

Seniors' health plan to expand

BY MARK PUENTE
STAFF WRITER

Gov. Mike Easley announced an expansion to a state prescription program last week that will ensure another 150,000 seniors the chance to participate by lowering eligibility requirements.

Senior Care offers as much as \$1,200 per year for medication to people not on Medicare or private health insurance.

Before its expansion, the program covered three types of diseases: cardiovascular, diabetes and chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases. The new benefits remove these restrictions and will cover any illness.

The program is funded by national tobacco settlement funds that go directly into the state's Health and Wellness Trust Fund.

The expansion will allow people to participate who are at or below 250 percent of the federal poverty level. It also allows those new to the program to get \$600 between now and the end of the year.

Von Valletta, president of the state chapter of senior advocacy group AARP, said she would not be surprised to see 500,000 people participating eventually.

"It's a significant amount of help for a significant amount of people," she said. "It is one of the best (programs) in the country. But we need help to get the word out to North Carolina seniors to enroll in the plan by the end of the year so they can get the money."

But Rep. Jim Gulley, R-Mecklenburg, is skeptical about the motives behind the program's

expansion two months before Election Day. "It is a good use of the tobacco money, but absolutely, it is an election year tactic."

He said Easley, who is seeking re-election, announced the expansion to garner more votes in his race against Republican candidate Patrick Ballantine.

Easley's campaign office could not be reached as of press time.

But Theodore Arrington, a professor of political science at UNC-Charlotte, said politicians should set aside party beliefs and determine whether the program's expansion is good public policy.

Dolly Mullen, a professor of political science at UNC-Asheville, said when elected officials don't follow through on the promises they make, the constituents who put them in

office have to be the first to call their hand. "Voters can take retribution on political parties. If Easley didn't think it would help him in the polls, he wouldn't have done it."

But it remains to be seen whether or not this move will give Easley a boost. He was leading Ballantine 51 percent to 35 percent, with 14 percent of voters undecided, according to a poll conducted in August for WUNC radio, WRAL-TV and The (Raleigh) News & Observer.

Sen. Richard Stevens, R-Wake, said the program is good because of the health care issues all citizens face. "As long as it helps North Carolinians, it is a good use of the tobacco money."

Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

SHELTER FROM THE STORM



DTH/RAY JONES

Jennifer Schmitt of Chapel Hill and her 5-year-old son, Sky Om-Landes, walk along a pier after a fishing expedition at University

Lake on Monday afternoon. Although the rain forced many to change their Labor Day plans, some people were able to enjoy the outdoors.

Ad found to have illegally endorsed Ballantine

BY KAVITA PILLAI
ASSISTANT STATE & NATIONAL EDITOR

The N.C. Board of Elections decided Friday that a TV advertisement mentioning gubernatorial candidate Patrick Ballantine violated state elections law.

The ad, funded by the Republican Governors Association, expressly advocated Ballantine's election instead of advocating for an issue, the board found.

All five board members — three Democrats and two Republicans — voted that the ad was in violation of elections law.

Don Wright, general counsel for

the board of elections, said if RGA had filed with the state as a political action committee, the ad would have been in compliance with the law. Instead, RGA claimed that the ad was about issue advocacy.

Scott Falmen, executive director of the N.C. Democratic Party and the individual who filed the complaint, said corporate contributions funded the ad.

He added that the BOE decision shows that the complaint is not a partisan tactic to attack Ballantine.

"We're delighted that the Board of Elections found that our complaint was with merit," Falmen said. "Even

more significant was that it was a unanimous, bipartisan vote, indicating that the ad RGA ran was paid for with illegal contributions."

The Ballantine campaign told The (Raleigh) News & Observer that it did not have any connection to the RGA ad. A spokesman for the campaign refused to comment on the issue to The Daily Tar Heel.

The issue of coordination between RGA and Ballantine was not pursued by the Democratic Party, Wright said.

Falmen added that coordination was not a primary part of the Democrats' argument.

