

**SARAH HODGES**

FROM MY WORD PROCESSOR TO YOUR EARS
Sarah Hodges is a senior psychology major from Durham.

E-MAIL: SEHODGES@EMAIL.UNC.EDU

Petitions need more than just a signature

College is the ideal time to form and strengthen our opinions. Many people hold views on nearly everything, especially in our liberal college town. We need to learn, however, to deepen our knowledge of the issues instead of just taking on more opinions.

We learn about the issues facing our generation by taking classes in women's studies or social justice. We get involved in extracurricular clubs or political organizations. Then we find the corresponding button or T-shirt to wear in the hopes of swaying someone else's opinion with catchy slogans.

AT-LARGE COLUMNIST We wallpaper the back of our cars with our opinions on politics and religion. Think of how many more bumper stickers you could tout if you traded in your four-door sedan for a Hummer. If only it didn't clash with the "Global Warming is Real" slogan you have on your car now.

With the mob of booths and advocates flooding the Pit every day, it's easy for college students to overload on causes. We want to change the world. We want to fix the problems that our parents created when they were trying to change the world.

We might be swayed to sign a petition in the Pit every now and then or to show our solidarity with the people of Darfur by joining a Facebook group.

But what is the point if we're not going to check back and see if our petition had any influence on the issue? How about if we're just going to delete event announcements unless there is free food involved?

We might even agree to be bombarded with listserv e-mails from the Sierra Club or the Human Rights Campaign — that is, until we get tired of them asking for the money we need for textbooks, rent and the Thursday night pint.

It takes very little effort to get involved on such a superficial level. There are clubs and campaigns surrounding the Pit everyday at lunch. Here we can pick up a flier or talk to a spokesman and feel informed about an issue, but then we're not really getting the most out of our education.

College is the proverbial time to find oneself. We should not be against abortion because that is what our parents taught us, nor should we be pro-choice just to fit in with the liberal majority. We should be able to strip all of our political convictions down to their moral foundations and build them up again.

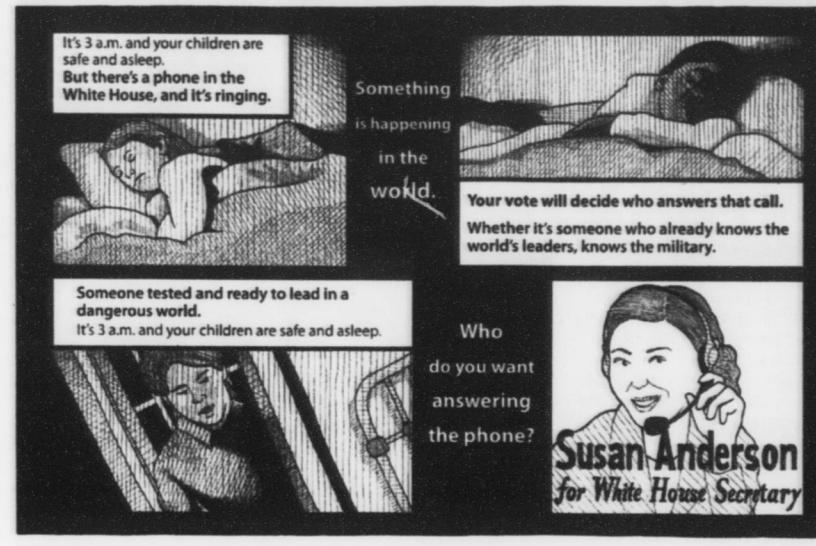
We need to take this opportunity to read up on the issues. It's great that we want to be involved, but we're not well-equipped to deal with social issues when much of our generation gets its news from "The Daily Show." Watch the six o'clock headlines. Make CNN or The New York Times your laptop's home page. Research the organizations whose petitions you usually sign without a second thought.

People like to have opinions and to be ready to argue their stance on every issue. We often fail to realize that it is not important that we have all of the answers, just that we feel strongly about the ones that we do have.

Most importantly, we should show people how we feel rather than just telling them. Instead of simply signing petitions, call your legislators or join a protest. Take that step from contemplating bathroom fliers while washing your hands to actually going to an information session or volunteering in the community.

Maybe it is time to trade in that sedan after all. Get a bike instead. Do something to fight global warming instead of spreading the word from next to your exhaust pipe.

EDITORIAL CARTOON By Mason Phillips, mphil@email.unc.edu



False alarm

ASU student's actions were reckless; school reacted well

Appalachian State University student Matt Haney embarrassed himself and his university Monday with a sickening display of insensitivity.

When Haney discovered some minor damage to his apartment door Monday afternoon, he made like Greg Paulus in a close game and freaked out.

