

FOR THE RECORD

Editor's note: Following is the statement by Chapel Hill Mayor Kevin Foy regarding the death of Student Body President Eve Carson delivered on behalf of the Town Council at the start of Monday's council meeting.

We begin this evening's meeting by acknowledging the grief and pain that we are suffering at the loss of our colleague and friend, Eve Carson.

Eve was the president of Carolina's student body, which is how many of us came to know her. But the more we got to know her, the more we understood what an extraordinary person she was, and how broadly and deeply she touched the lives of people in Chapel Hill and beyond.

Eve's death represents for us a terrible, incomprehensible loss. She was a person who embodied what is beautiful in this world, and it was a joy to know her. Her having been taken from us rips from us our greatest hopes and our greatest dreams and our greatest aspirations for what the world might become someday.

We are diminished by the loss of Eve, and we know it.

We mourn this day, but we will carry on. We will soldier on. We have Eve's memory and spirit to help us carry on. But we will always remember Eve; we will always cherish Eve; and Eve will always be with us in Chapel Hill, to challenge us with her beauty and grace, her intelligence and charm, her compassion and idealism.

Eve's spirit will challenge us to be a place where youth can flourish and hope can endure and evil will be forever banished. And although we cannot replace Eve, we do know that she was a person who mattered in this world by the work she did, and she was destined to do great things. Rather than have those things remain undone, each of us can look to pick up a piece of the work that Eve did, and to do the work she would have done, the way she would have done it.

My colleagues on the council and I have been a part of the sorrow of our community, and we have reached out to Eve's family and to our colleagues on campus and beyond. We have extended to Chancellor Moeser our deepest sympathy to the campus community, and we have sought to comfort everyone in our town. Each of us has suffered, individually and collectively, a harm that is deep and piercing.

Yesterday, my wife Nancy and I attended Eve's memorial service at her hometown in Athens, Georgia. We had the opportunity to meet Eve's mother, Teresa, her father, Bob, and her brother, Andrew. We told them how much Chapel Hill valued Eve and how heartsick all of us are.

Eve's family was very gracious, and even under the burden of such surpassing grief thanked us, and all of you for your thoughts and your support.

Athens and Chapel Hill are now forever bound. We are bound by the thread of the life of a lovely young woman who touched us as she graced this world.

Please join me in a moment of silence to remember Eve; but I hope that this moment will resonate around the world, and that our moment will awaken this world with our cry of grief at this senseless death.

I would also like to call attention this evening to the assistance that is available to everyone in our community who is coping with this tragedy and who needs assistance. Our town has a crisis unit, housed in our police department, that is ready to help, and I ask you please to call them to seek that help if you need it. Contact information is available on the town website or by calling Town Hall.

In addition, the university has counseling available and people ready to assist members of the campus community during this difficult time.



The wrong tax and the wrong time

MARK ZIMMERMAN

Orange County has always prided itself on being a progressive community that strives for fairness. When the Orange County Commissioners chose to add a referendum to the May 6 primary election ballot imposing a new sales tax on property, known as the transfer tax, it abandoned those principles.

The transfer tax is a regressive tax that will disproportionately impact lower-income homeowners, place an unnecessary burden on affordable housing and nonprofit organizations and unfairly concentrate our taxes on a minority of our fellow citizens. The way it works is that when you sell your home or some land, Orange County will take 0.4 percent of your selling price before giving you the rest of your proceeds.

Why is the transfer tax regressive? It is well documented that most fixed-rate sales taxes are regressive. The transfer tax is nothing more than a fixed-rate sales tax on your property. Lower-income homeowners pay more of their income for housing, particularly in a high housing-cost county like Orange. Their homes also account for more of their total assets than higher income households. The lower one's income and lower the price of one's home, the greater the impact this transfer tax has on a family's finances.

Home ownership is one of the best ways for families to raise their standards of living. It is just bad policy to strip them of the equity they worked so hard to earn just because they have to move.

Live in an affordable housing unit? You'll have to pay. Live in a Habitat House? You'll have to pay. Building an affordable house? The transfer tax may be paid multiple times by the original property owner, the developer and then the builder. Suddenly that home is no longer so affordable. Own a church or a nonprofit? You don't have to pay property taxes but, sorry, you'll have to pay this transfer tax.



“Why would we choose to add a new tax on which we cannot depend? Why would we add more costs to people selling their home in this real estate market?”

No property sale is exempt from the transfer tax.

Why is the transfer tax unfair? The proceeds from this tax itself support us all. But the tax itself is piled high on the shoulders of just a few in each year. We shouldn't tax a minority to pay for the majority.

This problem in principle has an onerous practical effect. By not spreading the burden out to everyone, which would minimize its impact on any one person, the weight of this transfer tax on those who sell their homes is dramatic. For the average home seller in 2007, the transfer tax bill would have been \$1,371. If the equivalent amount of money was raised by regular property taxes,

it would take 14.3 years to pay off that one transfer tax bill.