"We hope that the Republican Governors Association will abide by the law," he said. "And we hope that Patrick Ballantine will encourage the outside groups that are in support of him to abide by the law as well."

The board will reconvene Thursday after consulting with the state district attorney as required by law. The N.C. Democratic Party has not requested any specific penalty but likely will do so this week.

"I'm sure we'll be making a case to the state board (this) week, but we haven't gotten that far," Falmen said.

Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

Frances fails to cripple state's holiday weekend

BY ALEX GRANADOS
STAFF WRITER

Despite anxiety about the path of Hurricane Frances, there was no shortage of visitors to the state of North Carolina during Labor Day weekend.

Connie Nelson, communications manager for the Cape Fear Coast Convention and Visitors Bureau, said Friday that she didn't expect the hurricane to interfere with the weekend.

"In addition to the travelers who normally come for Labor Day, we are expecting people leaving (Florida) for safer destinations," Nelson said.

She said local officials were not concerned about the holiday storm, which made landfall this weekend in Florida and is now inching toward the state's panhandle.

"We just don't anticipate any emergency measures being necessary," Nelson said.

While some transportation officials didn't expect decreased holiday travel, coastal rentals during the weekend told a different story.

At Kure Beach, just 12 of the 26 units at the Moran Motel were rented Saturday, said Dianna Pernell, who runs the business.

At the nearby Sand Castle Inn, Norris Teague reported a similarly poor showing on what is normally the last big hurrah of the tourist season.

He called it one of the worst Labor Day draws in his 31 years at the motel.

"My own sister didn't want to come," he said.

A flurry of midweek cancellations bought occupancy rate at Wrightsville Beach's Blockade Runner hotel to about 60 percent, said Bill Baggett, one of the hotel's owners.

"It's a beautiful weekend to have nobody here," he said.

Fears that Frances would somehow make its way up to the Carolina coast proved unfounded, but Nelson said there is no way of knowing what people will do until the path of a storm is known.

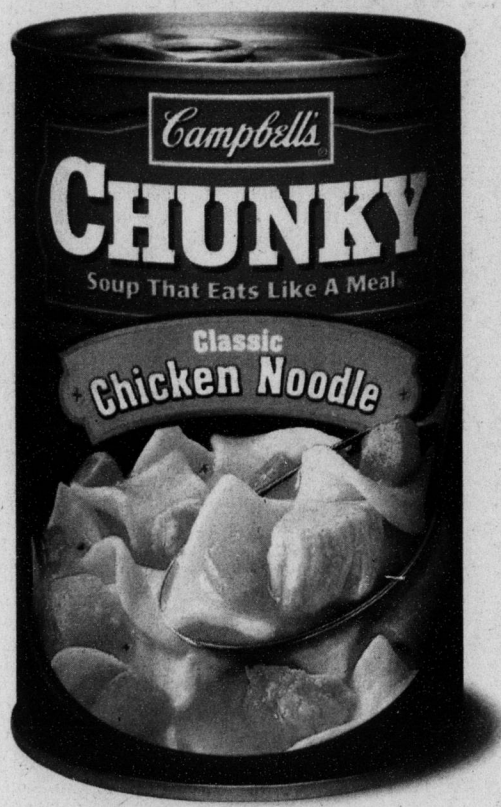
"You just don't know until weather events actually make landfall," she said.

Patty McQuillan, spokeswoman for the N.C. Department of Crime Control and Public Safety, said the Raleigh communications office reported road traffic that was lighter than usual during the weekend.

But she said traffic was expected to pick up as tourists return home Monday night and this morning.

The Associated Press contributed to this article. Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

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Don't delay! Application forms for '04-'05 Official University recognition of student co-curricular organizations are available from Room 2501 A of the Union. For continuous recognition, you must submit your Agreement at a meeting with Jon by Friday, September 24, 2004.

Questions? Concerns? Contact Jon at jon@email.unc.edu