

Budget Soon To Pass; It's About Time

A saga that has stolen the limelight of state government news for months might finally come to an end today. State legislators are set to vote on a \$14.4 billion budget bill and end a three-month impasse.

The House and Senate tentatively approved the budget Thursday and

could take a final vote today during special sessions. A breakthrough in budget talks came Wednesday when legislators from both chambers agreed on a \$1 billion tax package to reduce a looming shortfall and ward off a threat

from Gov. Mike Easley to veto an unbalanced budget.

It's about time. Today marks the 139th day of the 2001 session, the longest on record. If that doesn't impress you, consider this: each additional day the General Assembly is in session costs taxpayers \$55,000 for the legislators' expenses and staff salaries, according to the Associated Press.

During the past few days, lawmakers have shown excitement as the end of budget debates draws near. "We have a budget," Senate Pro Tem Marc Basnight told reporters Wednesday.

House Speaker Jim Black also is excited about the possible vote and appears confident that the newest budget package will pass the General Assembly. "He thinks this might be the package that will work," said Danny Lineberry, Black's spokesman.

Still others are not convinced that the best possible budget compromise has been reached.

"We're relieved that there is a budget but we are disappointed with what's in it," said House Minority Leader Leo Daughtry.

Daughtry said he opposes several aspects of the budget including millions of dollars allocated to Easley for special appropriations.

But despite his objections, Daughtry said he is ready for the session to end. "We're unhappy that we've been here for so long," he said.

Other leaders agree. "I've been here 16 years and I've never been here this long," said Rep. Bobby Barbee, R-Cabarrus. He said he is eager to return home and get back to his job and family.

Barbee said he and some other legislators have spent much of the past week sitting in their offices while budget negotiations were being held in closed chambers. "You just sit here and wait for someone to tell you what's going on but nobody's telling us much," he said.

Rep. Toby Fitch, D-Edgecombe, also said the long session has taken its toll on legislators. Nevertheless, he said there is still work to be done. "It's a part-time legislature, not a full-time legislature. We have jobs and homes and I'd like to be home," he said. "But just because I'd like to be home doesn't mean I'm not going to do my job."

Fitch was among eight House Democrats who opposed earlier plans to implement sales tax increases which they argued unfairly targeted the poor.

Still, Fitch said he could not describe an ideal budget that could meet everyone's needs and one that all legislators could agree on. "What the ideal package is, you just can't say unless it's in front of you," he said.

However, Fitch said he would like a budget that gives adequate funding for education and allows all state residents to live a quality state of life.

He might get his wish. The budget up for consideration allots \$8.3 billion towards education, including a 2 percent pay increase for K-12 teachers and \$8.9 million for need-based financial aid for public universities.

The bill also continues funding for mental health facilities, such as Dorothea Dix Hospital, that faced closing under an original Senate plan.

While it is a sign of relief that legislators have finally learned the meaning of compromise and working together, I think it makes absolutely no sense that the budget is even an issue nine months after the session started.

This goes beyond sales taxes, lotteries and, dare I say, the Group of Eight. Legislators said they knew that last year's budget might cause problems before it was even approved.

The budget shortfall did not appear miraculously and leaders should no longer use it as an excuse. It's about learning to work together as a team for the betterment of the state.

Pass the budget and let state agencies go about their business. Then go home. It is about time.

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APRIL BETHEA
STATE & NATIONAL COLUMNIST

RDU to Delay Expansion, Cut Workers

By MARK SEELEY
Staff Writer

Planned construction at Raleigh-Durham International Airport has been put on hold indefinitely after severe flight cuts, an airline shutdown and a massive decrease in ticket sales resulting from last week's terrorist attacks.

RDU already has cut 115 flights per day in and out of the airport because of the shutdown of Midway Airlines, which had a major hub at the airport. More

flight cancellations could follow as a result of decreasing ticket sales.

RDU Communications Manager Mirinda Kosoff said the new terminal project has been suspended because of an anticipated decline in airport revenue.

The project included building an addition to Terminal A, the airport's main terminal.

Kosoff added that federal funding might spur more flights in and out of RDU, replacing the 115 grounded by

the Midway shutdown.

