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The Daily Tar Heel

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BOARD EDITORIALS

Boosting Efficiency

Student Health Service is planning to trim its operating hours. The move will save money — and still adequately provide care.

A significant change in UNC Student Health Service is approaching. Reduction in operating hours for SHS is planned to begin May 21, assuming University approval.

The plan, which looks to eliminate idle time at SHS, will create a more productive atmosphere for students who seek medical aide. There is a low demand after-hours for medical care, thus the manpower presently available is superfluous and going underutilized.

Under the change, the proposed hours of service for fall and spring semesters are 7 a.m. to 11 p.m. Monday through Friday. The weekend hours will be 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. and summer session hours will be 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Friday. The after-hours service charge of \$40 will not change.

With the reduction in hours, one might have concern. But there is no need to worry.

Plans are in effect for other avenues students can use when needing medical care. HealthLink (966-7890), a free 24-hour service in which nurses from UNC Hospitals will be available to answer callers' health questions.

An official registered nurse will be available to advise a student to go immediately to the emergency room or offer self-help skills and have the student wait until SHS is open,

depending on the medical severity. So even if SHS is closed, students will still have access to medical professionals who can advise them of a proper course of action.

And if a trip to the emergency room is deemed necessary, students enrolled in the Student Health Insurance Plan can waive the \$100 deductible. Students can also apply for reimbursement of up to \$500 in personal patient charges for emergency services not covered by a health insurance plan.

The University training room, an untapped resource, can also be used for any orthopedic needs. It is located in Fetzer Gym and is open to any student. Changes in hours will be a more effective use of student fees. Reallocation of hours will also create more appointment slots for students, making doctors more available for personal office hours. Medical officials would not have to fulfill as many on-call duties as the old SHS hours called for.

Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs Sue Kitchen will meet with Chancellor James Moeser and his Cabinet next week to institute these hour changes.

The changes are appropriate and needed. They will give students a more efficient Student Health Service.

Added Protection

State lawmakers have pondered opening up the state's child abuse registry to screen day-care workers. It's an idea worth investing in.

As more and more parents in North Carolina require day care for their children, the state must take steps to ensure that these day-care establishments provide a safe environment and are run by responsible adults.

It is imperative that North Carolina allow state licensing officers and day-care employers to check the state's child abuse registry.

Currently in North Carolina, child-care employees must undergo a criminal background check. But since fewer than 5 percent of verified child-abuse cases ever make it to court, there are thousands of people against whom abuse charges have been substantiated but who can still easily work in child care.

This must be changed. More than 214,000 children are in child care in North Carolina in various day-care establishments. Ensuring that those day-care establishments are adequate is essential to the health of our state's children.

By screening child-care employees on a child-abuse registry, day-care employers and licensing officials can weed out prior offenders. This would decrease the risk of child abuse in day-care establishments and limit the access prior offenders have to children.

Opening the registry would serve the state greatly in adequately protecting children. If

the registry were open, an appeals process would be in place to make sure the ruling of social workers is a fair and accurate one.

Currently there is no appeals process in North Carolina. And since there are so many cases that never go to court, a social worker's ruling is never really checked. Establishing an appeals process would ensure that justice is served on both sides of the issue.

Though the cost to institute an appeals process would be \$750,000, the money would be a worthy investment. There are several other states that successfully utilize a mix of the criminal background check and child-abuse registry.

North Carolina should follow suit. The multitude of parents who entrust their children to day-care centers across the state would be more than willing to foot the bill to open the registry to employers. The added peace of mind alone is worth it.

The problem of child abuse is worthy of closer attention. Cases of convicted or verified abusers having access to children through day-care cannot occur — though it is possible to slip through the cracks today.

Opening the state child-abuse registry would best serve the interests and futures of our children.

For the Record

In the April 12 editorial "Presumed Guilt," it was incorrectly stated that alcohol violations and not reporting underage drinking are Honor Code violations. They are not. Sanctions for underage drinking are handled through the housing department. The Daily Tar Heel regrets the error.

READERS' FORUM

RSVVP Organizer Wishes To Thank All Participants For a Successful Project

TO THE EDITOR:

The annual Chapel Hill-Carrboro RSVVP event (Restaurants Sharing V/5 & V/5 Percent) held in November 2000 has been the most successful in the project's 12-year history. As of April 11, 100 of the 105 participating restaurants have sent in their 10 percent donation for a current total of \$22,023. Both the number of restaurants participating and the total amount of money raised have set a new record for the project.

