

## Proposed bill gives option of public finances to campaigns

BY WHITNEY ISENHOWER  
STAFF WRITER

Campaigning for public office in Chapel Hill could soon become financially feasible for more local residents.

A bill in the N.C. House would provide those seeking to campaign with the option of receiving public financing. The bill, which applies exclusively to Chapel Hill, would open up opportunities for residents who could not fund their own campaigns or do not have the time to seek donations.

"It would level the playing field," said Rep. Joe Hackney, D-Orange, one of the bill's primary sponsors.

Though the bill doesn't require that campaigns be publicly financed, Town Council members say the funding could take campaigns' focus off money and force them to be more driven by ideas and platforms.

"It requires candidates to run on the merits of their position and not on how much money they can raise," said council member Jim Ward.

The bill does not require all campaigns to be equally financed, leaving candidates with the option of making the race financially competitive.

Council member Mark Kleinschmidt said the purpose of public financing is to eliminate one of the most important campaign problems: the initial cost of entry. He considers the idea behind

the bill important but disputed the urgency of the proposal.

The largest spenders haven't always won recent town elections, he said, adding that those who spent the least also didn't win.

"You still have to meet minimum expectations in order to get your message to the people," Kleinschmidt said.

Critics of campaign finance reform assert that the legislation brings free speech issues into question.

Andrew Perrin, University professor of sociology, said the U.S. Supreme Court has recognized that campaigns can feature political speech.

"You have to be careful you don't violate a candidate's right to speak through their pocketbooks."

But others say the proposed bill would not violate the right to free speech because candidates still have the option to raise money separate from the public funding.

Ward said the bill's chances for passage could be hurt by those who determine whether it becomes law.

"It will be decided by people who have been elected by the current system, and they may not be eager to change the process. But I hope they would evaluate it on its merits."

Contact the State & National Editor at [stntdesk@unc.edu](mailto:stntdesk@unc.edu).

## School officials aim high with budget

BY BRIANNA BISHOP  
ASSISTANT CITY EDITOR

County school board members know what they want in place in district schools next fiscal year, but the level of funding available for their initiatives is less certain.

"We're wishing big here," board Chairwoman Libbie Hough said at Monday's work session on the fiscal year 2005-06 budget. "We'll have to prioritize."

According to the projected budget, the district's total request to the county for the coming fiscal year will be about \$2.9 million — a 16.26 percent increase from last year, according to staff reports.

This number is likely to change as the board tweaks its overall budget, estimated at \$23.3 million. School board members noted

that the projected increase would be much smaller if the Board of Commissioners had matched last year's requests.

For 2004-05, the county only gave the district 31.4 percent of the roughly \$2.3 million it requested.

Superintendent Shirley Carraway said this year's budget requests are aligned with the district's strategic plan, as well as a report by Professor Madeleine Grumet of the University's School of Education on the resource disparity between the county's two school districts.

But she said Grumet's report was not the driving force in drafting the budget, as it provided information already known to many.

"It's really just a validation of the work the district has done or is attempting to do," Carraway said.

Grumet's report suggested that Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools had \$12 million more in annual funding than county schools.

Current budget requests for human resources include the addition of four high school teachers, a reading remediation teacher and social workers, among others.

The board will request funding for 1 1/2 social workers, which with a matched commitment from the county Department of Social Services will give the district one social worker at each school.

Other items on the projected budget include funding for a middle college program at Durham Technical Community College next fall, a part-time coordinator for the International Baccalaureate program at Cedar Ridge High School,

and funding for textbooks.

Board members also discussed the possibility of having two subject-area specialists and the need for counselors or testing coordinators.

"It's very clear what we need and the direction we need to be going," Hough said.

District staff will look into the ideas generated at the work session, and the budget will be discussed again at the board's Monday meeting. Another budget work session will be held April 11.

The board will hold a public hearing April 25 at 6 p.m. at Cedar Ridge High School on budget priorities.

Budget requests are due to the commissioners in May.

Contact the City Editor at [citydesk@unc.edu](mailto:citydesk@unc.edu).

## Districting push untimely, commissioners say

BY KAVITA PILLAI  
ASSISTANT STATE & NATIONAL EDITOR

A bill introduced Monday night by state Rep. Bill Faison, D-Orange, would change the process of Orange County commissioner elections — but county officials say the action is premature.

The bill would require district representation in commissioner elections. Beginning in 2006, residents of District A, which includes the Chapel Hill township, would elect two commissioners every two

years to serve four-year terms.

District B, which includes Hillsborough, and District C, encompassing mostly rural Orange County, each would elect one member. One member of the board would be elected at large.

The rules would increase the number of commissioners from five to seven and become law after voters approved them in a referendum.

Faison said he sponsored the bill because residents of urban areas such as Chapel Hill end up elect-

ing the entire board.

"Right now one region is dominant," Faison said. "There's no reason other regions shouldn't have a voice — someone at the table who shares their views."

He added that although rural areas will have a guaranteed voice on the board, the commissioners might not act any differently.

"The majority view will be urban — Chapel Hill," he said. "But the small-town, rural view needs to be heard."

But some county officials think the measure is unwarranted.

Commissioner Stephen Halkiotis said the board is waiting on a report from the county manager that will explore district representation. He also said the issue has been studied before.

"The majority of the board thought that one person-one vote

was the best way to go," he said. "I still feel that way."

"Mr. Faison, for his own particular reasons, has basically acted unilaterally by introducing a bill that was not requested by the Board of Commissioners."

Commissioner Barry Jacobs said he would have preferred that Faison had waited until the board examined the issue on its own.

"I think it's vastly premature," he said. "We told (Faison) that, and he filed it anyway."

But Faison said he doesn't see any downside to district representation, adding that several commissioners have voiced their disagreement with his plan for reasons unknown to him. "Whether it's self-preservation or not, I couldn't tell you."

Contact the State & National Editor at [stntdesk@unc.edu](mailto:stntdesk@unc.edu).

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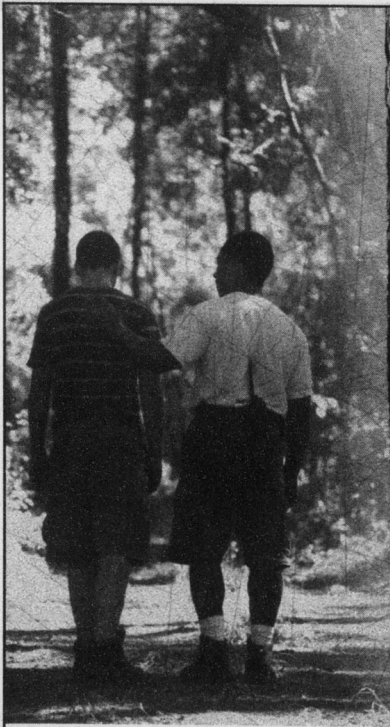
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