There are other problems with electing the transfer tax. Its revenue is historically unpredictable and unreliable because it is tied to the real estate market. Real estate is experiencing some real challenges right now, meaning revenue estimates from the transfer tax have already dropped significantly, down 13 percent so far. Why would we choose to add a new tax on which we cannot depend? Why would we add more costs to people selling their homes in this real estate market?

The transfer tax is a bad idea. So, how do we get more revenues? First, we should continue to push for better fiscal stewardship. Second, we should revisit another new revenue option the commissioners considered, the restoration of the 0.25 cent sales tax. This tax would have minimal individual impact; the average person would only have to pay around \$5 per year for an equivalent amount raised by the transfer tax. And this sales tax exempts food and medicine, making it much less regressive. Third, we need to get serious about attracting, nurturing and retaining responsible commercial development in our economic development zones, which have lain fallow for too long. Until we have a more diverse tax base, the commissioners will continue to tax our homes and property, one way or another.

As for the transfer tax, it is certainly not the right tax. It is certainly not the right time. It is not right for Orange County, now or in the future. There are better, fairer alternatives. I urge each of you to vote no on this referendum in the May 6 primary.

Mark Zimmerman owns the Re/Max Winning Edge real estate brokerage in Chapel Hill and is vice president of the Chapel Hill Board of Realtors. He is also spokesperson for Citizens for a Better Orange County.

The authors admit “technology has revolutionized almost every aspect of our lives,” yet they conclude “we may all serve children better with paper, pencil and chalk.” They reach this conclusion by arguing that the technology we use isn't designed for education.

I am well aware that technology itself is not an educational panacea. It must be accompanied by training, continuing support and an adequate budget. These are no small requirements. However, the call to abandon technology initiatives is the wrong response to these challenges. Instead, we must push our elected officials and school administrators to provide teachers with the support they need for successful technology integration. Anything else is just irresponsible.

MIKE NUTT
Carrboro

Thoughts on CHHS cheating scandal

HOLLY HARDIN

Spending time trying to hunt down graduates who may have had access to Chapel Hill High School keys and discussing how to curb cheating only addresses this problem at the surface. We need to ask ourselves, what about our educational system is causing our students to cheat? Should the students be held accountable for this problem or did the problem exist before it reached their level?

Any system with a GPA/ranking system unjustly assigns more value, and often respect, to “higher-level academic” courses than to courses that are developmentally appropriate for an individual student or to courses in the arts. Schools that use this system put students, regardless of motivator (self, parent, school), in a situation where they are pressured to perform in classes that may not be a best fit.

Certainly this pressure can push some to succeed, albeit not all, but is that what we want motivating our students to do well?

We live in a highly competitive society, but why is only that portion of society seeping in? We also live in communities where people collaborate to find answers and produce goods/services/entertainment, where citizens find their niche rather than practice all trades and, ideally, where people value varying talents.

Moving away from traditional grading and a one-size-fits-all standardized curriculum towards a more project-based, student-constructed model is the direction we must take to allow students to be intrinsically motivated and allow them to find meaning and purpose in their work. Additionally, an authentic, experiential approach to education, where students investigate and work on real issues, would provide students with an actual goal and investment in the broader community, not just a grade.

Learning does not have to exist inside a classroom with time-tested materials; the greatest learning comes out of planning, implementing, sharing and mistakes made along the way. The skills gained in such a program could encompass traditional subjects while also building lifelong learners, problem solvers, critical thinkers and responsible participants in a global society, as well as actually preparing our students for this highly competitive society so often referred to. Or perhaps, even show them that not everything is about competition. Although a radical change, it's time we started to take action.

Yes, I too hope the “school community will learn from the incident,” but working to curb cheating is only a solution at the surface; the true solution lies in changing our current approach to education.

Holly Hardin is the science teacher at Community Independent School in Pittsboro and a member of the Cedar Rock Cooperative in Carrboro.

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LETTERS

Dinner Thanks

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to the success of the Eleventh Annual Community Dinner celebrating Orange County's cultural diversity, held on Sunday, March 2.

The fact that between five and six hundred people attended the event bears testimony to the multicultural goodwill present in our very diverse community.

Furthermore, more young people than ever volunteered to help at this year's dinner and their presence was noted and much appreciated. It is encouraging to know that so many people in our midst have open hearts and minds at a time when fear, hatred and suspicion are competing elements.

NERYS LEVY, CHAIRPERSON,
Community Dinner Committee.

Article was off-base

If the sentiment expressed in Peha and Lester's article “Paper, pencil and chalk” (3/6/08) is the same perspective held by our school systems' administrators, our children are being done a great disservice.

LETTERS POLICY

Letters should be no more than 425 words in length and must be accompanied by the author's name, address and contact information. We will publish one letter per author per month. Lengthy letters written in longhand will mysteriously become lost. Typed letters are preferred and email even more so. That said, send your letters to:

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