bill Martin, a mother would have legal protection if she abandoned her infant within 15 days of birth as long as she left the child with a "responsible adult." She could also toss the child to a law enforcement officer, hospital, health department or emergency medical technician without fear of prosecution.

Similar laws have been passed in Texas and are currently under consideration in California, Georgia and Kentucky.

Though it has the noble intention of preventing infanticide, the bill is riddled with legal questions, as well as ethical concerns. And the General Assembly is making the right decision by letting it fall off the docket.

The bill was sent to a Senate subcommittee last Thursday, where Sen. Martin says that it will sit collecting dust until the legislature adjourns later this summer.

And any such measure belongs in the trash bin of the General Assembly.

By allowing negligent mothers to toss away their newborns like hot potatoes without legal consequences, the General Assembly would be passing a bill tantamount to sanctioning child abandonment.

Leaving your child without proper care is abuse, and is subsequently against the law. The focus should be on preventing unwanted

pregnancies through sexual education and advocating safe sex or abstinence.

Allowing a mother to escape personal responsibility is not the answer.

Besides the major ethical problems, he bill raises other legal questions. Where do the parental rights of the father come into play?

A father can do little if the mother of his child takes the newborn into a police station and leaves him for good. It's doubtful the police would simply hand the child back to the father if he tries to take custody of his flesh and blood. Most likely, the infant would be under the ward of Social Services or placed in a foster home.

The bill would not even force the mothers to reveal their identities or medical histories. So in many instances, a father could never be found and notified of what has happened.

And in the end, if this proposal passed into law, would it be that effective? While the aim is to prevent infanticide, by dropping the criminal attachment to child abandonment, it makes it an even more viable option for desperate or negligent parents to leave their newborns on a hospital's doorstep. And there will certainly be repeat customers.

Between 1985 and 1997, 22 abandoned babies died within a day of their birth. That's 22 too many. But it doesn't warrant amending current legal codes when there are so many unresolved legal and ethical questions surrounding the proposal.

The best thing for legislators to do is abandon this bill.



New Chancellor Ready for Work

I'm delighted to extend greetings to the new members of the Class of 2004 and all of our students. Each of you should be proud to be associated with Carolina. In many ways, I feel much like a new student myself, and although I've been doing my homework this summer, I hope I can rely on you to help me with the Tar Heel learning curve when I begin work as chancellor in August.



JAMES MOESER
CHANCELLOR

When I was first approached about leading UNC-Chapel Hill, the University's academic excellence and tradition as the nation's oldest public university immediately came to mind. Of course I was familiar with Carolina and its status as a top public university. It's the kind of school we looked to as a model at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, where I have been chancellor for the last four years. Ultimately, however, it was the people — the students, faculty, staff, alumni and others who are in the Carolina family — who proved to be the deciding factor. There is a spirit on this campus that I have never felt on any other campus in America, a spirit of love and devotion, a sense that this is a very special place. I have been privileged to go to school and serve on the faculties of some of the best public universities in America — Texas, Michigan, Kansas, Penn State and Nebraska. But what Carolina has is absolutely unique — it is a mystique, a pride in the place, a feeling that people express that this is a special place set apart — that no other campus in America that I know of has. You will sense it too, if you have not already.

I found the challenge of Carolina irresistible. It offers an unparalleled opportunity to take a great university to the very pinnacle of its existence — to help move UNC from one of the best public universities in the nation to the very best public university. Few schools can begin to aspire to such a lofty goal; yet at Carolina, with the right combination of public and private support, I am confident that it's well within our grasp.

A key to that success will be the \$3.1 billion bond referendum to improve capital facilities on UNC system and community college

campuses. During my first three months at Chapel Hill, my top priority will be to garner support for the referendum, which will be on the November ballot. If approved, the bond package promises to be a watershed moment for North Carolina higher education in general and for Carolina in particular. It would provide the university with nearly \$500 million for building projects over about six years. Compare that to the \$25 million in state appropriations the University typically has received in a good year for capital projects, and you begin to see the staggering impact the bonds can have. Never has the university seen such an infusion of money, and never have its needs been so pronounced.