Fearing that he might have to pay for the door, Haney decided to file a police report in which he claimed to have seen an armed burglar wearing a Pink Floyd T-shirt moving toward ASU.

From there, the situation quickly escalated to a total campus lockdown before police discovered that the entire incident was a misguided fabrication.

By spinning a mysterious tale of a Pink Floyd gunman, Haney showed a level of judgment at best, asinine, and at worst, comfortably numb.

The incident took place just weeks after the tragic shooting at Northern Illinois University and days after a botched emergency drill at Elizabeth City State University.

Fortunately, there is good news to report from this most unusual false alarm.

Where Haney's creative storytelling capabilities failed miserably, the increased security measures at ASU clearly succeeded.

Administrators at the university responded quickly — just 24 minutes after the initial police response — and efficiently to the news of a possible gunman.

Text messages, e-mails and online updates kept students informed and helped to tame the circus of a situation.

On March 19, UNC administrators will test a number of on-campus sirens distributed throughout North and South campuses responsible for relaying pre-recorded instructional

messages to students, faculty and staff in the case of a similar emergency.

The tests are part of a security program intended to ensure quick and efficient communication in the case that a tornado, hazardous chemical spill or gunman jeopardizes campus safety here in Chapel Hill.

The tests also mark the launch of Alert Carolina, a safety awareness campaign that aims to educate the UNC community about what safety measures are available and how people should react in the case of an emergency.

Hopefully we will never have to deal with a real or imaginary gunman on campus here at UNC.

But if the unthinkable occurs, with these new security measures, we should be able to expect the same level of efficiency and professionalism demonstrated by administrators at ASU.

Pulling the race card

Wright's 'Jim Crow' complaint just doesn't hold up

The embarrassing situation concerning possible ethics violations by Rep. Thomas Wright, D-New Hanover, has reached a new low.

With Wright's joint General Assembly ethics hearing coming to a close, one of his attorneys, Doug Harris, fired one last desperate volley at the panel in an attempt to derail the case against his client.

Harris attempted to highlight Wright as the victim in this mess. So he did what all good lawyers do when their back is against the wall: Go big or go home.

He dropped the race card.

Unfortunately for Wright, Harris' legal argument works about as well as a black-and-white TV with HD cable.

Harris has pinned his argument on contrasting last year's case against Rep. Pryor Gibson, D-Anson, with Wright's current predicament, claiming he is a victim of a "Jim Crow" hearing.

Harris argued that Gibson was in nearly the same position that Wright is in and that the only reason Gibson got off and Wright is being prosecuted is

because Wright is black.

This, of course, is a gross exaggeration by Harris, a legal stretch and yet another hit to the reputation of the legislature, compliments of Wright's continuing antics.

The attempt by the Wright defense to use race as a get-out-of-jail-free card is shameless and, luckily, went more or less ignored by the assembly.

The connection is nothing more than one gross, invalid logical fallacy.

Gibson, who is white, was accused of misconduct and misrepresentation of a bill during last session.

A fellow legislator accused him of violating ethics rules by falsely certifying a local zoning bill as "noncontroversial." The charge was later dismissed by the ethics committee.

Wright, on the other hand, has been accused of mishandling \$350,000 in campaign and charity donations. It's also amounted to six felony charges.

We hate to be the ones to break it to the Wright camp, but Lady Justice isn't that blind.

Comparing Gibson's alleged mischaracterization of a bill to the possibility of misusing upwards of a third of a million dollars in public and charity funds is ludicrous.

The two events are in no way parallel to each other. Gibson's was an internal distinction, irrelevant to citizens. Wright's situation, for fear of understanding our point, is substantially more serious.

Wright's irresponsible use of the race card is just another chapter in the disjointed story that's been his defense.

Wright's legal tactic since day one has been to dodge the charges and instead challenge the legitimacy of his accusers.

We can only wonder why that's the case.

As for everyone else watching this debacle, we hope those in the political sphere are taking notes. Leveling charges of discrimination as recklessly as Wright has done should not be acceptable to our elected officials.

But with any luck, this will be the end of the cleanup of Raleigh the assembly promised last year.

A better door than window

N.C. needs better budget accessibility, transparency

According to a report released Monday by the Pew Center on the States, North Carolina sorely lacks transparency in its budgeting process.

It's a no-brainer that transparency should be required of any public body in a functioning democracy. Since billions of taxpayers' dollars are concerned, the state's lack of transparency is an even more egregious offense.

The "Grading the States" report card assesses a variety of criteria, including employment, information and technology and budget management, to determine how effectively the nation's 50 states are serving the public.

While the state scored a B-minus overall, it was the issue of budget transparency on which

the report was most critical.