The Durham program, which benefits St. Philip's Community Kitchen, reports that pledges from 41 of 49 restaurants total \$6,300 and the Food Bank of N.C. in Raleigh has collected \$8,000 thus far, bringing the Triangle-wide total to more than \$36,300 and counting. Again, a record! The cumulative total for Chapel Hill-Carrboro RSVVP program has now reached \$170,000, with the Triangle-wide, 11-year total approaching \$300,000. 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.

Alpha Phi Omega fraternity president, Angie Lindsay, coordinated the distribution of the posters and table tents to all of the downtown participating restaurants. Aaron Nelson, then the interim director of Greek affairs, helped to distribute fliers listing all of the participating restaurants to all the fraternities and sororities and the office of resident housing for doing the same for residence hall residents. Antoine Peuch of West Franklin Preservation Partnership sponsored free trolley rides between the medical complex 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.

The Daily Tar Heel promoted the event with many pertinent feature articles relating to hunger in our community, restaurant participation and the importance of eating out on RSVVP Day. Chrissy Beck, director of marketing, published the complete list of participating restaurants as community ser-

vice ads for several days before the event. These are all great reminders to the UNC students and faculty to Eat Out! or Take Out! for a good cause. Several restaurant owners and managers admit that they join the project because of encouragement and/or gratitude from their regular patrons. Thank you all very much.

With due respect to the many generous and community-spirited restaurateurs who agree to donate 10 percent of their receipts for a whole day; to the many diners who fill these restaurants on RSVVP Day; and to the great promotion by the sponsors, I do believe that the loyal support of the University community offers that special "edge" to our local efforts 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
RSVVP Chairman
Chapel Hill-Carrboro

The length rule was waived.

Second Amendment Not For Gun Owners, but To Protect State Militias

TO THE EDITOR:

Russ Helms should have reviewed constitutional law before submitting his column "Gun Control Costs Innocent Lives" (April 3) supporting the individual's right to bear arms supposedly found in the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

The Second Amendment does not guarantee a virtually unfettered right to arm oneself in defense of life, property and against the possibility of government-imposed martial law. Contrary to Helms' opinion, historians, scholars, and most importantly, the courts, have virtually all concluded that the Second Amendment was designed to protect state organized militias rather than the individual right to own a gun. It is a collective right and not an individual right. The Supreme Court has never struck down a gun control measure as unconstitutional under the Second Amendment.

Helms alleges the need for a gun to use in self defense. But in 1997, for every time

a firearm was used by a civilian to kill in self-defense, there were 4 unintentional deaths, 43 criminal homicides and 75 suicides. In 1998, for every time a woman used a handgun to kill a stranger or intimate acquaintance in self-defense, 385 women were murdered by a stranger or intimate acquaintance. Guns killed 32,436 people in the United States in 1997.

The proposed Firearms Safety and Consumer Protection Act before Congress will allow our country to address these sobering statistics.

Matthew Oliver
Freshman
Public Policy
Firearms Safety Project Manager
N.C. Consumers Council Inc.

Get a Job

The Daily Tar Heel is taking applications for back-page columnists, cartoonists and editorial board members. They are available at the front desk of the DTH in Suite 104 of the Student Union and are due April 25. Still have some questions? Contact Editorial Page Editor-select Kate Hartig at Hartigk@aol.com with any concerns.



To Protect and Serve — And Seize

Willie Jones was startled by the heavily armed men in the Houston airport who were demanding his money. Especially since the thieves wore badges.

Willie had paid cash for a plane ticket and had \$9,600 more to buy plants for his landscaping business. Federal agents deemed this suspicious and seized his money.

This true story of "civil asset forfeiture" should be fiction in a land whose Constitution declares that no person shall "be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation."

This isn't just another of many "drug exceptions" to our once-cherished Bill of Rights. Though the lure of prohibition profits was the reviving force, police now abuse forfeiture widely. In 1996, the Supreme Court upheld the forfeiture of a woman's car after her husband used it to score a hooker.