We have our work cut out for us. Carolina is a top-flight university — you probably wouldn't be here if it weren't. We have the brainpower, reputation and expertise to move forward and surpass our peers.

We have bright students, outstanding teachers and world-class researchers. At the same time, however, we face a critical need for dollars to finance renovations, repairs and new construction. Returning students know what I'm talking about. You've seen the condition of our classrooms, laboratories, libraries and support facilities. They are in dire need of repair, many are outdated and outmoded, and some are simply unusable or unsafe.

Without the bond money, not only will our students suffer, but so will the state and its citizens. Carolina will be unable to continue fulfilling its mission to teach North Carolina's future leaders and professionals, expand the

frontiers of knowledge and help grow the state's economy. Successful passage of the referendum will dramatically improve how we teach our students, conduct research that helps people live healthier lives and carry out public service that makes our state a better place to live.

North Carolina will experience important economic and social challenges in the decades ahead, and UNC-CH, as well as the other public universities and community colleges, can be an integral part of the solution. But we must have appropriate facilities to do that job.

I know you will hear more about the bond referendum in the coming months, you need to do your share to educate your friends, family members, local legislators, government leaders and others about Carolina's needs. We must tell our story. We must show the state's citizens why this and the state's other campuses need the bond money. We must explain how the money will help them, their sons and daughters, and the people of North Carolina.

Please participate in this educational process and help Carolina reach its potential. I also urge each of you to register to vote and to show your support for the referendum in November.

If your family is from North Carolina, make sure your parents, siblings and other relatives go to the polls, too. Our state's future depends on everyone's support.

This fall I will be part of the new class at Carolina. So if you see a 60-year old balding administrator walking around the campus looking lost and confused, that will be your new chancellor. Stop and say hello and help me find my way. I promise to do the same for you. Thank you in advance for your help, and best wishes for a great fall semester.

Dr. James Moeser begins work as UNC's ninth chancellor on Aug. 15. He has served the past four years as chancellor of the University of Nebraska at Lincoln. An internationally known concert organist, Moeser also has held leadership positions at the University of South Carolina, Pennsylvania State University and the University of Kansas.

EDITORIAL NOTEBOOK — JONATHAN CHANEY

Hit the Books

Administrators should drop the pretentious idea of raising the 'intellectual climate' through elementary school-like assignments.

Someone forgot to mention that Oprah Winfrey has been hired into the upper echelons of UNC's administration.

For, much like the queen of daytime talk has been on a quest to spark the brain cells of American housewives through her Book of the Month Club, UNC has been forcing incoming freshmen and transfer students to digest a novel in hopes of elevating that elusive "intellectual climate" of the University.

It's insulting to incoming freshmen, and the student body as a whole.

The new book requirement is a part of the First Year Initiative program. A panel of students and faculty members decide on the reading selections.

And they have done an excellent job of choosing intriguing, worthy books.

This year, the selection is "Confederates in the Attic," a Pulitzer Prize-winning novel by Tony Horwitz. Last year, it was Alex Kotlowitz's "There Are No Children Here: The Story of Two Boys Growing Up in the Other America."

But to make it a requirement for freshmen to read the book is ridiculous.

How insulting to find out about this assignment right after you get the acceptance letter to Carolina. It tells you that your grades, test scores and extracurricular activities qualify you as one of the best and brightest in the state of North Carolina, and that your talent shows through in your admission to one of the top public universities in the country.

And if you're outside of North Carolina, it's twice as hard to get in.

So you're smart enough to get into Carolina, but we don't think you're "intellectual" enough.

But have no fear, we'll solve that mistake by making you read this book.

