

BOARD EDITORIALS

# COVERING THE GAPS

A new UNC-system health insurance plan could be risky to the rest of the state, but it's worth looking into because of the potential benefits.

A task force commissioned by the UNC-system Office of the President is looking into alternatives to the state's primary health insurance plan. And thank goodness for it.

The root of the problem with the current option — or, rather, the lack thereof — seems to be the exorbitant amount of money that it takes to cover one's family members using the plan, which is the only one available to state employees.

It is abundantly clear that workers' feelings regarding the State Health Plan range from indifference to outright dissatisfaction. As many of these employees already have to balance their salaries with living costs, large insurance payments only add to the burden. That's why a "pilot project" that could provide UNC-system employees with more choice is a great idea.

Of course, there is some danger involved in giving the UNC system the reins of its own health options. If a significant number of people move out from under the State Health Plan's umbrella, those left behind might become that much more vulnerable to unforeseen budgetary dilemmas.

Still, the possible benefits of an alternative are too great to ignore.

Simply put, state employees who work within the UNC system deserve a greater amount of variety in their health insurance coverage. So does every person who works for the state — but at this point, it makes sense to experiment with just a cross-section of the whole workforce.

Implementing such change in so many people's health coverage undoubtedly will cost a pretty penny, and it's unclear what the source of any extra funding might be. But if a new plan turns out to be successful, it would mean tens of thousands of people being happier with their coverage.

It would mean about 36,000 people not having to worry so much about the weight of their wallets in supporting their families' welfare.

It's a worthy cause, which is why the task force should continue to forge onward in researching alternatives. And if whatever the task force comes up with is feasible enough, UNC-system and state officials should push it through.

# TOO BIG A TRADE-OFF

A goal to reduce carbon-dioxide emissions in the town sounds good, but it could mean fewer Carolina North parking spaces than needed.

Chapel Hill has been known for being at the forefront of environmental progressivism. But a bold proposal before a Town Council committee — an effort to reduce carbon-dioxide emissions by 60 percent by the year 2050 — could cost the University dearly in the end.

On its face, such a goal is highly ambitious and would improve public health in this town.

But to achieve it, Chapel Hill officials would have to find ways to reduce the amount of car traffic.

And one way they certainly could do so would be to cut the number of parking spaces the University aims to incorporate into its satellite campus, Carolina North.

The development proposals for Carolina North call for 16,000 to 20,000 parking spaces to be built alongside research facilities, shops and residential areas. This collection of parking spaces could become a logical target for regulation.

"I think that type of design could not withstand the rigors of reducing our carbon emissions by 60 percent or reducing them at all," council member Jim Ward told The (Durham) Herald-Sun.

But the University can't afford to lose these spaces

to the town's efforts to reduce emissions.

The new research center will need a diverse workforce once it has been completed. Limiting the number of parking spaces would limit the accessibility of the satellite campus.

And improving public transportation as part of the emissions reduction effort won't be an adequate solution to loss of parking at Carolina North. Employees and students commuting to the satellite campus from outside the Chapel Hill area wouldn't benefit from public transportation within the town. A car commute, and parking spaces, still would be necessary.

It's no secret that town officials have been wary of the Carolina North parking situation. Their concerns are understandable, but they shouldn't set a goal that would force them to eliminate valuable spaces.

As it stands, the University faces a lack of parking spaces — a problem that affects faculty, staff and students alike. If parking at the satellite campus also becomes scant, that problem would be exacerbated.

The town should work to improve and protect the environment, but it should do so without throwing yet another roadblock in front of Carolina North.

# KEEP YOUR PROMISE

State officials shouldn't go back on their word to taxpayers by letting a 4-year-old half-cent increase in the N.C. sales tax remain in place.

Gov. Mike Easley's new budget proposal clearly puts the state ahead of its citizens, especially its poorer ones.

The half-cent of the sales tax that was set to go off the books this summer features prominently in the governor's budget. Easley projects that it would cost the state more than \$400 million to reduce the sales tax by half a cent.

But this would amount to a new tax, as state officials had promised to sunset the sales tax increase, which was passed by lawmakers in 2001 and extended in 2003, this year.

Of course, now that the state has been able to take advantage of the additional money for some time, it obviously is reluctant to give it back — no matter what was promised to taxpayers.

One of the biggest problems with using the sales tax to raise revenue is that any increases in the tax fall most heavily on those who can least afford the extra financial burden.

Low-income North Carolinians will feel the pinch of everyday goods being marginally more expensive before people in higher income brackets do.

Such a regressive tax should not be made permanent. It is a measure to be used when necessary — not something that state officials should adopt simply because they cannot keep their hands out of the cookie jar.

Raising such a huge amount of money to correct budget shortfalls in this manner is irresponsible of the state. One might question whether the government has lost sight of its duty to North Carolinians in its frantic rush to win at the numbers game.

