

BOARD EDITORIALS

HEALTHY POSSIBILITY

Although it would create an extra burden for some people, the UNC system should require students to have some form of health coverage.

UNC-Chapel Hill loses good students every year not because of academic problems or honor code violations but because they came to school without a safety net for sickness or injury.

UNC-system administrators should remedy that problem with a health insurance requirement.

Approximately 15 percent of UNC-CH's student body doesn't have health insurance, which is simply too many people living with the risk of injury.

Accidents can happen in the course of four years at the University — and the financial fallout is deadly.

Every year, UNC sees students leave for paying jobs in order to pay off expenses that they wouldn't have faced if they'd bought coverage.

Fortunately, UNC-system administrators are following in the steps of the University of Connecticut, Ohio State University and the 10 University of California-system schools by considering a rule that would make health insurance mandatory for all incoming students starting as early as fall 2006.

Such a plan could be dangerous if it didn't ensure choice and accessibility, but administrators have made

solid plans to address those aspects of the proposal.

Students who already are covered by health insurance that matches or exceeds the University-endorsed plan would be allowed a right to waiver.

But more importantly, Margaret Jablonski, vice chancellor for student affairs, told The Daily Tar Heel that financial aid would cover the costs of insurance for low-income students.

Factoring the requirement into financial aid would keep the measure from pricing students out of UNC while still serving its purpose.

Officials also are moving in the right direction by eyeing multiple plans and considering the needs of different student populations. Jablonski told the DTH there might be three or four plans from which to choose.

Bob Wirag, director of Student Health Service, put it best when he said it's not just the individual who loses when he or she leaves UNC — the University loses its investment too.

With careful measures to ensure choice and accessibility, a mandatory insurance requirement would be a solid strategy toward preventing that loss.

EDUCATION'S FRIEND

For the most part, Gov. Mike Easley's budget proposal is a strong set of recommendations that gives education in North Carolina a boost.

Gov. Mike Easley's proposed budget, released Wednesday, gives a satisfactory amount of money to the UNC system. If his proposals are passed, they could alleviate some of the damage that public universities in this state have suffered from successive cutbacks.

The governor's proposal promises the full amount of enrollment growth funding requested by the UNC-system Board of Governors — \$73.6 million — along with \$11.8 million for financial aid.

Questions surround Easley's new sources of revenue for his budget, including increased excise taxes on candy, newspapers, movie tickets and other products. The main source of contention is his proposal to increase the cigarette tax — a sensitive issue in a state with such a strong tobacco background.

But given that North Carolina has the second-lowest cigarette tax in the nation, the state should take the benefits of an increase — for the revenue it would generate and for the health of the public.

The state would gain extra tax money to pay for education and other major needs, and the increased costs for consumers would help prevent underaged

people from buying cigarettes.

North Carolina needs that revenue. The state doesn't automatically fund the university system's enrollment growth — something it provides for K-12 education. Without regular funding increases, the state needs to look in new places for those funds.

Excise taxes are the best way to ensure that the additional tax burden is shouldered by people who make conscious, unforced decisions to commit their money.

Responsible North Carolinians should be able to decide for themselves whether they can afford to purchase these products. The state shouldn't act as a financial baby-sitter for people who want to spend their hard-earned cash on luxury items.

That said, one of Easley's suggestions is disturbing. A tax increase on newspapers would disrupt the free flow of information in North Carolina, and it must not come to pass.

Otherwise, N.C. schools need the money. If Easley's budget proposal manages to survive political attacks, it could be a boon for education — arguably this state's most essential entity.

NOT A SUPER REMEDY

Transportation officials should think carefully before they commit to building an expensive "Superstreet" in Chapel Hill to alleviate traffic.

For many people, sitting in a long line of cars, waiting for a traffic light to change and thinking about places to go and people to see can be one of the most frustrating elements of daily life.

But although bad traffic screams for a quick fix, sometimes it's best just to grit one's teeth and bear it — without turning to a pricey solution.

Unfortunately, a pricey solution seems to be what officials want.

According to The (Raleigh) News & Observer, N.C. Department of Transportation planners are mulling the possibility of building a new type of intersection called a Superstreet in Chapel Hill. The new system eliminates the use of direct left turns — instead, it forces drivers to turn right, cut left into a median and then turn left again through another traffic light. Something similar already exists in parts of Michigan.

Officials have designated Chapel Hill's crossroads of U.S. 15-501, Erwin Road and Europa Drive as a major problem area. The intersections certainly can become inundated with slow-moving vehicles, especially during rush hour.

But a Superstreet would be an overly expensive

solution to a problem that really doesn't warrant such a substantial response, at least not yet. It would cost millions of dollars: According to the N&O, the last bid to build the project, from Triangle Grading and Paving Inc., was almost \$5 million.

Also, construction of the project would be inconvenient to people driving at night, when most of it would take place.

The only point at which traffic levels at this crossroads truly reach infuriating proportions tends to be after a major UNC football or basketball game — when a large number of motorists are trying to leave the area at the same time.