President Bush is requesting that Congress pass a bill providing an \$8 billion relief package to the airline industry, which was hit especially hard by last week's terrorist attacks.

The package immediately would grant \$5 billion to airline companies nationwide.

An additional \$3 billion would be set aside for better airport safety and security.

The bill would be in addition to a \$40

billion fund Bush signed into law Tuesday.

Four major domestic airlines — American Airlines, United Airlines, Continental Airlines and U.S. Airways — have already announced that as many as 25 percent of their employees could be laid off in the upcoming months because of a decreased demand.

But RDU is not the only airport dealing with major setbacks.

Charlotte-Douglas International Airport, the largest U.S. Airways hub in

the nation, has not been operating at full capacity since the attacks.

U.S. Airways is set to decrease its number of daily flights by 23 percent in the coming weeks.

It also will be cutting at least 11,000 jobs nationwide.

CDI Public Relations Director David Orr added that Charlotte-Douglas flights still are limited.

"Right now only 75 percent of the

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Kenneth Smith of Chapel Hill takes a break to eat lunch while working on the renovation of what used to be Taco Bell on Franklin Street. The building soon will house a women's clothing store.

Boutique to Fill Franklin St. Vacancy

By KRISTEN HEFLIN
Staff Writer

Taco Bell shut its doors in mid-July, leaving 2,900 square feet of prime real estate at 120 E. Franklin St. vacant.

But the boarded-up windows and barren Santa Fe facade of the former Taco Bell will soon be replaced by a new women's clothing store set to open Nov. 1.

Construction is under way for XO South Incorporated Ladies Apparel, a retail store that will bring New York fashions to Chapel Hill.

Robert Humphreys, director of the Chapel Hill Downtown Commission, said he thinks local competition might have forced the fast food chain to shut down. "Maybe they couldn't compete with the independent Mexican restaurants like Cosmic Cantina," he said.

A Taco Bell representative from the Luahn Food Systems office in Raleigh said the chain shut down July 17 because of

poor sales. "It didn't have a drive-thru, and that's at least half of your sales or more," the representative said.

But soon after Taco Bell vacated the property, a new plan for the Franklin Street vacancy emerged.

Eli Avidin, who is overseeing construction of the store, said he began to develop the property in August. Avidin said he and his wife, Susan Harvey, moved to the area from New York and saw a market for the boutique.

The ladies fashion store will carry designer shoes and clothing from brands like XOXO and Diesel. "I think the street needed it," Avidin said.

XO South Inc. will join other designer clothing shops in downtown Chapel Hill that target the student consumer.

Despite the presence of similar stores nearby, Avidin said he is confident that New York fashion will appeal to area consumers. "Hopefully we will do well with the community's support."

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Officials Suggest More Security After Laptop Thefts

By ASHLEY DAVIDSON
Staff Writer

With a recent increase in reports of laptops being stolen on campus, both students and faculty are having to think not only about shutting down their computers but locking them down as well.

On Wednesday, two separate incidents were reported of laptops being stolen from residence halls — a problem that officials say tends to occur all around campus.

Captain Mark McIntyre of the Department of Public Safety said students are not the only victims of campus

laptop theft.

"Some are stolen out of dorms and out of libraries, but the majority have been taken from business offices and administrative buildings," he said.

McIntyre also said this problem has been ongoing. "Over the past several years, there has been an increase in thefts," McIntyre said. "But then again, there has also been an increased number of students with laptops on campus."

The Carolina Computing Initiative, which requires all incoming freshmen to purchase laptops, began last fall.

Recent laptop thefts also have presented a question of where the stolen

laptops are funneled. "Some that are stolen are for personal use, but there's got to be a market for them somewhere," McIntyre said.

Bruce Egan, associate director of the Academic Technology & Networks help desk, noted the ease with which laptops can be stolen. "It's certainly a significant problem because it's so easy to just slide them into a backpack," he said.

The increase in thefts has made students more aware of the problem. Freshman business major Jeffrey Waters said he has been more attentive of his laptop lately. "I've thought about it," he said.

"And reading about it recently makes me

more aware of it as a problem."

