



LEGISLATIVE NEWSLETTER

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CTE Gets More Good Press: From Scott Mooneyham, in the Nov. 14 edition of the Insider's Afternoon Update:

RALEIGH -- One of the more insightful comments made on the campaign trail during 2008 came from GOP gubernatorial candidate Fred Smith.

Smith, a successful developer and former state senator from Johnston County, remarked more than once, "Bulldozer operators make a pretty good living."

His point was that not everyone can or should earn a four-year degree at a liberal arts university, and that plenty of people with a two-year, community college degree in heavy equipment operation earn more than some graduates holding four-year university degrees.

That opinion doesn't seem to be all that widely held in academia or elsewhere.

A four-year, university degree is sold as the path to a prosperous life, and kids who end up at community colleges are often looked down upon by their peers.

It is true that workers with four-year degrees are employed at higher rates than those with high school diplomas. It's also true that a university graduate has a better chance of being employed than someone with a "two-year degree or some college." Unfortunately, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics doesn't delineate between those with two-year degrees and those who just taken some college courses and never earned a degree.

Maybe it should. A survey by the National Association of Manufacturers suggests that workers with two-year technical degrees are in demand. The survey found that, even in this down economy tough job market, almost a third of its members have trouble finding skilled workers to fill their jobs.

The numbers are worth considering as states like North Carolina face shrinking budgets and public universities respond to cuts by hiking tuition.

Against this backdrop, Gov. Beverly Perdue recently announced that she was revamping and consolidating programs designed to allow high school students to earn community college credits free of charge.

The initiative is aimed at both students who want to pursue a technical degree at a community college and those who hope to transfer community college credits to a four-year university.

Perdue has made a point of talking about the initiative as a way to put some students on a career path.

But high school juniors and seniors must maintain a "B" average to qualify for the free courses, a requirement that may put the primary focus on students who are looking to use the courses to get a jump on a four-year university degree. (In the past, students have had trouble getting coursework to transfer.)

Students interested in a four-year degree who participate could save on tuition. The state should save money too.

The question is whether this program, or any other, will cause 18-year olds about to enter the cold, hard world to ask some tough questions about higher education, questions that policy leaders sometimes discourage with blanket statements about the value of a university degree.

Those degrees are valuable. Still, the value isn't the same for everyone, particularly if they come attached to a mountain of debt and questionable job prospects.

Bulldozer operators earn a pretty good living.

State Employee Job Losses Lower than Expected: Legislative Republicans say state budget office figures showing that 1,629 former state workers received either severance payouts or health premium payments prove that state layoffs were not as draconian as Democrats and some advocacy groups claimed. The numbers presented during a meeting of the Joint House and Senate Appropriations Committee this week showed severance and health care payouts of \$23.7 million.

Sen. Richard Stevens, R-Wake, co-chair of Senate Appropriations, said the figure compared to \$21 million during the previous biennium. "It puts facts on the table," Stevens said of the report. "The wild allegation had been that 30,000 jobs were affected. That was never the intention."

But Senate Minority Leader Martin Nesbitt, D-Buncombe, noted that estimates of 20,000 to 30,000 job losses were based on all levels of government in North Carolina -- federal, state and

local government workers. The figures provided by the budget office included only laid-off workers whose positions were totally funded by the state. Unfilled positions that were eliminated also weren't reflected in the numbers.

Education and Other Numbers: The figures posted showed 516 local school system employees laid off, along with another 57 at the NC Department of Public Instruction. Laid off teachers do not receive the severance payments, but do receive health insurance coverage for up to 12 months. Other layoffs shown in the report: 243 within the University of North Carolina system; 496 with the Department of Correction and other Justice and Public Safety agencies; 165 with the Department of Health and Human Services; and 79 within the Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

Rep. Harold Brubaker, R-Randolph, co-chair of House Appropriations, acknowledged that the figures do not show any retiring state workers and that some additional layoffs could occur. But he and Stevens emphasized that the layoffs in the current budget, as reflected by the severance payouts, appear to be very similar to those from budget penned by Democrats two years earlier.

State Superintendent's Race: At least two more elected officials are eyeing a run for North Carolina state schools superintendent next year. Rep. Tricia Cotham, D-Mecklenburg, said Thursday she'd run for the job if incumbent and fellow Democrat June Atkinson doesn't seek re-election. Atkinson said last week she was undecided.

Also, Wake County board member John Tedesco released a statement saying he would make a decision about entering the race after the end-of-year holidays. Tedesco has been a key member of the Republican Party's majority on the board the past two years as it changed the system's student assignment plan. Another House member, Democrat Rick Glazier of Fayetteville, is waiting on Atkinson's re-election decision and weighing a possible run.

Pre-K Spending Not on Legislative Agenda This Month: Funding for the state's pre-kindergarten program for at-risk 4-year-olds isn't being calendared for the reconvened session later this month, according to top lawmakers. House Speaker Thom Tillis said Wednesday that lawmakers had no plans to consider the matter. "We don't anticipate that on the 28th," said Tillis, R-Mecklenburg. Stevens, R-Wake and a top legislative budget-writer, said there were no immediate plans to address the issue because litigation over the state's pre-kindergarten program is still working its way through the courts.

Wake County Superior Court Judge Howard Manning ruled this summer against parts of North Carolina's budget law having to do with the program. He said that academic pre-school was part of a student's constitutional right to a sound basic education. The ruling took aim at provisions that could have forced some students to pay for the program. The state is appealing the ruling. Tillis and Stevens made their comments after an advocacy group held a news conference Wednesday urging lawmakers to fulfill Democratic Gov. Beverly Perdue's request to spend \$30 million to teach another 6,300 preschoolers starting in January.

Belt-Tightening Push: Republican Pat McCrory, a sure bet to run for governor next year, told a crowd of 270 women Tuesday that it's belt-tightening time for North Carolina. "We have to have leadership that understands that it's going to be tough economically and we don't have as much money as we used to," McCrory said during a women's luncheon at the North Raleigh Hilton. "Therefore, we are going to do more with less."

State Pension Fund Declines: The state pension declined 6.31 percent during the third quarter and was valued at \$69.6 billion, State Treasurer Janet Cowell said Monday. The pension fund's public equity investments, which fell 17.87 percent for the quarter, led the losses. Cowell pointed to the European sovereign debt crisis and weak economies around the world in explaining the decline. Losses for the quarter slightly exceeded a benchmark based on other public pension fund returns, but were not as great as some funds around the country. According to the Wilshire Trust Universe Comparison Service, public pension funds fell 8.94 percent for the quarter.

Quotes of the Week: *"Don't throw the ball away – and I don't want you to shoot."*

- Advice given around 1968 by then-coach Bobby Knight to his West Point guard, Mike Krzyzewski ([Click here for full story](#) – The News & Observer, 11-13-11)

"He's in pretty good shape. It doesn't look he's going to get a (major) primary challenger."

- Andy Taylor, a political scientist at N.C. State University, on the possibility of Pat McCrory being the first Republican gubernatorial candidate to go unchallenged in a primary since Lt. Gov. Jim Gardner (The News & Observer, 11-16-11)

Have a terrific Thanksgiving!



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