

State surplus may result in tax cut

By NICKI WEISENSEE
Staff Writer

When North Carolina adjusts its tax code to the revised federal tax code, the state may have a \$20 million surplus which could result in a tax cut for taxpayers, Gov. Jim Martin said Tuesday in a speech to Chamber of Commerce executives.

The proposed tax reduction would be targeted toward individuals or businesses whose taxes would increase because of the adjustments, Martin said.

"It's our belief that we might very well experience a substantial tax increase by (adopting the federal revisions), and it seems to me that the fair thing to do is to provide for

some offsetting tax reduction as a tradeoff," Martin said.

In his 1985 legislative agenda, Martin asked the legislature to eliminate the intangibles tax, the inventory tax and the state sales tax on food and non-prescription medicine.

"This would give us an opportunity... during this 1987 session of the General Assembly once again to consider a reduction in all or part of the intangibles tax (and) all or part of the inventory tax," Martin said, "because it would give us that extra revenue — if the predictions are correct — to be able to move forward in that way."

Martin also said in a press conference Thursday that he has economists trying to project the effect of the tax adjustment on the state's economy.

"Lt. Gov. Bob Jordan is not in favor of cuts in intangibles and inventory taxes at this time because of the investments that need to be made in education and economic development," said Brenda Summers, Jordan's press secretary.

Jordan's support depends on what plan the governor enacts for dealing with the surplus money, Summers said.

Education and economic development are the first two things on the governor's budget, so not using the

surplus money would not affect them, Tim Pittman, Martin's press secretary, said.

James Wilde, an associate professor of economics at UNC, said he does not agree with Martin's plan.

"At this point, my personal opinion would be to add to the budget of the public education sector of the state," Wilde said. "Also, the funds could be used for student loans, which have been cut, or to improve the state's highway system."

Roger Waud, UNC professor of economics, said it would be wise to decrease taxes.

"It will attract more business to the state," he said.

Students aren't buckling up, official says

By LAURIE DUNCAN
Staff Writer

More than 80 percent of Chapel Hill residents are obeying the mandatory seat belt law since a \$25 fine went into effect Jan. 1, said B. J. Campbell, director of the UNC Highway Safety Research Center.

The figures rank Chapel Hill highest in the state and close to highest in the nation in complying with the new law, Campbell said Wednesday.

But UNC students are among the least likely to be buckling up, he said.

"That's especially unfortunate, because almost every year two or three members of the student body

are killed in car crashes," Campbell said. "In most cases, if they were wearing a seat belt, they wouldn't have died."

The mandatory seat belt law was passed in October 1986, two years after U.S. Transportation Secretary Elizabeth Dole began pushing for it.

Before Jan. 1, front-seat passengers not wearing shoulder belts received warning notices. Now violators must pay the \$25 fine.

About 20 to 30 violations were issued for seat belt violations in January, Chapel Hill Police Officer Keith Lohmann said.

Accidents involving motor vehicles are the leading cause of death

among young adults, Campbell said. There were over 14,000 motor vehicle-related deaths in 1983, and thousands of them could have been prevented if those people had buckled up, he said.

The lower student compliance rate, which Campbell could not specify, probably existed because students make short trips around Chapel Hill, he said.

Campbell said he conducted a study last month to determine the effect of the new fine on seat belt usage in Chapel Hill. His participants stood on street corners at 17 sampling sites around town for an hour and counted how many front seat passengers were wearing seat belts, Campbell said.

A similar study conducted in December, before the \$25 fine went into effect, showed a 60 percent compliance rate, Campbell said.

"Chapel Hill is now and always has been higher (in seat-belt usage) than the whole state," he said.

Campbell also conducted a statewide study of compliance with the new law, and the results indicate that North Carolina has the highest

compliance rate in the country, he said.

Around campus, student opinion of the law varied from indifference to annoyance.

One student said the law was a parental action of the government.

"I think it's more important for people to be educated about why to wear seat belts and the importance of wearing them than for the government to dictate to us," said Tamera Majors, a junior journalism and political science major from Greensboro. "If you have an educated society, you don't need to dictate to them."

Such is the argument of the North Carolinians for Seat Belt Choice, a Hillsborough-based organization that has appealed to the N.C. General Assembly to repeal the mandatory seat belt law. The organization collected 65,000 signatures on a petition and may use them to pressure state legislators to repeal the new law, said Peggy Pell, of Seat Belts for Safety.

A spokesperson for North Carolinians for Seat Belt Choice could not be reached for comment Thursday.

Extradited drug smuggler awaits hearing in Florida

From Associated Press reports

TAMPA, Fla. — A neo-Nazi who allegedly vowed to "kill a federal judge a week" if arrested was brought under heavy guard before a federal magistrate Thursday on charges of heading the world's largest cocaine smuggling ring.

Carlos Lehder-Rivas, who was seized by Colombian troops in his jungle hideout Wednesday and flown here by U.S. Air Force jet, was ordered held for a formal hearing Monday in Jacksonville, where he is under a 6-year-old indictment on drug and conspiracy charges.

Lehder-Rivas, 37, has been called by prosecutors a violent, billionaire drug smuggler who heads a private army and helps lead the "Medellin Cartel" smuggling group.

Soviets fire on Afghans
ISLAMABAD, Pakistan — Soviet tank columns with thou-

News in Brief

sands of soldiers attacked Moslem guerrilla forts in eastern Afghanistan on Thursday as warplanes and artillery blasted the outnumbered insurgents, sources in Pakistan said.

An Afghan air force MiG-21 jet fighter-bomber was shot down by guerrilla anti-aircraft defenses Thursday and several other planes appeared to have been damaged, the officials said.

"Went With the Wind?"

ATLANTA — Will Scarlett O'Hara find a new love? Will Rhett Butler learn to give a damn?

The estate of Margaret Mitchell, author of "Gone With the Wind" who adamantly opposed a sequel, is working with a New York literary agent on an authorized novel continuing the story of Scarlett and Rhett.

Legislature

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overheads must be examined as state investments in the public schools grow, she added.

The lieutenant governor, who is president of the N.C. Senate, will support the development of a Rural Economic Development Corporation when the Senate convenes Monday, Bingham said.

The non-profit center would work with rural counties to discuss economic growth problems, and work with private industries to work out experimental solutions. It would also offer financial and technical help to local development projects.

Jordan's proposal includes a four-year program to give state tax credits to companies that relocate in certain poorer counties, Bingham said.

Among the issues expected to come up in the Senate this session are a change in the automobile tax law and the state billboard law.

Sen. James Speed, D-Louisburg, was on the Property Tax Study Commission, which reviewed the tax, now 3 percent with a \$300 limit. This means that a person who buys a \$15,000 car may pay the same tax as on a \$50,000 car.

"It could be more equitable with a 2 percent tax and no limit," Speed said. "But of course, that may net less revenue... so I have mixed feelings about it."

Speed said there has been opposition to the proposal.

Sen. Bo Thomas, D-Hendersonville, said he is working on a proposal to limit the heights of billboards and increase the highway privilege tax, now \$20.

Support for the proposal is hard to gain because legislators are "highly influenced by the industry," Thomas said.

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