Although students know theft is something to be cautious of, most don't alter their behavior. But McIntyre said students do need to be aware of the risk and of things they can do to prevent theft.

He said students need to have the serial numbers, makes and models of their laptops written down so that they can be recovered more easily if they are stolen.

"Also, make sure to keep your rooms and offices secure and don't leave (the laptops) laying out," McIntyre said.

Students who purchase their laptops through the University are covered by

Safeware insurance. Safeware insures UNC laptops for 4 years so that students are covered under the plan the entire time they are students.

Though the insurance plan covers theft and natural disasters, additional security also is recommended.

John Gorsuch, manager of the computer department in the Ram Shop, said it's always a good idea to use safety locks. "All of the laptops you can buy through UNC come bundled with a lock kit that locks the computers down."

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Filling an Information Void, Serving a Community

By SARAH SANDERS
Assistant Features Editor

Tony Quirk spends two hours every Monday morning preparing an e-mail aimed at helping 1,600 Triangle residents plan their social schedules.

As coordinator for the Local Events Listserv, the Chapel Hill resident compiles a calendar and other information for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.

Coming-out support groups, AIDS awareness activities and social gatherings at local night clubs are some of the events listed.

Quirk said he knows there is a tremendous need for the listserv because of his experience when he came to Chapel Hill two years ago.

"When I moved here, I wanted to meet people," Quirk said. "I really wanted to know what was going on. The calendar fills that void."

Founded in 1999, the listserv is the brainchild of UNC graduate student Glenn Grossman. Since taking over the listserv for Grossman in July 2000, Quirk said he has seen it grow in content and audience.

"The biggest change I have seen over two years is that the number of events has increased," he said. "It has really gained in popularity."

In order to keep himself abreast of developments in the LGBT community, Quirk subscribes to several community listservs like those circulated by UNC's Queer Network for Change and similar groups at local universities.

The weekly update keeps people informed about events throughout the Triangle with an emphasis on Chapel Hill.

But Quirk's personal concerns extend far beyond Friday nights on Franklin Street.

He said he closely follows U.S. government policy changes that might affect the LGBT community.

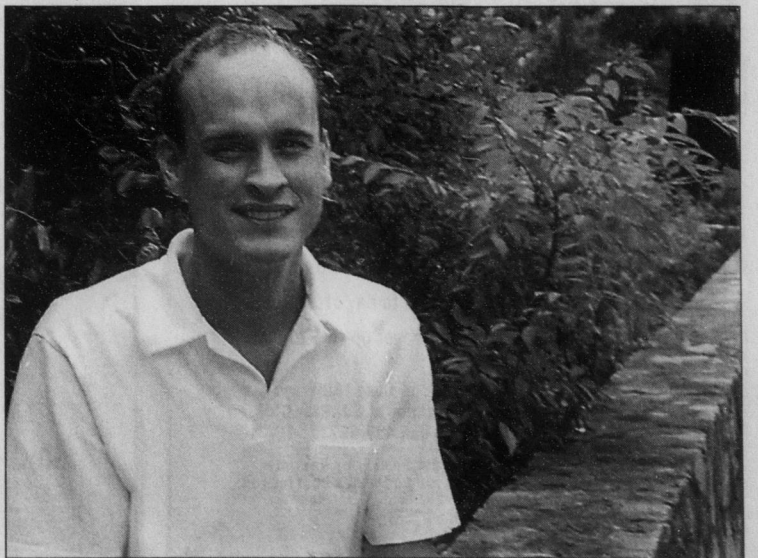
Quirk said he does not hesitate to contact legislators with input on prominent or controversial bills like the Hate Crimes Prevention Act and the Employment Nondiscrimination Act.

He also supports the LGBT community by attending unity and political events such as the parades, rallies and concerts associated with this month's N.C. PrideFest.

The life of an activist and organizer is new to Quirk because he was not involved in LGBT activities in his hometown of Jacksonville.

"I wasn't out at home," he said. "But since I've been (in Chapel Hill), I've realized there actually was a gay community there."

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Chapel Hill resident and part-time UNC student Tony Quirk runs a local listserv of social and informational events for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community.

DTH/JESSICA NEWFIELD