North Carolina's total spending ranks 10th in the country, at \$41 billion every budget cycle. Spending per capita ranks somewhat lower, 34th overall at \$4,642 a person.

North Carolina's budget can be found online via the Office of State Management and Budget, but it's notoriously difficult to wade through.

The report highlighted the fact that the governor's budget document was difficult even for experts to comprehend and that public input in the legislative process is "severely limited."

The online format contains links to various sections within the budget, each of which consists of a number of individual pages that must be loaded sepa-

rately, hardly an efficient way to view such a large document.

Also, there's no aggregate budget either within departments or for the state as a whole.

Citizens have a right to know how their money is being spent, particularly when the government is throwing \$41 billion around every two years.

Whether excessive secrecy or poor information reporting is to blame, the state needs to make budget transparency a priority.

The residents of North Carolina deserve the opportunity to see how their elected officials are working for them. But they can't do that if information is not readily accessible.

Honestly, we'd be surprised if the legislators themselves know what's in the budget.

QUOTE OF THE DAY:

"He's the nicest guy. ... But on the wrestling mat he's trying to tear your arm off and beat you with it."

THOMAS SCOTTON, ON WRESTLING TEAMMATE KEEGAN MUELLER

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Feel strongly about something that has been printed? Post your own response to a letter, editorial or story online. VISIT www.dailytarheel.com/feedback

Women's-only gym hours set a dangerous standard

TO THE EDITOR:

I was disappointed to see my beloved Daily Tar Heel supporting Harvard's decision of women-only gym hours ("No men allowed," March 5).

In fact, it reminded me of another article I read in the DTH about how UNC's Counseling and Wellness Services has new drop-in hours — unless you're white ("CWS adds drop-in hours," March 3). Of course, they apparently already have hours for students — unless they're straight.

Does it really hurt anybody to allow women a few hours in a gym to themselves or adding extra hours for anybody but (white people) to get mental help? No, it honestly doesn't.

But it applies a dangerous double standard that, if reversed, would bring the American Civil Liberties Union or Jesse Jackson down here in a New York minute.

It is exactly this kind of seemingly harmless helping hand to a religious or ethnic minority that can start a slow slide into separate and unequal. Of course, clearly some folks don't believe in equal services for every group.

Chris Cameron
2005-06 Daily Tar Heel
Opinion Editor

ASU incident demonstrates need for campus gun bans

TO THE EDITOR:

In response to the article regarding the safety threat at ASU ("ASU reacts to safety threat," March 4), this incident is yet another example of how our public and private universities need to ban firearms on campuses.

After the shooting at Columbine High School, Americans and politicians rushed to make our high schools safer, even going as far as implementing metal detectors in school. Yet with the attacks at Virginia Tech and Northern Illinois University, there has been little to no reform in the safety of college campuses.

Some argue that guns actually help make our campuses safer, yet violence begets more violence. Armed students that try to confront gunmen risk the chance of escalating the violence.

Universities need to place clear bans on weapons just as in the high school system. In a place where learning and education is a priority, firearms have no place.

College campuses have begun seeking plans to improve campus safety, but many of these programs are still lacking because students are not required to sign up for text alerts or e-mail alerts regarding emergencies on campuses. Campuses need to find a better way to alert all students and faculty to insure the safety of the campus.

College is a time of new experiences, cultivation and learning which should not be tainted with concerns about one's safety. College campuses, students and politicians, in lieu of incidents at Va. Tech and NIU, need to become more responsible in combating violence on campuses before another college campus is ravaged by violence.

Alexis Ivey
Freshman
History, Public Policy

SPEAK OUT

WRITING GUIDELINES:

- Please type: Handwritten letters will not be accepted.
- Sign and date: No more than two people should sign letters.
- Students: Include your year, major and phone number.
- Faculty/staff: Include your department and phone number.
- Edit: The DTH edits for space, clarity, accuracy and vulgarity. Limit letters to 250 words.

SUBMISSION:

- Drop-off: at our office at Suite 2409 in the Student Union.
- E-mail: to editdesk@unc.edu
- Send: to P.O. Box 3257, Chapel Hill, N.C., 27515.

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The Daily Tar Heel

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115 years
of editorial freedom

ERIN ZUREICK
EDITOR, 962-4086
ZUREICK@MAIL.UNC.EDU
OFFICE HOURS:
MON., WED., FRI. 1-2 P.M.

ADAM STORK
OPINION EDITOR, 962-0750
APSTORK@MAIL.UNC.EDU

JONATHAN TUGMAN
ASSOCIATE OPINION EDITOR, 962-0750
TUGMAN@MAIL.UNC.EDU

EDITORIAL BOARD MEMBERS

JESSICA SCISM
SARAH WHITWORTH
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