Oh and by the way, you can go pick it up at our bookstore. We have a giant stack of them right as you walk in the door.

Proponents of this new program say it gives incoming students a jumping-off point from which they can begin to relate to one another, or a common ground from which they can begin meeting new people when they arrive on campus.

I know that when I was a freshman, I would have loved to introduce myself and begin dissecting a novel in an informal, friendly chat.

As students, we do not need oversight when it comes to building on our intellectual strength. Each student does it his or her own way, through the groups they join and the classes they take.

As much as the nebulous term "intellectual climate" sounds appealing, it's nothing but fluffy talk from faculty and administration. Don't let anyone fool you. The intellectual climate at UNC is vibrant and intense. We have some of the top scholars in the nation gathered in one place.

Just because we don't sit around the Pit in berets and quote Kafka does not mean we're lacking a strong intellectual spirit.

I have a couple of little hints for the administrators here. If you want to improve the intellectual climate at UNC, improve its facilities. Hire more professors and encourage them to teach in innovative ways. Diversify the course selection and offer more specialized courses. One book isn't going to go a long way.

In the meantime, I recommend a little summer reading assignment for the administrators themselves.

It's called "The Complete Idiot's Guide to Running a University."

READERS' FORUM

November Bond Crucial for Future of Higher Education

TO THE EDITOR:

North Carolina's community colleges and universities contribute so much to our state — they give students the skills they need to succeed, they provide our businesses with a well-trained workforce and they keep North Carolina's economy competitive both nationally and internationally.

While our campuses have helped build North Carolina and its economy, they now face some monumental challenges: the need for critical repairs and renovations as well as new facilities to prepare for booming enrollment growth.

Our 59 community colleges can expect 15,000 new students over the next five years, and our universities can expect another 48,000 students by 2010.

At the same time, nearly 800 university buildings are in dire need of repair, while the community college system's construction and repair needs top \$1.4 billion.

Recently, the General Assembly approved a \$3.1 billion bond referendum to help address those challenges. The bond package — which enjoys bipartisan support from government, business and education leaders all across the state — is the right decision for North Carolina.

It will not raise taxes, according to Treasurer Harlan Boyles, and it will help create jobs, economic growth and opportunities for generations to come.

The bonds will be on the November ballot this fall, and I am confident that voters will make the right choice for North Carolina's future by voting "Yes" for higher education bonds.

Marc Basnight
Senate President Pro Tempore
NC General Assembly

Downtown Benefits From Dedication of Town Employees

TO THE EDITOR:

As anyone who has lived in or visited Chapel Hill for more than a cou-

ple of days knows, this is a town that knows how to celebrate.

Like any good party preparation must be made. We can enjoy all of these public gatherings with a reasonable assurance of safety because of the work of the folks at the CHPD and Fire Departments. Their presence, and the anticipation of the need for their services by their panning departments, allow those of us who attend these gatherings to enjoy ourselves. Our safety is their concern, and they handle it effectively.

When the last of our guests head home for the night, the well-oiled machine that is the Chapel Hill Public Works Department swings into action. No matter how late the festivities go, these folks descend upon the party locale and sweep it clean.

We are fortunate to have such a truly terrific group of town employees. It's obvious that they care about the town and take pride in their work. So, from all of us who enjoy the fruits of your labor, thank you. You are the elite in your fields.

Kathleen Lord
Chairwoman
Downtown Commission



The Daily Tar Heel welcomes reader comments and criticism. Letters to the editor should be no longer than 300 words and must be typed, double-spaced, dated and signed by no more than two people. Students should include their year, major and phone number. Faculty and staff should include their title, department and phone number. The DTH reserves the right to edit letters for space, clarity and vulgarity. Publication is not guaranteed. Bring letters to the DTH office at Suite 104, Carolina Union, mail them to P.O. Box 3257, Chapel Hill, NC 27515 or email forum to: editdesk@unc.edu.

The Daily Tar Heel

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