Civil forfeiture derives from a medieval precedent. When Joe Peasant's ox got mad and stomped his neighbor's grandma, aristocratic lords blamed — and confiscated — the ox. Joe kept his head and the lords kept the ox. (Poor Grandma kept nothing.)

President Reagan liked the concept, but not the unlikely image of a suitcase of drug money leaping up to stomp Grandma. In a "better" precedent, John Hancock, the first signer of the Declaration of Independence, once had his ship seized by the Crown.

Apparently Reagan figured that tactics used to steal from peasants and harass our founding fathers were perfect to fight his drug war.

So Reagan seized the opportunity to permanently fund another ever-increasing program for his beloved federal government. He signed the law that allows federal agencies to seize close to a billion dollars a year, based only on probable cause. Eighty percent of the victims of these seizures are never charged with a crime. How does it work?

The feds charge the property, not the person. Which, the rare times these reach the courts, leads to names like "United States v. \$405,089.23 U.S. Currency," "U.S. v. 92 Buena Vista Avenue" and "U.S. v. One Mercedes 560 SEL." Cars and houses and



RUSS HELMS
HEALING OUR WORLD

cash have no rights, so the government can grab a home on the same evidence it needs to look inside. This includes anonymous witnesses and paid informants. Remember the recent DEA-informant perjury scandal?

Courts have even ruled that cops can seize property on a hunch — as long as they can produce probable cause before the official hearing, if there ever is one. And to be seized, an object only needs to "facilitate" a crime.

So when Billy Munnerlyn, an entrepreneur with a charter plane service, ignorantly took a fare from a new customer whose suitcase was stuffed with money, the feds seized his plane. They charged the plane with "facilitating" the cash. The cash, also seized, presumably was "facilitating" some other wild-and-crazy property with its vicious crime. No humans were charged, and Billy was left to try to prove his plane innocent. Justice or skyjacking?

A 41-apartment building in New York is seized on a hearsay warrant. Hotels are forfeited when one room is used by guests for a drug deal. Forget to warn the teenager that prank 911 calls are serious? Police take the house, the land and the bank account used to buy the tomato seeds for the garden.

These are the same police we trust to rescue cats from trees and carry guns and wear badges and break down the doors of the bad guys at 3 a.m. Are you confident that they're breaking into homes to catch a dangerous criminal, not because it's a swank house?

That house is worth a lot of R.V.s. Or as Sheriff Bouchard of Oakland County, Michigan calls the \$300,000 toys, "mobile command centers." As one wag says, "Don't forget the mini-bar, sheriff."

Some cops seize so much they can "forget" where they stashed all those unmarked dead presidents. The Prince George County (Md.) Sheriff's Department guarded a "forgotten" \$45,000 booty until a fiscal manager — his job since eliminated — tipped off auditors.

The biggest weakness of the federal forfeiture law is that police face a conflict-of-interest by benefiting directly from the seizures.

"The bare financial facts of this case shine a light on the corrupting incentives of this arrangement," judges wrote in one forfeiture case. "We see aggressive but marginal claims asserted on dubious jurisdiction to seize charitable funds raised for the relief of abject orphans in an impoverished country, so that the money can be diverted for expenditure by the Department of Justice."

To combat such fears, North Carolina provides extra constitutional and legal protections to citizens in forfeiture cases, and demands that seized funds be used to pay for education.

But when justice department pitched a new "adoption" scheme to N.C. lawmen, "Everybody's eyes lit up," according to congressional testimony. N.C. police give seizures to federal agencies, who "adopt" the money under federal law, then return 80 percent to the police. Some \$4 million a year is laundered this way by N.C. law enforcement, circumventing the legislature's plans to spend it on the children.

N.C. law prevents turning seized property over to the feds without a court order, so the DEA "deputizes" cops, who then seize property as federal agents to bypass state law. One prominent officer told the Kansas City Star, "Just because there is a state law doesn't necessarily mean that that state law is correct."

So needed reforms will be difficult. The conflict-of-interest has eroded everyone's trust in the police. Consider the police reaction when Bill Wright, Utah speaker pro tem, instigated discussion on seizure reform. About the debate on the floor of the state legislature, the law-and-order Republican said: "I have never been more intimidated in my life to look out there and see 200 officers in uniforms with guns on their hips, staring me down."

E-mail Russ Helms at rhelms@bios.unc.edu.



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 e-mail forum to: editdesk@unc.edu.