And this set of intersections isn't even particularly dangerous. It certainly isn't a magnet for fatal car wrecks, and most of the accidents that have happened there have been relatively minor.

Chapel Hill is a town of some 50,000 people, and high traffic levels should come as no surprise.

It's not too much to ask motorists traveling through this crossroads to budget an extra five minutes for their commute. Officials shouldn't call upon a Superstreet to save the day.

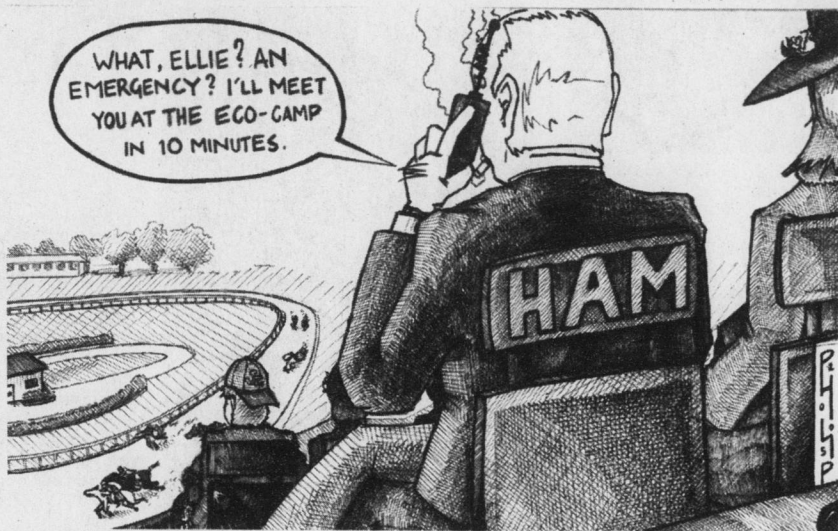
ON THE DAY'S NEWS

"Good health and good sense are two of life's greatest blessings."

SYRUS, ROMAN AUTHOR

EDITORIAL CARTOON

By Philip McFee, pip@email.unc.edu



COMMENTARY

As potential sources for new revenue, state lotteries stink

In theory, a lottery sounds like a great idea. If a state needs more money for something like education, it runs a lottery and add the proceeds to the education budget. Those who want to participate in the lottery can do so, and they have a shot at winning a large sum of money. Those who don't want to participate, for any reason, don't have to. It's a tax on the willing.

In 1964, New Hampshire became the first state to implement a state-run lottery. According to the Education Commission of the States, 40 states and the District of Columbia, have lotteries. Twenty-two of those states earmark lottery proceeds for education.

But in practice, state-run lotteries aren't so simple. They are just more examples of politicians providing us with false solutions to real problems.

There are many reasons why lotteries aren't successful. For one, the revenues are never as high as the politicians promise when they originally propose these programs. Of course, this is assuming that a particular lottery actually makes a profit in the first place — something some games have proven to be incapable of doing.

And when lotteries do make a profit, revenues typically make up a very small percentage of overall education budgets. They're certainly not the financial windfalls that politicians claim they are.

So let's assume that a lottery does indeed make a profit. Average citizens like you and me might believe that the honest politicians simply are going to take the lottery money and add it to the existing education budget.

We would be wrong. In many cases, scheming politicians simply replace the funds they initially



PHILIP HENSLEY
LIBERTARIAN STEEZE

had tabbed for education with lottery money.

A 1997 study published in the State and Local Government Review stated that once a state implemented a lottery, education spending declined. It also stated that "states without lotteries actually maintain and increase their education spending more so than states with lotteries."

Lottery proponents like to point to Georgia's HOPE Scholarship Program — which provides funds for high-achieving students seeking to attend the state's public and private colleges and universities and is funded through Georgia's lottery revenues — as an example of how a lottery can bolster education in a state.

But although the HOPE lottery has been more successful than others, the program is starting to face many problems that will require a rollback of the "free" education it promises to students.

Like any other program that offers anything free to people, the HOPE Scholarship saw a rise in qualified students after its inception. Much of this was contributed to by grade inflation, as high school grade point averages rose while SAT scores remained the same.

Lottery revenues have started to plateau, and Georgia lawmakers already have begun to place restrictions on the program. Last year they voted to make certain cuts if lottery reserves fall from one year to the next. If reserves

decline two years in a row, the \$300 book allowance would be cut in half. If they decline another year, that allowance would be nixed altogether. And if they decline a third consecutive year, certain student fees would be cut from the program.

Lawmakers also are considering limiting the number of credit hours a student is allowed to take under the scholarship. A current proposal would cap the amount the scholarship pays for at 127 hours. While this would mean that certain slackers would get booted from the program after a while, it also would mean that those with majors requiring more than 127 hours would have to pay for an extra part of their education.

You and I could come up with all sorts of solutions to the lottery problems I raised. We could say that if only lawmakers did such and such here and such and such over there, the problem would be solved and we could run a successful lottery.