The state obviously has to find money somewhere, but the sales tax was increased specifically as an emergency stop-gap measure.

Officials must find alternative sources of revenue if there is nothing in the proposed budget that can be cut.

Some state lawmakers might not have been re-elected had this come up during the election year instead of conveniently afterward. Easley should be ashamed of breaking a promise to North Carolinians.

If nothing else, officials must start learning to keep their word to constituents.

ON THE DAY'S NEWS

"Not on one strand are all life's jewels strung."

WILLIAM MORRIS, ENGLISH CRAFTSMAN AND WRITER

EDITORIAL CARTOON

By Steven Oklesch, elven@email.unc.edu



COMMENTARY

# Fixing relations with Europe will be a tall order for Bush

President Bush left Washington, D.C., this past weekend for a tour through Europe. He was supposed to tout the importance of European unity and of improved relations between the United States and the European Union.



AMON ANDERSON  
PARA SER CULTO, ES SER LIBRE

But in his first speech in Brussels on Monday, Bush devoted only a few lines to European unity. He dismissed the opportunity to increase goodwill between the trans-Atlantic powers in order to advance his policy stance on Russia, Iran and Syria.

Many Europeans likely will be disappointed that the president would neglect such an opportunity, and they likely will question the earnestness of Bush's limited pro-European Union rhetoric.

If Bush is serious about advancing liberty across the globe, he must act strategically to ensure that the U.S.-European alliance that he refers to as "the main pillar of our security" is maintained and enriched. And this will take more than a few sentences.

Europe has granted the president its audience, and Bush must take this opportunity to mend rifts that have stemmed from the war in Iraq. This is no small task, because Europeans harbor much ill will toward the president. One thousand protesters greeted Bush's arrival in Belgium, and even larger protests are expected for later this week.

Both Bush and European leaders hope that this is indeed a bridge-building trip for him. European leaders have been instructed to stay away from contentious issues. But although they are pushing for reconciliation, Europeans themselves have grown more displeased with U.S. action. In March 2004, the Pew Research Center for People and

benefits of strong U.S. relations. In introducing Bush in Brussels, Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt referred to U.S. action in the former Yugoslavia, when E.U. forces were unable to intervene.

The United States also recognizes the importance of Europe, as we borrow hundreds of billions of dollars a year from the European Union and abroad. Though the two powers have very different problem-solving preferences, both Europe and the United States need a healthy, reciprocal relationship.

President Bush's trip to Europe is a step in the right direction, but many Europeans are wary of his sincerity. He must convince them of a willingness to rebuild the relationships damaged through foreign policy differences. For Europeans actually to buy what Bush is selling, he's going to have to demonstrate that the United States is willing to sit down at the table and treat its allies as true partners.

"The credibility of the United States is sinking," former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright told The Philadelphia Inquirer. "Osama bin Laden has been able to do something that 40 years of communism was unable to do, which is to divide Europe from the United States."

Our nation has lost a great deal of moral legitimacy during the past few years, and this decline has been substantial in Europe. In order for the United States to regain that legitimacy and to progress as part of an international community, we must invest in international democratic institutions — showing the world that when President Bush talks about liberty, his money is where his mouth is.

Contact Amon Anderson at amona@email.unc.edu.

EDITOR'S NOTE: The above editorials are the opinions of solely The Daily Tar Heel Editorial Board, and were reached after open debate. The board consists of seven board members, the editorial page associate editor, the editorial page editor and the DTH editor. The 2004-05 DTH editor decided not to vote on the board and not to write board editorials.

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**Those seeking positions within the CAA should turn in applications by March 2**

TO THE EDITOR:  
Applications for the 2005-06 Carolina Athletic Association Cabinet now are available outside the CAA office in Union 3508-C. Positions available include Sports Marketing chair, Homecoming chair, Ticket Distribution vice chair and Fever chair, among others. Completed applications should be returned to the CAA office no later than 5 p.m. March 2. Please contact CAA President-elect Justin Johnson with any questions or concerns.

Justin Johnson  
President-elect  
Carolina Athletic Association

**Alpha Iota Omega's standpoint has a strong foundation in constitutional law**

TO THE EDITOR:  
The board editorial entitled "Stand Your Ground" opens a Pandora's box paving the way for government-regulated speech. If the University is allowed to require Alpha Iota Omega to admit any male, regardless of creed, UNC is effectively conditioning AIO's access to state funds and facilities on the fraternity members' relinquishing their freedom of speech and right to exercise their religion freely.

Further, AIO's "strong" equal protection rights are violated. By exercising their free speech, they are forfeiting resources given to other groups who are exercising their First Amendment rights in a manner agreeable to the administration. The protection of the law is being unevenly applied.

Do not get me wrong: I am in favor of student funds being used to fund student groups of all ideologies exercising their freedom of speech and religion under the auspices of UNC student organizations. I firmly believe that a truly open forum of ideas car-

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