

Órange County school board chairman Keith Cook resigned his position following a controversy surrounding a speech he gave at Orange High School's graduation ceremony that was found to be taken from an Web site.

# School board chairman resigns under pressure

### Plagiarism scandal fuels decision

BY CATHERINE SHAROKY

June 10 — A collective gasp emanated from the overcrowded board room as Keith Cook announced his immediate resignation as Orange County School Board chairman Monday night at a Board of Education meeting in Hillsborough.

Cook's resignation came as a result of a plagiarized graduation speech he delivered on May 28 at the Orange High School graduation service.

The speech was originally delivered in 1998 by Donna Shalala, then U.S. secretary of Health and Human Services. Cook selected the speech after performing a Google search for "graduation speech."
Throughout the ordeal, Cook

has maintained that the speech wasn't attributed to Shalala on the Web site.

"I have tried very hard in 15 years in the community to carry myself in an ethical manner," Cook said in a prepared statement. "We are all human beings, and human beings make mistakes."

His resignation decision. which he said he made only minutes before the meeting, was met with approval from the six board

Cook said he will remain an active board member and still plans to run for re-election July 20. "I think that the children and the district still need a voice like mine," Cook said.

The plagiarism incident has received national attention and created an uproar in the com-

Cook apologized for the embarrassment that his action caused, especially for the graduating class and their parents.

"Hopefully I did the right thing and we will be able to move on," Cook said. He said that the focus of the school board should return to the children of Orange

"This is a sad evening for each of us," Vice Chairwoman Brenda Stephens said.

Ultimately, the board members had a responsibility to hold him to standards of faith and honesty,

Cook was greeted with hugs and pats on the back from supporters who spilled out of the board room as he left after the

announcement. He said that his supporters had encouraged him not to step down saying that one incident shouldn't

wipe out a decade of service.

"He has been in the forefront of education for children," said Elvira Mebane, who has a child in the school system. "He is for all of the kids."

At the start of the meeting, the board denied Cook's request to add public comment to the

Cook said that he wished the board and the public heard more from his supporters throughout

the week. "People in the community and on the street have been very positive about me," he said, claiming the media had distorted the

He said that he had endured many personal attacks in the past week that had provided him with many humbling lessons.

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Julie Hunt, who graduated from Orange High School last week, said she isn't satisfied with

"I think that a lot of people are disappointed," she said. "It gives a bad reputation to Orange High and Orange County."

> Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.

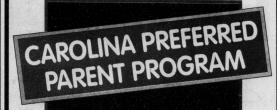
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# University considers signage

ASSISTANT UNIVERSITY EDITOR

June 3 — The University's

Task Force on Signage in Athletic Facilities endorsed the idea of corporate advertising in UNC sports venues during their final meeting May 27.

The recommendation will now go before Chancellor James Moeser and the UNC Board of Trustees. If approved, it could result in the formation of another committee to determine how the revenue would be distributed.

In response to the "substantial need for the Department of Athletics to meet rising scholar-ship costs, facility demands and sport-by-sport operating budget requirements," the resolution recommends that the University "explore signage and other related partnerships, for athletic venues." The task force also included

several guidelines for signage to ensure it had a limited and tasteful effect on UNC athletics.

"Signage or partnerships should only be introduced in a limited and tasteful way, with a

small number of companies that have strong integrity and national impact," the resolution stated.

The task force also recommended that the signage have significant financial impact within the athletic department; and the partnerships protect ... the environment and tradition of the institution.'

**UNC Athletics Director Dick** Baddour, who is chairman of the task force, has said in the past that the corporate presence would have as little effect on the University as possible.

"I can't imagine that we would change the names of our facilities ... I think we'll always be the Dean Smith Center and Kenan Stadium," he said at a forum in April. "We won't use floor logos like the McDonald's one on the Georgia Tech court."

The task force assembled by the BOT in October charged with the responsibility of examining the possibility of signing with corporations to allow permanent advertising in Kenan Stadium and the Smith

The revenue from corporate advertising in sports venues would provide necessary funds to the booster club that funds stu-dent athletes' scholarships. Due to recent tuition increases, the club failed to cover all its scholarship obligations.

The funding alternatives to corporate signage included increasing ticket prices, increas-ing student fees and eliminating

Judith Wegner, 'chairwoman of the faculty, said that although she was not happy with the idea of corporate signage and its effect on the University, the task force did successfully explore other

"They really had talked about how unfortunate it was to have to go this route, but it was really because they felt there would be some serious shortfalls."

Staff Writer Lauren Harris contributed to this article. Contact the University Editor at udesk@unc.edu.



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