But any time you turn a social problem over to politicians, it ceases to be a social problem and becomes a political issue — an issue to be decided by those with the most political influence, which will never be you or me.

In the end, it doesn't really matter if state governments are being hypocritical by running lotteries while banning private gambling ventures or whether or not a lottery is a regressive tax on the poor. Politicians want us to debate those issues, because it takes our attention away from the real question of whether or not lotteries actually work.

The answer is clearly no.

Contact Philip Hensley at <http://philiphensleyjr.blogspot.com>.

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.

READERS' FORUM

Dance Marathon organizers are being criticized unfairly

TO THE EDITOR:

I was very disappointed to see that Virginia Wooten's article on Thursday's front page was part of a troubling Daily Tar Heel tradition during the week of UNC's Dance Marathon. Last year's editorial cartoon and Wooten's article were more concerned with a sense of hostility and bitterness between student service groups and charities than they were with the charities' successes.

I have heard students in other service organizations complain about Dance Marathon in the same line of many of Wooten's insinuations. To them I say this: There is not yet so much right in the world that charities need to "vie" with one another to help others. Most students presumably join service organizations to help people, and for any of these students to say that he or she is "against" another charity which succeeds at helping people is not only inconsistent and ridiculous; it is an embarrassment to our vibrant and compassionate student body.

I have never danced for 24 hours at the Dance Marathon, and I have never been on one of its committees, but I recognize the real help they have provided to the families and children of this state. The men and women of DM are our friends and our classmates, and they deserve support and commendation for their success, not ridicule.

I applaud students in every campus service group who are committed to making the world a better place, and I am grateful for leaders such as Dave Scott of Alpha Phi Omega and Amy Gorely of the Carolina Center for Public Service who embrace a diverse, pluralistic approach to community service at Carolina.

Alison Carr
Senior
Biology

Mandatory health coverage would be an extra burden

TO THE EDITOR:

Is everything driven by money these days? The new policy that would require students to have health insurance comparable to the University's standards before admission does not take into account students who cannot afford health insurance. The fact that companies already are making bids on who will be the one to supply health insurance to the University's students is suspicious. It makes me think that there are monetary reasons for this policy.

Sudden illness combined with the need to get a job to pay medical bills was cited as one of the main reasons for dropping out. I would like to see the actual number of dropouts in a given year and the breakdown of the proportion of students who cite medical expenses as their reasons for dropping out versus the medical condition itself causing them to

drop out of school.

Reason says that those who cite medical expenses as reasons for dropping out are those who will reconsider coming to this school because of the cost of education and the added health insurance cost. To make this policy valid, administrators might want to provide free or discounted health insurance to those who can't afford it.

Demi Alabi
Junior
Nursing

Dealing with the flu can be simpler than a hospital visit

TO THE EDITOR:

Many people associate the flu with the cold, blustery days of winter, but as we are starting to see a little more sunshine and warm weather, Wake County medical officials report that February usually produces the greatest number of flu cases. This time of year, local hospital emergency departments are becoming overcrowded with patients who are coughing and sniffing. Other associated symptoms include a headache, sore throat or a fever and chills.

Flu-like symptoms, while very uncomfortable, are not usually life-threatening and should be treated appropriately, but not in a hospital emergency department. A health clinic, doctor's office or even an urgent care facility can provide quality treatment at a fraction

of the cost. Unfortunately, many students missed the opportunity to receive a flu vaccine this year because of restrictions and the reported shortage. However, the restriction has been lifted, and vaccines are available once again.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and local hospitals have recommended easy, free guidelines to reduce the chance of getting the flu. These are common-sense ideas, and as you sit in class, on a bus or in a meeting, be mindful of the environment surrounding you. Your common sense can save you money in doctor and hospital visits.

Jill Formanczyk
Senior
Nursing

First Collegetown program will handle diversity issues

TO THE EDITOR:

How many times have you heard someone say, "I'm not racist, but ..." — only to go on and make a racist comment? "I'm not against gay people, but ..." What's keeping different races at UNC from interacting more? What's your opinion on the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender-Straight Alliance's Kiss-In in the Pit? Why do people have diverse "school" friends and homogenous weekend friends?

Explore these issues. How? What is going to bring about a change in your behavior and in your mindset? Collegetown. Right

now, student leaders are organizing UNC's first ever Collegetown program with the National Conference for Community and Justice, a nonprofit organization founded in 1927. At Collegetown — a free weekend retreat scheduled for April 1-3 — 40 UNC students will open up these questions and form a real Carolina community, poised to make real change on campus.

Pick up a Collegetown application in the Union resource hub across from Alpine Bagel Cafe. Applications will also be available in the Pit today from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. You can e-mail us, too, at collegetown@unc.edu.

Stephen Lassiter
Co-president-elect
Campus Y

Alisha Brice
Chairwoman
Campus Unity Committee
CUAB

TO SUBMIT A LETTER: The Daily Tar Heel welcomes reader comments. 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 2409, Carolina Union, mail them to P.O. Box 3257, Chapel Hill, NC 27515 or e-mail them to editdesk@unc.edu.

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